

**THE  
PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES**

**OFFICIAL REPORT**

**IN THE FIRST SESSION OF THE NINTH PARLIAMENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF  
TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO WHICH OPENED ON DECEMBER 17, 2007**

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**SESSION 2007—2008**

**VOLUME 6**

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**HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES**

*Thursday, October 02, 2008*

The House met at 10.00 a.m.

**PRAYERS**

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

**Mr. Speaker:** Hon. Members, I have received communication from the hon. Member for Naparima, Mr. Nizam Baksh, asking for leave of absence from today's sitting of the House. The leave which this hon. Member seeks is granted.

**APPROPRIATION BILL**

**(BUDGET)**

[Fifth Day]

*Order read for resuming adjourned debate on question* [September 22, 2008]:

That the Bill be now read a second time.

*Question again proposed.*

**The Minister of Information (Hon. Neil Parsanlal):** Mr. Speaker, I rise to join the debate today in what can only be described as rather exciting times for the Parliament of Trinidad and Tobago.

I began my sojourn in this Parliament last year, sitting on the eastern side, well ensconced between two lovely ladies, the Member for Arima and the Member for Port of Spain South, respectively. Today, I sit on the westernmost side, where the company is not as beautiful or as bountiful as what I enjoyed previously.

My friend, the Member for San Fernando West began his sojourn on the southern side and is now on the northern side. My friend from Diego Martin West began his sojourn on the southern side and is now on the northern side. Two things are certain in my mind; the first is that no matter what side we sit on, all of us—all of us—are still proud Members of the PNM. [*Desk thumping*] The second is that for all of us our primary concern is the people of Trinidad and Tobago who we were all elected to serve.

This is the morning after the night that was. It is my fervent belief that at the end of all this, and I say this today to all of us who support the PNM, our country, our Government and, indeed, our party, will emerge much stronger for all of us. [*Desk thumping*]

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Politics, as I have come to understand, is not only about values and principles, the objective of politics is to deliver beneficial results to the people. It is because the PNM continues to deliver beneficial results to the people of Trinidad and Tobago that we were returned to Government 10 months ago. As a result of the prudent decisions taken by this Government and successive PNM administrations, we have been able to save almost \$15 billion of the unanticipated revenue that has come the way of this country.

It is in that context that I want to join the chorus of voices, not only from this side, but throughout the country, those whose voices do not attract headlines, but whose opinions we on this side value, in congratulating the Minister of Finance on her well articulated budget presentation. [*Desk thumping*]

The day before the budget was presented, I spoke to the hon. Minister and offered her, not only my prayerful support, but also those of others who had gathered to cover her with their prayers as she delivered the budget. I indicated to her then that while we would all be proud of her, it would have been, in fact, her own mother, recently deceased, who would be leading the intercession on her behalf. Indeed, we know our prayers have been answered, and the mother could not have been made more proud by her daughter's presentation. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Speaker, before I begin to speak specifically about my Ministry, allow me to take a few minutes to deal with some of the misinformation that has been so deceptively presented to this House by Members opposite. It is my hope that as we refute some of these allegations, that they would be given the same degree of media exposure that the original allegations received. [*Desk thumping*]

**Hon. Members:** Yes.

**Hon. N. Parsanlal:** I continue to live in hope. We could have predicted what every speaker on the Opposition Benches would have said, and they did not fail to deliver. What we had was Member after Member, preening like peacocks, yet in reality be nothing but whitened sepulchres seemingly immaculate on the outside, but filled with dead bones on the inside. What we had was one Opposition Member after the other standing before this House and making the most scurrilous allegations, using the cloak and cover of parliamentary privilege to scandalize and malign good people's names. They ensured that buried deeply under their allegations, and accompanied by a host of props, was a modicum of truth which the media gleefully grabbed.

The mere mention of the University of Trinidad and Tobago (UTT), for instance, as an alternative to UWI, sends the member for Caroni East into

conniptions. Throw in a word about the medical faculty, and his blood pressure goes sky high. Now we are told that he is begging Her Majesty, the Queen, to ensure that he keeps his third salary intact; well, God help the Queen. [*Laughter*]

In her attempt to revive her father's quickly diminishing presence in this House and elsewhere, the Member for Oropouche West shrieked and shrilled through her contribution for all the world to hear. I have said it before in this House, that everything related to Hitler's rise to power seems to be required reading for the UNC clan. In her misplaced zealotry for the UNC cause, the Member used some statistics which could only have been given to her by someone who wanted to make her look less than intelligent; that person succeeded beyond any shadow of a doubt.

I am quoting from the *Hansard* of September 29, 2008. The young Member stated:

"When we come to evaluating the benefits of Government's allocation to education, again we categorically state, it is not how much you spend, but how you spend what you have, because only 20.9 per cent of youths, that is, persons between 15 and 24, attained primary level education, while 60.2 per cent attained secondary level education and 1 per cent attained tertiary level education."

When I attempted to intervene in the debate, the young Member for Oropouche West decided not to give way, because clearly she knew that the statistic she was quoting was so out of whack with reality, that she could not afford a reality check. Let me provide this House and the national community with the reality check, with the facts concerning that enrolment. [*Desk thumping*]

The claim that 20.9 per cent of youths between 15 and 24 years attained primary education was nothing but a figment of the not so fertile imagination of the Member for Oropouche West. The fact is, education to age 12 years in Trinidad and Tobago is compulsory; this includes primary education. At this time, 95.4 per cent—95.4 per cent, [*Desk thumping*]—of primary school students transition to secondary school. Since students who do not enter secondary school are largely accommodated in vocational programmes, the drop out rate is less than 4.6 per cent—less than 4.6 per cent. Yet still the Member for Oropouche West would have this House believe that only 29 per cent of youths between 15 and 24 years attain primary school education.

The second claim was that only 60.2 per cent attain secondary education. We have demonstrated already that it was 95.4 per cent. She went on to state even further that only 1 per cent attained tertiary level education. I wonder how Members opposite could come to this House with this kind of misinformation and

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stand so proudly and deliver such dishonesty with a straight face. [*Desk thumping*] I wonder. Certainly, if she holds herself as someone representative of youth and encouraging youth to become involved in this art and science called politics, then she should know better; she ought to know better.

The fact is that approximately 17,855 students write the SEA exam every year. The Member for Caroni East could have given her the figures; the annual enrolment at tertiary level public institutions is between 7,000 and 8,000, and at private institutions it is more than 5,000. So cumulatively the tertiary enrolment level is now more than 50 per cent. When the Member for Oropouche West said 1 per cent, we wondered what was the motive; what could possibly be the motive, but then we were advised by the Member for Oropouche East, her colleague, that there was nothing good in this budget. They could see nothing good, and wherever there is anything good, they would ensure that is denigrated.

I have said in this House before, and I noticed it is being used repeatedly, I will claim my copyright soon, [*Laughter*] facts are stubborn things and they will not go away. [*Desk thumping*]

The one Member opposite, in my estimation, who took the cake, was the Member for Princes Town North who took all of 75 minutes, one hour and 15 minutes, and lambasted the police service and every police officer of this country as being corrupt, unethical and engaged in some kind of conmanship. He again tried to plead the case and cause of Senior Superintendent Chandrabaan Maharaj, citing a string of allegations which we have answered in this House. The Member for Laventille West/Morvant has answered questions about this in the House.

Those allegations the Senior Superintendent had been asked to produce in writing; he never did before his retirement, and yet the Member for Princes Town North could have provided this House with chapter and verse of those allegations.

#### **10.15 a.m.**

Mr. Speaker, today I want to pay tribute to all the hard-working police officers of the Trinidad and Tobago Police Service who everyday continue to lay down their lives for this country, who everyday make untold sacrifices to ensure that the citizens of this country enjoy some measure of safety and security; who, even in this honourable House, have to stand and listen to the unadulterated nonsense purveyed by the Member for Princes Town North.

Mr. Speaker, the contributions from the other side were vacuous, bereft of truth and imagination beyond the cheap theatrics. Indeed, the contributions on the

other side could easily be likened to be Shakespearian imagery of tales being told by fools, full of sound and fury, yet signifying nothing. [*Desk thumping*]

And so we come to the primary response from the Leader of the Opposition, sorry, the Leader of the Women's Arm of the UNC, the Member for Siparia, and a plethora of biblical quotations that accompanied the contribution. I am reminded of two things, I will only say one at this point; that it is not all those who say Lord, Lord will enter the kingdom of heaven.

Mr. Speaker, it was a contribution that was filled with lies, half-truths and innuendoes, a phrase I am sure they are very familiar with.

**Mr. Speaker:** Are you implying that the Member was lying? Because that obviously, as you are well aware, is unparliamentary.

**Hon. N. Parsanlal:** Mr. Speaker, I am not implying that she did, and she did not write the speech either, it was written by Nigel et al. But Mr. Speaker, to be a little more parliamentary, it was a contribution that was footloose and fancy-free with statistics and if PricewaterhouseCoopers (PWC) knew that their report would have been used for such cheap, political profit, I am sure they might not have produced it.

Mr. Speaker, while the Member for Siparia showed only projects that were completed, and said that this Government had a 90 per cent failure rate, she did not show or demonstrate that there were projects already in progress. A true picture of Government's performance however, emerges when the truth unvarnished and untainted by UNC manipulation is told.

I went through the very documents the Member went through, the PWC reports on 2006—2009. In 2006, she reported that the total projects were 100 and those completed were 18, she left out that there were 48 projects in progress and, therefore, her statistic of 82 per cent failure is woefully inaccurate. They cannot even get their maths correct, because even when they add up the projects, they got 131, in fact, it is 137. The only division some Members on that side have to do is by two.

Mr. Speaker, the total number of projects completed, the Member indicated, was 22. When we checked the same reports that she checked the number was 28, and what she forgot deliberately to mention was that the number in progress was 71. Therefore, from an average according to her of 83.2, the percentage in fact that had not yet started was only 28 per cent. From 83.2 to 28 per cent, one cannot casually make such a mistake.

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For the 2007 report, she said there were 117 projects and only 27 were completed. Mr. Speaker, those in progress were 53. Why are they not mentioning those things? There were 53 projects in progress, so according to her, the percentage failed is 76.9. There were 32 projects that were not started.

In 2008 she indicated there are 121 projects and only 12 completed. In 2008, there are 79 other projects in progress, so according to her the failure rate is 90, but only 25 per cent of the projects have not started. So when we do an analysis of what the Member for Siparia indicated, according to the Member for Siparia, 90 per cent of the projects—but even if you take her numbers, the average is in fact 83 per cent. So they cannot do their maths correctly. The real average is in fact 29 per cent. Mr. Speaker, what that means alternatively, is that seven out of every 10 projects this Government has engaged in has started, not one out of 10 that the Member for Siparia so glibly presented to this House, an inaccurate statement.

The Member for Chaguanas West is a constituent of mine, I have known him for a very long time, and he is a man I admire tremendously. I respect all my constituents, I respect his tremendous business acumen, he is an achiever, a world traveller and I respect that and give him all the kudos necessary. But I believe that none of us is above correction, so when the Member spoke about the slow response of officers from the West End Police Station to a report, I have a report in my hands from the Senior Superintendent, Head of the Executive Secretariat, Senior Superintendent, Stephen Williams which says:

“It is not true that only two Officers were on duty at West End Police Station at 9.30 pm. on Tuesday, 23<sup>rd</sup> September 2008. There were sixteen (16) Police Officers on duty at West End that night including two (2) Sergeants, one (1) Corporal, one (1) Ag Corporal and fourteen (14) Constables. MP Jack Warner did call West End Police Station around the time that the report was made by the female adult. He had a conversation with Corporal St. Aude. He identified the female adult as one of his employees at Centre of Excellence. It was not true that it took two hours for the female adult to receive attention from the West End Police Station. The officers responded to her report within five minutes of the time that the report was made.”

Mr. Speaker, I am reading from a report from Senior Superintendent Stephen Williams, the Head of the Executive Secretariat.

**Mr. Warner:** Thank you for giving way, Member for Lopinot/Bon Air West my parliamentary representative.

I want to say for the record that what I told the House was the absolute truth, and in fact MP, if you know anywhere in Trinidad where the police respond in five minutes, then tell me please.

**Hon. N. Parsanlal:** Mr. Speaker, I am happy to report that in the constituency of Lopinot/Bon Air West, I have received reports and assistance from the police within five minutes. [*Desk thumping*] And it is no special treatment, it was not for me.

Mr. Speaker, the Member for Siparia, or to be a little more proper, because I like to give people their due, she is a leader on that side; the Leader of the Women's Arm of the UNC—because unfortunately, that is the only leadership position she might hold—spoke in glowing terms about the UNC's management of liquidity during their term of office. I am sure that every right-thinking citizen of this country will agree with her that the UNC perfected the art of liquidity management; the evidence is before the court every other Monday morning. They never allowed it to reach into the economy. That is how they managed the liquidity.

The economic hit men or assassins that she spoke of are now in jails in sundry parts of the United States of America. That is how they managed the liquidity of this country. And just a word of caution to the Member for Siparia and all the Members on that side: Please do not go about making sweeping statements about the hon. Prime Minister meeting criminals in Crowne Plaza because I am sure the nation will recall a series of such meetings the Member for San Fernando East held at the same Crowne Plaza venue with the then Prime Minister, the hon. Basdeo Panday. [*Desk thumping*] I am sure they would not want the nation to think or to come away with the impression that the Member for Couva North can be called a criminal.

Mr. Speaker, the UNC described the 2008/2009 budget presentation by the hon. Minister of Finance as same old, same old, more of the same thing. Mr. Speaker, we would be the first to admit, and I would be the first to admit that it is more of the same thing. It is more of the same thing for senior citizens; more of the same thing for retired public servants; more of the same thing for persons with annuities and pensions; it is more of the same thing for potential middle-class homeowners; it is more of the same thing for students; it is more of the same thing for the Agricultural Development Bank, and it is more of the same thing for citizens of Trinidad and Tobago who continue to put more of their faith in the People's National Movement. So we agree totally with them that it is same old, same old; more and more of the same thing.

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Mr. Speaker, to hear them talk, and they have admitted it that there is nothing in this budget or nothing this Government could do that redounds to the benefit of this country. So this morning I want to read into the record two success stories that could only have come because of policies deliberately implemented by the People's National Movement.

They based their analysis on the PWC report, and I want to turn to the Ernst & Young budget analysis for 2009, and I want to read from page 24 which deals with the retail and distribution sector. It says:

“The distribution sector experienced growth of 10.3% during 2007. The growth in this sector reflected heightened activity in the wholesale and retail trading activity including the sales of motor vehicles, spare parts and household appliances.”

Mr. Speaker, there is a curious statement here.

**10.30 a.m.**

It says:

“The reduction in growth in food prices came about as a result of a moderation in the price of vegetables.”

It went on to say:

“This was due in part to the establishment of farmers markets to reduce the margins between producers and consumers.” [*Desk thumping*]

But to listen to them would be to come away with the impression that this Government has done absolutely nothing, and the evidence is here in black and white. On page 25 of the same report under the manufacturing section it says:

“For the first time since 1997, the rate of growth of the non-energy sector surpassed that of the energy sector in 2007.”

Let me repeat it:

“For the first time since 1997, the rate of growth of the non-energy sector surpassed that of the energy sector in 2007.” [*Desk thumping*]

And they would have us believe that nothing good is happening in Trinidad and Tobago; that this Government is doing nothing to diversify the economy. Yet still, Ernst & Young tells us that the rate of growth of the non-energy sector surpassed that of the energy sector in 2007.



Is it that Ernst & Young is not reporting accurately? I wonder. It does not stop there. This claim by Ernst & Young, if it was standing alone, one might get a little antsy, but this claim is supported by a communiqué issued by the Trinidad and Tobago Manufacturers Association to commemorate Independence 2008. So that Ernst & Young says one thing and then the TTMA says before:

“Trinidad and Tobago has much to be proud of.”

**Hon. Member:** Repeat that.

**Hon. N. Parsanlal:** It says:

“Trinidad and Tobago has much to be proud of. [*Desk thumping*] This small, twin-island state is viewed as the economic powerhouse of the Caribbean...

We also have a valiant manufacturing sector, seen as the leader in the region, which contributes significantly to the country's Gross Domestic Product, and employs more than 55 thousand people.”

This is the TTMA, not the PNM; this is the TTMA saying that Government's policies with respect to the manufacturing sector, not just this year, not just last year, but for successive PNM administrations, have borne fruit.

The second success story I want to read is from the *Business Express* of yesterday; recent, recent vintage—*Business Express*, October 01, 2008. On page 3 there is an article headlined: “Changing the face of agriculture”, by Ariti Jankie. It says in the article:

“Dr. Bibi Ali...”

And I want the country to hear this, you know:

“Dr. Bibi Ali, a Caroni (1975) Limited ex-worker, had been dabbling in the production of pesticide free garden produce while her husband Dave Singh worked with a crew in the construction of a greenhouse in Barrackpore.

Ali said: ‘I’m totally convinced that a new face to agriculture exists in greenhouses’.”

Then a very telling statement is made:

“More than 30 greenhouses were built within the last two years with funding from the Agricultural Development Bank.” [*Desk thumping*]

More than 30 greenhouses in the last two years, Mr. Speaker, with funding from the Agricultural Development Bank! Last year we increased it to \$100

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million and in this year's budget the allocation to the Agricultural Development Bank has gone to \$125 million. [*Desk thumping*] So that what you will have is more and more greenhouses being built and we agree entirely with them that there is a new face to agriculture in greenhouses.

The article goes on to say:

“Under construction in Barrackpore...”

Down by you.

“is a gutter connected two-in-one greenhouse, the first of its kind in Trinidad. Farmer Shaheed Baksh has ordered the large two-in-one greenhouse to add to an existing greenhouse set up in March 2007.”

Again, another curious statement:

“Built at a cost of \$120,000, he was able to harvest sweet peppers to pay off the ADB loan within a year.” [*Desk thumping*]

Those on the other side will have us believe that nothing is happening in agriculture; that since Caroni closed down, agriculture dead! The facts are there and they remain very stubborn things; they will not go away! Because Caroni shut down, apparently they, too, shut down.

The last statement in this says:

“...the cost of chemicals used in hydroponics and greenhouses had increased in the last year by more than 100 per cent yet farmers were able to pay off their loans by applying efficient business techniques.”

That is why everything that the Member for Siparia said—or most things that the Member for Siparia said—have to be taken—not with a pinch but with a pound of salt. They just cannot be believed!

I recall the end of her budget contribution last year—because it is consistent—she spoke of the four horsemen of the Apocalypse and she described the UNC as the fourth horseman, noting that the fourth horseman will bring political death, she said, “to that Government as a UNC Alliance will form the next government and, through you, Mr. Speaker, I say goodbye to the hon. Prime Minister as he demits office.” That was August 24, 2007.

Less than three months later, the majority of voters in Trinidad and Tobago rejected soundly the United National Congress, [*Desk thumping*] saying goodbye, not to the Member for San Fernando East, but to the failed policies and fiction

peddled by the prevaricators on the other side. They were able to do that because successive PNM administrations have sought, above everything else, to create a knowledge-based society. A society where the provision of education that is free; available to the masses; accessible and relevant to the developmental needs of a society, is seen as the pivot on which we will all progress.

This knowledge-based society; this education that we are trying to provide; this informed society, is what will make our women shine and take their place. No longer will mothers and daughters be fighting for Yankee dollars in Point Cumana. Instead, today, they go to the University of the West Indies in search of that which will make their lives so much richer.

Education and the results of this knowledge-based society is what will make our young men make better choices. No longer are our fathers and sons fighting to keep businesses alive, because they can both go to the University of Trinidad and Tobago—do not get your blood pressure up, Member for Caroni East—one, by virtue of their grades and the other, by virtue of their prior learning experience.

Education is what will make our young scholars contribute to the research and development capacity of this country. No longer does a mother have to make a choice as to which of her children she would enrol in school. No longer will mothers have to do that. All can now attend, because this PNM Government has ensured that education, from nursery to tertiary is free. [*Desk thumping*] So when those on the other side ask who is going to benefit from this budget, I want them to ask the hundreds of thousands of students, both young and old, who would have benefitted from the measures introduced in successive budgets and, particularly in this year's budget.

On this note, it would be remiss of me if I did not congratulate the Members of Fyzabad and Caroni Central whose children both received national scholarships [*Desk thumping*] and whose children will join, no doubt, the thousands of other national scholars who would have their tuition funded by the Government of Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*] Should they go on to excel at the university and attain first-class degrees, they, too, are guaranteed free tuition up to the PhD level. Yet still, Members on that side have the unmitigated gall to accuse us of spend, spend, spend.

The Ministry of Information is about supporting the creation of this knowledge-based society. Indeed, achievement of Government's 2020 objectives is dependent on an informed and educated population. Information is the new currency through which this country will trade on the international markets and

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the Ministry of Information, through its agencies, stand ready, willing and now able to make that contribution.

A knowledge-based society is an innovative and life-long learning society which possesses a community of scholars, researchers, engineers, technicians, research networks and firms engaged in research and in the production of high technology goods and services provision. Knowledge is used to empower and enrich people culturally and materially and, therefore to build a sustainable society. The Ministry of Information has responsibility for the National Library and Information Systems (NALIS) in Trinidad and Tobago; the National Archives of Trinidad and Tobago, the Government Printery, the Government Information Services Limited and the Caribbean News Media Group.

Each of these organizations contributes significantly to the creation of this knowledge-based society of which I speak. NALIS, the National Library for fiscal 2009, will purchase two additional digital mobile libraries to add to the existing fleet at a cost of \$3.6 million. In fiscal 2009, the construction and outfitting of the library at the Chancery Lane Complex in San Fernando is being done at an estimated \$66.2 million. We will complete the Scarborough library in 2009. There is also the commencement of construction of the Chaguanas—I am sure the Member for Chaguanas West will be happy with that. We missed you when we opened the expanded facilities just recently.

Commencement of construction of the Chaguanas Library is scheduled to begin in January 2009, and for the benefit of those on the other side, the Chaguanas library will have more than 58,000 square feet and it will be second in size only to the National Library in Port of Spain. [*Desk thumping*] We will also continue the upgrade of public library facilities at an estimated \$7.3 million, and training of librarians at an estimated \$19.6 million; that is, to ensure that we assist in the creation of this knowledge-based society. No country can exist without properly functioning and funded libraries and this Government continues to ensure that our library system is properly funded and functioning.

The Government Information Services Limited is a key platform for the transformation of Trinidad and Tobago into a knowledge-based society. We have in this country a very rich cultural heritage that has, over the years, been recorded in a variety of print, audio and video media, which has not generally been easily available to the general population.

The 2008/2009 budget has provided us with funds for the ongoing transformation of these media into a digital format, so that soon from anywhere in

Trinidad and Tobago, or the world for that matter, anyone will be able to go online to access this country's rich cultural heritage via the Internet.

**10.45 a.m.**

This project Government Information Services Limited (GISL) has been given the task of using our archives to create information products to communicate to the national public, our history and culture. This project begins with the cataloguing and digitization of all the material once held by the government information service and will make publicly available, rare archival film, audio and printed material dating back to Trinidad and Tobago's formative years and in some cases, even the pre Independence era.

This company began full operations one year ago and has made significant strides in the development of its information technology network, that will see an increasing percentage of government information now being delivered online. We direct Members that the website news.gov.tt already disseminates daily information on government news and events and by December this year, we will be providing live streaming of all important government activity, including the weekly post Cabinet press conference.

Another initiative is that already users of the *Trinidad and Tobago Gazette* can now access that Gazette through news.gov.tt. website. In other words, for all of us as lawyers, judges and anyone who has need of the Gazette cannot access it online. That facility would be upgraded eventually to searchable sites storing back issues of this important legal document.

**Mr. Speaker:** Hon. Members, the speaking time of the hon. Minister of Information has expired.

*Motion made,* That the hon. Member's speaking time be extended by 30 minutes. [*Hon. P. Taylor*]

*Question proposed.*

**Hon. N. Parsanlal:** Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker and colleagues.

A number of years ago the Member for Mayaro composed a very popular and thought-provoking song entitled, "Little Black Boy". It was a sad but very powerful commentary on a significant portion of our population. I am pleased to bring you an update of that little black boy. Life has changed very dramatically for the little black boy. By that little black boy I am referring to any citizen of Trinidad and Tobago. First and foremost, the little black boy no longer has to

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worry about any aspect of education under this caring Government. [*Desk thumping*] Education from nursery level straight up to tertiary level is free and for those who excel, up to PhD level. Furthermore, the little black boy is also afforded the luxury of not having to worry about transport, books or meals, all paid for by a caring People's National Movement Government.

We as a government also understand that academia is not for everyone and so we provided for all the other little black boys in programmes such as MuST, YTEPP and YAPA. These are all geared towards our other citizens.

All the educational programmes that the Government has outlined are complemented by our library system, as I have added. Currently, there are 23 public libraries; three mobile libraries and 640 primary and secondary school libraries and 23 libraries in ministries and other government departments. This means that the little boy now has options and alternatives. The little black boy in our society is no longer condemned to nothingness. The little black boy in our society now has alternatives. We on this side now ask them to embrace those opportunities. [*Desk thumping*] These initiatives not only affect the little black boy, but going one generation back, the programmes in place also have a positive impact on their parents.

There was a time when in this country households had to choose which child to send to school. More often than not the boys were chosen because there was an old philosophy, that the girls could always find a husband. We have ensured that those days are being completely eradicated and there is no longer a question of who goes to school because everyone has the opportunity.

This in itself restructures a family's basic income and expenditure. Expenditure has increased thereby facilitating an increase in disposable income, leading to greater savings and inevitably, a higher quality of life. This is the kind of forward thinking that has become the trademark of this caring Government, the ripple effects of one initiative benefiting generations of families. [*Desk thumping*] If you were to go back to two generations of the little black boy, this Government has put things in place so that even the little black boy's grandparents now enjoy a higher quality of life.

The reality of the situation is that our elderly are well cared for. The Senior Citizens Grant has been increased by \$300. CDAP has been extended. Our older population still travels free across the country and now, even between Trinidad and Tobago. For all we know, the Member for Couva North could be watching this debate from the lovely sister isles, having boarded the ferry free of charge, courtesy the Government and people of Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*]

These programmes that I have outlined are available across this country, not in theory but practical. Across this country the same scenarios occur. More and more people benefit. More and more little black boys are being encouraged and nurtured to take their rightful place in Trinidad and Tobago.

This is the new story. I encourage the Member for Mayaro to perhaps rewrite this new calypso. Whether the Member for Mayaro wants to believe it or not, or any one on that side for that matter, this is the new reality facing the people today. What is left is for us as citizens, individually and collectively, to make the correct choices; embrace the myriad opportunities that are now available; look beyond today to the tomorrow of fulfilled dreams, major accomplishments, indeed, to the tomorrow promised and delivered by the Government and people of Trinidad and Tobago.

Thank you.

**The Minister of Public Administration (Hon. Kennedy Swaratsingh):** Mr. Speaker, I rise to join this debate and pay tribute to the hon. Minister of Finance for a wonderful contribution, that will go down no doubt in history, as one of the best budgets that this country has ever received.

As I rise as well the morning after, it would be remiss of me if I do not share a few thoughts. Unlike many others here I worked under the UNC administration when they were in government. At that time I was a member of the Defence Force. For the years that they were in government I was a senior army officer in charge of welfare, public relations and civil military affairs. I worked not closely with the then attorney general and minister of works and transport, Sadiq Baksh. I remember when Gillian Lucky acted as attorney general during that Gocking armoured vehicle incident, when the then prime minister was in Tobago. I also responded as the welfare officer of the Prime Minister's residence when at that time we had the murder/suicide. Not only did I look after the families, but I also presided over the funerals of those two officers. I was also a priest for a number of years. I spent seven years in the monastery and 13 years as an active priest in various parishes. I have heard a number of confessions and other personal details of all kinds of people.

I have since resigned from those two institutions even though I remain a very strong practising catholic. Even though I am no longer there, I would not at any point in time use the information that I have received during my tenure for any private or political purpose. You only received that information because of the positions you held. Therefore, one ought to be careful when one is in a position of responsibility, how one uses that information for personal gain. [*Desk thumping*]

**Mr. Manning:** Integrity.

**Hon. K. Swarathigh:** Very true, Prime Minister. That is why I say that integrity must first of all be personal.

I was 18 years old when I went to see the then Archbishop of Port of Spain, Anthony Pantin, to be interviewed to go into the seminary at Mount St. Benedict. I will never forget the impact that that man had on my life. In fact, I would dare say that had he not died I may have thought twice about leaving the priesthood. There are two men who have influenced my life. One has been Archbishop Pantin whom I think is probably the holiest man this country has ever produced. The other, I say this not out of any—take it for whatever it is. When I was also contemplating entering into a public life in politics, having served publicly for all of my life and having no desire to go back into public institutions, when I was asked to consider and I was invited to join this government, it was very important that I had much faith and confidence in the leadership of the People's National Movement.

Today, I stand proud of what this Government has produced and will produce for the future of Trinidad and Tobago. I remember a young girl called Petal who came to my office about a month ago. Petal asked to see me and I agreed, obviously. Petal said, "Minister, I want to thank you for what this Government is doing for us." She was a return scholar coming back with a first class honours degree. Petal said to me, "I am inspired to come back to this country. I want to pursue my studies and I am inspired to come back and work in this country because of the vision articulated by the Government of Trinidad and Tobago." [*Desk thumping*] I am therefore encouraged to come back in public life and serve at this level because of the hon. Prime Minister, Patrick Augustus Mervyn Manning and more specifically, to be one of those who seek in a very proactive way to make this vision come to reality.

**11.00 a.m.**

It is in that vein, Mr. Speaker, that I want to talk about just a couple of things in the limited time allotted to me this morning; one is the contribution of the hon. Member for Chaguanas West. This Government continues to commit to education in a proactive and succinct way. When people can say, as the hon. Member for Chaguanas West, and I read.

"Mr. Prime Minister, you could never walk in Dr. Williams' shoes for education. You could give 10 PhDs per person, it is wrong. Madam Minister of Education, let us say that 40 students get first class honours in history; they go Finland to do a PhD, you pay for it; does that help us?"



I have spent all my life helping and working with people. I will tell you that the young children and those not so young coming back with First Class Honours, wherever they go and whatever they study, the exposure, growth, view of the world, perception of themselves and their country will irrevocably be changed because of the path made available to them by this caring administration. [*Desk thumping*]

Other Members on that side—the Member for Oropouche East and the Member for Siparia—indicated that because of the brain-drain we need to be careful that we do not educate children to serve in some other countries. Mr. Speaker, we invest in people; according to Minister Mc Donald, “done talk”. Our investment is in the people of Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*]

I presided over the launch of a professional development programme on Tuesday last. I am proud to report to this honourable House that over the last fiscal year we spent \$147 million in scholarships. We are estimated to spend \$174 million this year. [*Desk thumping*] We have 259 persons earmarked to return in fiscal 2008; next year, we are estimated to have 320. Contrary to public pronouncements by those on the other side, we have been able to place 158 scholars thus far. I will tell you that in the Ministry of Health, we placed 65; in the Ministry of Education, 14. We had 12 attorneys coming back; all went to the Office of the Attorney General, and the list goes on.

Of that 259, 39 have asked for deferment in order to complete additional courses and the remainder we have all employed under the Professional Development Programme started in this fiscal year by this caring PNM administration. We are, therefore, making sure that not a single scholar who returns to Trinidad and Tobago will not be used in the public or private sector.

If this Government did not care about people, would we have invested so heavily in the future of Trinidad and Tobago? We are ensuring that we produce the next crop of leaders to take our place in the institutions of our country.

I want briefly therefore to take up on a few of the items alluded to by the hon. Prime Minister on Tuesday evening. One was the tremendous role that ICT has begun to play in the new landscape that is emerging in Trinidad and Tobago. The Government has significantly invested in ICT over the last five or six years. In fact, the Government's portal and backbone being completed at the end of this year will ensure that not only do we now have the vehicle through which we could connect all Government Ministries and Departments, but provide new channels of service delivery for which the people have long been clamouring. I dare say that this will be by the year 2012, so you will hear about it for the next

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four years. I am telling you in advance that you will hear about it next year, the year after that and the year after that. You will hear about it until we complete it. [*Desk thumping*] It will not happen overnight; it is a process.

My predecessor presided over the establishment of the Government's infrastructure in ICT's strategy branded "Fast forward, First Phase". In establishing that infrastructure, we now have a communications backbone to build and connect Ministries for government services—more as we go along—as end to end services.

I have also been asked by the Prime Minister and the Cabinet to preside over public sector reform as we seek to complete a number of programmes started in the previous years. As you would have known, Mr. Speaker, one such programme is in the transport authority, that we have talked for a while about establishing. We are now in the final phase of establishing a government-to-government agreement with the government of the Province of Nova Scotia. We hope before long to bring into the public sphere the new transport authority with its corresponding legislation. We will later on—it is already on the Order Paper—debate the Electronic Transactions Bill.

There was an article by the Central Bank, I think, which quoted the Bank as saying that electronic payments are safer than cheques. Later in this session, we should debate the Electronic Transactions Bills that will now give the legal wherewithal to do transactions over the Internet; together with sister legislation, brought by the Minister of Information, that ensures that data transmitted will have a facility to protect it, and establish the office of data commissioner.

Together with this, later this year, building on infrastructure laid down over the past years, we will launch a pilot programme, a Government kiosk where, for the first time, you will access government information and services in one interface.

We are, therefore, moving very quickly over the next couple of years to produce end-to-end channels of government service, one of which the Prime Minister alluded to—to ensure that in all businesses and at home people have access to fibre so that transactions can be done in a matter of seconds as opposed to the dial-up that some people have today. As we continue to build these service channel deliveries, we are ensuring that people ought not to have to move far from their homes or leave their homes to access government services.

It is important, therefore, when we talk about issues like productivity, that we understand that one of the things that impact on productivity is the housing to which Government employees have had to subject themselves. That is the reason people talk about all that we are building. We have to create a more conducive

environment for public officers to work. In fact, we spend almost \$70 million a month in rent and over \$200 million in lease facilities every year, and anybody who has an iota of understanding will know that it is preferable to own as opposed to rent.

Together with this, when we lease a facility, we have to outfit the facility by putting in additional infrastructure. The cost sometimes to move into these facilities has gone from \$300 per square foot in outfitting to over \$700 per square foot, and when we move we often have to leave the infrastructure. Therefore, the Government spends, beyond the rental fee, additional sums of money that we have not quantified, but which I will during the course of this year seek to put a better handle on to ensure that we can measure what it costs the Government to rent and lease these facilities as opposed to moving into our own facilities. Even after we move into our own facilities that are now being constructed, we will still require additional rental facilities.

Let me therefore remind Members of this honourable House that when we talk about managing our expenditure, part of putting up all these infrastructural facilities is that, in the years to come, being able to manage our expenditure on a recurrent basis. A part of putting in all these service channels is to manage our expenditure in the years to come.

When people talk about this Government and this budget being shortsighted, there is the failure to understand the work that many Ministries have been involved in as we seek to lay a platform as to where Trinidad and Tobago will be in the years ahead. A lot of that work starts now. A lot of the work to reach those targets must be completed during the next couple of years.

Mr. Speaker, I would just like to talk about a couple of things as well. We are also going to be establishing in the Ministry of Public Administration, in conjunction with the Inter-American Development Bank, an office to deal with public/private partnerships. We know that the public service, as the Prime Minister intimated, continues to have its challenges. We have to find more effective and efficient ways to implement Government programmes to bring on the relevant expertise to partner with us to develop Trinidad and Tobago by the year 2020. To do that, we have to ensure that we create the right framework to build on the collaboration we believe to be essential to reach our targets. Later this year, in fact, I hope by December, we will establish an office within the Ministry of Public Administration.

In that Ministry as well, we will establish the Government's Human Resource Services Company Limited. The public service is not structured around proper HR

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function aligns. We often find ourselves competing for the same resource. So we have established the Human Resource Services Company to help to attract the right talent available to Trinidad and Tobago, whether Trinidadians and Tobagonians residing in the diaspora or other qualified individuals, to work with the Government as we seek to implement our agenda.

So we will be moving at a pace to ensure our legislative agenda; that we get fibre to homes and that we create new channels of service delivery to all citizens of Trinidad and Tobago.

**11.15 a.m.**

Mr. Speaker, I am given a short time today, because we want to move on to other speakers on this side. I have a couple of things I want to end by saying. First of all, when the Member for Oropouche East indicated in his contribution that the debate has ended because they have no more speakers, I think sometimes we are given the impression that this Government somehow has hijacked this Parliament. This Government is duly elected. It is the right of any Member on this side, who wants to contribute, to do so. If they have nobody else to speak, it is not our fault.

They have indicated that—During the election I personally was subjected to all kinds of things. The Member for Couva North talked about the Pope and me. I have never, nor will I ever, respond to any situation vis-à-vis the Catholic Church, because I continue to hold a sacred responsibility to the years that institution has contributed to my life. “Dey put up posters in St. Joseph saying: Swaratsingh leave de priesthood. He leave de army; ask de boys.” They are free to ask whoever they want to ask. I am very proud of my record in those two institutions. All of that pales into comparison of the record that this Government will establish over the next four years. We are poised to do great things for this country. This budget—you can stand around and see—will lay the framework for the implementation that you would see over the next few years. I am also one to say, when you compare the contributions of Members of this side to the contributions of Members opposite, you will see quite clearly why we are here and they are there.

Mr. Speaker, the hon. Member for Tabaquite talked about suggestions as to how we should do what we are being asked to do, and diversifying the economy. They are quick to tell you these very nice suggestions, but will never go in detail to say how, where, at what cost, and so on. They remind me very often of what is being said of those in the US Presidential Election; with all the things we talk about, there is a cost attached to it. You have to go into detail of some of these things, in order to discover what that is. Unfortunately, we are not privileged to

those details. We, on the other hand, will tell you quite clearly what we plan to do, how we plan to do it, how much it will cost and, more specifically, we have begun, more than ever, to be very cognizant of the fact that the time to deliver is now; the time to make sure that we build and complete all the things that have been built in the past from all the Members that have contributed to.

I, like my colleague from Lopinot/Bon Air West, have a great amount of admiration and respect for anyone who would have served in government or this Parliament now, in the past or in the future, because to serve is a sacred oath and responsibility. To serve means that you put people's interest before your own. To serve means that you must come tirelessly, everyday and seek the welfare and well-being of the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago. You cannot but admire and respect people who would have done that in the past. As we seek to walk in their footsteps, we must endeavour to be no less. We must come prepared to roll up our sleeves and get involved in the work that is before us on both sides of the House, to ensure that Trinidad and Tobago becomes a better place.

This morning on 95.5, I was listening to the radio while coming down and I heard a young scholar talk about her dismay and the things she sees happening in our institutions. The Member for Oropouche East talked about institutions failing and the breaking down of institutions. I wonder if they realize how they contribute to the breaking down of all these institutions by the things they say. In order for us to uplift this country, we must start here. When I used to preside over weddings, I would remind couples when they get married: "Yuh cyah give what yuh eh have. Yuh marriage would only be what you are. It will only have what yuh bring to it. If yuh bring bad things, then what yuh expect? If yuh bring bad thoughts, then what yuh expect?" A lot of times, when they think that they are pointing fingers at us, they are really talking about their own feelings and about themselves.

I have, during the course of my life, been very privileged to have worked with countless organizations and people in many different parts of the world. One of the things that I would always be proud of is my home country, Trinidad and Tobago. My entire family resides aboard. I stayed here for a reason. I stayed here because, in the calypso vein of the Member for Mayaro, Trinidad is my land and of it I will always be proud and glad. While people "does want to bad talk it", I know what we have been able to accomplish here. I know that, like the mustard seed in the Bible, if you have faith as small as a mustard seed you can move mountains.

We have been called all kinds of things, neophytes, of which I am proud to be one. "Yuh could call meh anything. It doh make ah difference to me." *[Interruption]* Babies, OJTs. One of the things that they will come to know us by

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is that we are people who believe what we say, preach what we believe and practise what we preach. We want to make this country proud of all of our institutions and we would work very hard to ensure that, as we continue to contribute to these debates, our contributions speak more about us than about them, because if we spend our time trying to respond to all that they have to say, we would not let people know the achievements of this Government.

Mr. Speaker, we would not be sidetracked. We would not be deterred. We would not be detained any further by the macerations and mimicry of what we are sometimes faced with. We remain committed, we would stand tall, we would persevere till the end, and we will ensure that we achieve our targets, when we go to the election in 2012, premised on this budget.

For those who see nothing good about it and cannot find hope; hope is not wishful thinking. Hope is not a fallacy and a figment of the imagination. Hope is a clear certainty that as night follows day, a dawn will come. We do not know when and at what time, but it shall rise and it will not be the fact that this Government continues to be sidetracked by the utterances, not only of those opposite but outside as well, by those who will try to use all of their expertise and all of what is available to them, to make people believe that nothing good is happening in Trinidad and Tobago; nothing good. Tell that to the 259 scholars. Tell that to the 320 coming back next year. Tell that to young people like Petal, who is committed to coming back home and making Trinidad and Tobago a better place. Tell that to the pensioners. Tell that to those differently-abled. Tell that to the people who will be using our transport system.

Mr. Speaker, to say that everything is perfect, is to give a fallacy and figment of the imagination. I would end by saying that in all the institutions that I have belonged to, none was perfect, because it is about human beings. There is no perfect human being, but it is all about people who are committed to making Trinidad and Tobago the best that it could be. Therefore, we have to rise above our imperfections and seek the welfare and well-being of all the citizens of this country.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**The Minister of Health (Sen. The Hon. Jerry Narace):** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Allow me to congratulate the Minister of Finance on the presentation of her first budget, as well as the content which will truly see us shaping our future together, to achieve the creation of a First World nation. This Government is about vision. May I also congratulate the hon. Prime Minister for creating the

opportunity for a female Minister to deliver a budget presentation for the first time since independence.

I am aware that I am speaking to the national community through this honourable House and wish to encourage more specifically the young people of our nation to be motivated and enthusiastic about our country's development. Never in the history of Trinidad and Tobago have they enjoyed so many opportunities. Indeed, we are mobilizing and developing the people of our nation by improving the numerous training programmes and educational opportunities and, thus, providing for every single citizen.

Everyday citizens thank God that this is a PNM-led country. I had proposed to speak to health in the Upper House, as I was attending the 48<sup>th</sup> Directing Council of PAHO in Washington, as well as an important Caricom Ministers' meeting to deal in particular, with the Caribbean Public Health Agency, which includes the Caribbean Public Health Laboratory.

This meeting, the Annual Agenda for the Americas for all Diseases is set, and Trinidad and Tobago currently sits on the Executive Council. Because of the querulous, unsubstantiated and absolutely false allegations made against my family and me, Trinidad and Tobago has been forced to abdicate its responsibility, unable to be represented at a ministerial level, in order to address these fabrications made by the Member for Caroni East.

It is a sad loss to this country. I have listened to the last contribution, that young people would have to look at Parliament and look at Members on the other side, including the Member for Tabaquite, treat an important place like the House of Representatives by making querulous and unsubstantiated attacks, using the cloak of parliamentary privilege.

**11.30 a.m.**

Mr. Speaker, I was dissuaded by many from responding to the character attacks and the ludicrous allegations made by the Member of Parliament for Caroni East last Monday. Nonetheless, I feel compelled to share with you some parameters surrounding my public life.

As a citizen, I am here to serve my country. When I accepted the generous offer to serve as Minister of Health by the hon. Prime Minister, I recognized the weight of this position and the challenges that would come along the way with it but, in all cases, I saw this as a calling to serve my country, and that is one of the most noble and spirited acts in a man's journey of life.

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I stand before you as a Member of Parliament and as the Minister of Health to tell you that my conduct is guided not only by the public interest, but also my resolute belief in God and my determination to help bring goodness to all citizens, especially the less privileged in our society.

My professional and personal conduct is above all, based on the principles of accountability, integrity and transparency. That is why I sit on this side of the House today. For me, this is not about the pursuit of personal goals, I am here to fight for and achieve national goals.

It is now clear that there is fear and intimidation residing in the Members of the Opposition. They are so intimidated and scared by both the PNM successes and the thought that I might succeed in transforming the health sector. This, of course, could see them relegated to Opposition in perpetuity and hence the reason that they have now focused their rhetoric on personal attacks.

Hon. Members, you all heard the allegations made by the Member of Parliament for Caroni East. First, let me say that these allegations are quite simply untrue. These allegations reek of desperation, and despite the fact that I am inclined not to take offence in them, I feel a sense of duty to respond appropriately. I, therefore, apologize in advance, because my wish was to stay focused on health care developments.

Mr. Speaker, when I made my first speech here, I said that I was not getting in any war with anybody. I was asked to do a job and I was just trying to do that job. In fact, I have never attacked anybody personally in the Upper House or the Lower House. I want to assure the Member for Caroni East, as a certain candidate said in the recent run-up to the presidential election, “the more he lies on me the more I will speak the truth about him”. [*Desk thumping*]

You know, the Member for Tabaquite, my good friend, I could understand his concern and I would address that shortly, but the Member for Caroni East, I do not believe that he has the moral rectitude to talk to me about corruption. [*Desk thumping*] I am aware that he is making a cheap yet calculated attempt to divert public attention from all the successes that we are realizing—small ones like policy arrangements and so forth in the health sector—which explains his slant and efforts to attack the Minister of Health and employees of the Ministry since my assumption of duty. When all else fails, he resorts to personal attacks. Thus, I expect, attack after attack, but I remain resolute, tenacious, unperturbed and undaunted by these attacks. Mr. Speaker, if I really want to deal with him today, he would have preferred to allow me to focus my energy on health.



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Mr. Speaker, this is not the first time that I have served in public life. I have been an alderman, a member of the National Flour Mills board, the Chairman of the Tunapuna/Piarco Regional Corporation and an Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary and an Ambassador at Large. I have been head of the CSME Unit, chairman of the South Transport Committee, as well as the co-lead negotiator for Caricom bilateral trade agreements.

Mr. Speaker, I was the youngest auditor for the fifth largest bank in the world, Bankers Trust, an insurance broker and a successful chief executive officer of a chain of supermarkets that saw every major conglomerate bidding for it. I was paid \$5 million for a non-compete clause in my arrangements. That is how much respect they had for me.

Mr. Speaker, my life has been replete with success after success, and I reckon that it might simply be that I am in fact blessed and have received the eternal blessings of my mother and father. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Speaker, this is what Terry Joseph wrote about the Member of Parliament for Caroni East:

Tim is a politician. So while nothing in his resume suggests singular administrative ability, he has been thrust into positions of supreme influence at major health care institutions.

Most recently, he chaired the NWRHA relinquishing the post only upon being made a Government Senator. It is this succession of portfolios that brought him under the national and particularly the political microscope as a million dollar NWRHA scandal broker.

Mr. Speaker, that was his first administrative position and his first public position and that is what happened, and he is coming to attack my family and my integrity! Out of order; completely out of order.

Every member of my family and the community from which I come could attest to my behaviour, particularly with my parents and my family. Because of the respect for the privacy of his relationship with his parents, I would say nothing on the matter. I know far more than he knows that I know, but I have taken counsel from the hon. Prime Minister, and I would not put it into the record.

**Hon. Member:** Shame Tim!

**Sen. The Hon. J. Narace:** Mr. Speaker, I could tell the Member for Caroni East why he is wandering from pillar to post and yet cannot seem to find one

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success. You know, recently, I met him in the bathroom, and the Member for Nariva, the Member for Chaguanas West and the Member for Mayaro were also there. I said to him: “You do not have to mash up a country to win an election.” I said to him that what we did when we were in Opposition is that we went back to the party and asked what did we do wrong and why were we put in exile. I told him that we reorganized and started a family day and we had all kinds of different activities and we went to the convention. We took a look at ourselves. [*Desk thumping*] Clearly, the public said something was wrong and we did it not once but on several occasions. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Speaker, I said to that Member, why do you not reorganize your party? It is good for this country to have two major political parties. Do you know what he said to me? He said to me: “But we cannot find a man like you, all the good people gone COP.” He told me that. [*Laughter*] And then the Member comes here to denigrate my family and my integrity! Mr. Speaker, do you know what is worse? The many shopkeepers and grocers in this country are great entrepreneurs and make significant contributions by providing convenience and keeping the spirit of industry going and growing. [*Desk thumping*] Recently, I went to Vemco’s function and 3,000 employees are employed there now. He started with \$1,500; Anthony Sabga. If you go around this country you are going to find people who started small enterprises and they ended up big, even my own family. The country is replete with it and so is the world. Bill Gates also started small.

Mr. Speaker, the many shopkeepers and grocers in this country are great entrepreneurs and make significant contributions. In fact, it is the small and medium size businesses that provide 80 per cent of the employment of any country and contribute to the supply chain that mitigates inflation. [*Desk thumping*] So, is a grocer less than you? Is a shopkeeper less than you?

I am sure Dr. Hamza Rafeeq, the Member for Caroni Central, who runs a small pharmacy is no less a man than the Member for Caroni East. [*Desk thumping*] In fact, I have more respect for him and so do the many women and wives of Trinidad and Tobago.

**Hon. Member:** Resign now!

**Sen. The Hon. J. Narace:** I am going to say no more on that matter. There is only one benefit for the Integrity Commission in this matter and I welcome it, because at the end of the day it is bound to provide me with a public certificate of integrity, one the Member for Caroni East will never be able to display. [*Desk thumping*]

Permit me to put on the record that the Reinsurance Company of Trinidad and Tobago Limited is, indeed, owned by my family, a fact that was public knowledge even before my appointment as Minister. Upon my assumption of office, I divested myself of any involvement of all business operations in keeping with established provisions of the Integrity in Public Life Act. I have fully complied with the rules and regulations of the Integrity Commission and namely the Integrity Act of 2001, and my character remains unstained, unblemished and untarnished. [*Desk thumping*]

Let me serve the Member notice that I will be pursuing section 32 of the Integrity in Public Life Act to ensure that the Member for Caroni East pays the proper price for his false allegations. [*Desk thumping*] Actually, there is a jail term involved. If you do not know, you could discuss it with the Member for Diego Martin North/East.

**Mr. Imbert:** How I come into this? [*Interruption*]

**Sen. The Hon. J. Narace:** He understands the Act. Member for Caroni East, whether you apologize or not it is entirely up to you. Members, this is a nasty attack on my family and myself and for the record, I repeat, the allegations are entirely untrue. I am appalled and literally sickened by his attempt to sully my name. What is worse is his attempt to denigrate my family's name in this pathetic desperate effort to attack me politically. My brother, a former Assistant Commissioner of Police, served as a most distinguished public servant and retired with an unblemished record, and you want to bring his name into disrepute!

My wife has just been re-elected as the head of ATTIC with an overwhelming mandate, a woman of impeccable integrity, and you want to bring my wife into disrepute! [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Speaker, the only time the police come to my home is when they bring the Cabinet Notes. [*Laughter*] Mr. Speaker, I am proud to say my two children have followed in that trade. I am very proud to say that. I am indeed proud to be associated with all four of them.

I received a letter from the Executive Chairman of TRINRE, my wife. She told me she wrote to the Speaker and the letter said:

“Dear Honourable Speaker,

I seek your assistance in correcting the Parliamentary record of absolutely false and scandalous allegations made against my name and that of the Reinsurance Company of Trinidad and Tobago Limited (TRINRE), of which I am the Executive Chairman.

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In the debate in the House of Representatives on Monday September 29th, 2008, the Honourable Member for Caroni East, Dr. Tim Gopeesingh suggested in his contribution that TRINRE had acquired contracts from the State through corrupt means. The Honourable Member of Parliament's contribution led to a front page headline in one of the daily newspapers which read "Wife, Children, Brother run Trinre NARACE GETS \$100M CONTRACTS"

Everybody saw when you handed Bhagoo of the *Newsday* the file. Many people saw and they called me and they told me, in case you do not know.

"Also on Tuesday 30th September 2008 in Parliament, the Opposition Chief Whip and Member of Parliament for Tabaquite, Ramesh Lawrence Maharaj made the following statement to the Honourable Prime Minister: 'You didn't tell us that the Prime Minister's palace is also insured with TRINRE. You didn't tell us that. I want you to tell us that.'"

Now, you know, you are my very good friend and we have a lot of history, and I will always take any act of integrity on your part seriously, because I know what you did when you were uncomfortable with no integrity in a previous reincarnation. So, I would always take it seriously.

**Mr. Manning:** He brought the government down.

**Sen. The Hon. J. Narace:** It continues:

"These allegations are utterly false, and not being a Member of Parliament, I am without any opportunity to correct the Parliamentary record in this regard. Accordingly, I seek your indulgence in having the following read into the Parliamentary record."

**11.45 a.m.**

"The majority shareholding of the Reinsurance Company of Trinidad and Tobago (TRINRE), was acquired by Investment Managers Limited in June 2001. Since that acquisition, TRINRE has been governed by a highly respected and reputable Board of Directors. TRINRE, like any other insurance company in Trinidad and Tobago, does not tender for State business, since this type of business is done through insurance brokerage firms (which TRINRE is not) who then place the business with various insurance companies."

So, an insurance company cannot tender, a brokerage house has to do it.

"In essence, the State does not place insurance directly with any insurance company, and accordingly, there is a State tendering process in which TRINRE can participate.

Pursuant to statutory requirements, the financial records of TRINRE are lodged with the Central Bank of Trinidad and Tobago. As at December 31<sup>st</sup> 2007, the total premium value written is below \$100 million.

Let me state emphatically, that since the appointment of Jerry Narace as Minister of Health on November 12<sup>th</sup>, 2007, TRINRE has not written insurance with respect to any new client from the State Sector.”

Since my appointment, no new clients from the state sector.

“Further, the Prime Minister's residence is not insured with TRINRE, and in fact, it is common knowledge, that the Central Government's policy thus far is not to insure Government buildings.” [*Desk thumping*]

You know what surprised me, you are a former Attorney General, you should know that central Government—[*Interruption*]

**Hon. Member:** He knows it.

**Sen. The Hon. J. Narace:** Well if you know that, that is not nice. If you know that, that is not nice. I prefer to believe you did not know. [*Crosstalk*]

**Mr. Speaker:** Order!

**Sen. The Hon. J. Narace:** Let me repeat the entire paragraph.

“Let me state emphatically, that since the appointment of Jerry Narace as Minister of Health on November 12<sup>th</sup> 2007, TRINRE has not written insurance with respect to any new client from the State Sector. Further, the Prime Minister's residence is not insured with TRINRE, and in fact, it is common knowledge, that the Central Government's policy thus far is not to insure Government buildings.”

They do not insure them. [*Crosstalk*]

**Mr. Speaker:** Order!

**Sen. The Hon. J. Narace:** It goes on:

“It is obvious that the Member of Parliament for Caroni East in his anxiety to attack the Minister of Health, chose Parliament as a forum to launch this baseless and desperate attack without due consideration for the possible consequences for the members of my family, the reputation of TRINRE which has taken years of hard work to rebuild, or for my own reputation as its Executive Chairman and as President of the Association of Trinidad and Tobago Insurance Companies (ATTIC).

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Regrettably Mr. Speaker, the foundation upon which the principles of Parliamentary Privilege have been developed is being eroded.”

This is a tradition handed down to us and you stand here with the distinct arrangement of eroding the parliamentary privilege.

“It would seem that the time is now upon us to explore the relevance of these principles, and the means by which ordinary citizens can be protected from unwarranted attacks.

I look forward to your prompt attention to this matter and I also ask that you take whatever action you may consider appropriate in order to prevent any further misbehaviour.

I thank you Mr. Speaker for the opportunity to correct the Parliamentary record.”

Let me just warn the Member for Caroni East. My wife is not the kind of woman that you want to try to beat. [*Laughter*] Let me just warn you about that. It is sad that in this House of honour, the Member for Caroni East could not demonstrate a shred of decency, and this is indeed a travesty that cannot be corrected since he cowardly used the cloak of privilege.

I dare you Member for Caroni East, go outside and say TRINRE got \$100 million worth of contracts by using my post as Minister and appointing directors and then influence them. [*Desk thumping*] I dare you! I dare you! Do it. Having taken the advice from hon. Prime Minister, there are some nice words I had here for him that I will not use.

That is cowardly behaviour, we do not have to go there, and we do not have to behave like this. The world is looking at us. Today we are on the Internet, everything we do ricochets across the world, and in every mission all through the world people see these things, and they would ask, what kind of people live in Trinidad and Tobago. We will have to give an account, and therefore if you make an allegation that is with foundation, that is okay, but you cannot come and make baseless allegations.

Let me just tell you about the Member for Caroni East, I would not say anything bad. [*Crosstalk*] I am not enjoying this. You know what I believe? I believe somewhere in you there is a decent part. I believe every child is born with a gift. I believe every human being can be good, and really, you would notice that is why I do not like to attack people personally. I will never attack people's families.

Last December or thereabout he said there was a cartel operating in the Ministry of Health. So, I wrote him a letter dated December 19, telling him to give me the information. A letter written to him on December 19, published in the newspaper; not a word. Last week, I think it was, he made another outburst about TTHSI and some anonymous letter, and I am presiding over corruption, this and that and all kinds of things. I wrote him again—it was published in the newspaper—not a word. Let me tell you, the public is looking at you and if the public recognizes that all you are going to do is tell untruths in this House, they would always take a second look at the PNM, even though we have cause—

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** I have the information for you.

**Sen. The Hon. J. Narace:** Then send it to me.

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** Look it here, I will give it to you.

**Sen. The Hon. J. Narace:** Send it to me, because I have plenty to tell you. There were two letters I received from his constituents—again on the advice of the Prime Minister, I would not say anything—one included where you used bad language, obscene language. I would not read it, I would not put it in the record. If you see what the other letter said; if you see the photograph they had; if you heard what they said that you said to—well I would not say it, because this is not what this Parliament is about; this Parliament could never be about that.

I want to remind the honourable House of the mismanagement of the \$1.6 million at the NWRHA in 2000 and 2001. I wonder whether he could recall what happened in 2001. Does he remember the investigation conducted by Auditor General, Joycelyn Thompson and the Personal Management Services Limited (PMSL)? Remember? If his memory fails him, allow me to remind him that the PMSL was a private consultancy firm hired by—you know who—former finance Minister, Gerald Yetming, to investigate allegations of irregularities at the Authority. Gerald Yetming was investigating him.

The Personal Management Services Limited in a 31-page report into the matters raised in the Auditor General's report on NWRHA recommended that four senior employees stole \$1,635,840 from the NWRHA on a date unknown between December 14 and December 19, 2000. You know who was the chairman there? Who was the chairman there?

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** I was the chairman. Mr. Speaker—

**Sen. The Hon. J. Narace:** I am not giving way. I am not giving way. [*Crosstalk*] On September 14, 2001, the new board of directors at the NWRHA met

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and terminated the contracts of the four senior managers who were suspended in May 2001. Mr. Speaker, do you know I met Dr. Gopeesingh, the hon. Member for Caroni East, George Lacquis, John Rahael, Halin Jailal and a few other people in Mayaro, and I told him, "Boy, what I was hearing around town, be careful you know" because I gave the same advice to a "fella" called Dhanraj Singh. I told the then Minister, be careful with what you are doing; jail not nice. I gave him the same advice and I gave him advice again today.

You can make a contribution; summon your spiritual fortitude. [*Desk thumping*] The managers involved were Ramesh Sharma, Ramjit Sookdhar, Renal McCann and Dulapchan Maharaj, and according to the report, Dr. Tim Gopeesingh, who was appointed a Government Senator by Prime Minister Basdeo Panday, was chairman of the NWRHA when the sum of \$1.6 million was deposited into the account of the managers.

When the issue became public—and Dr. George Lacquis knows everything about this; I know he knows because he told me—Dr. Gopeesingh was forced to deal with the matter and see that money was quickly returned into the NWRHA account, and you are coming to talk about my wife's integrity. That is shameless, shameless and cowardly! This is the man who now appears before us as a saint, as the corruption prosecutor for the nation. He does not have the moral rectitude to administrate a game of "pitch", he cannot say if the marble went in the ring or outside the ring; you cannot say that. No moral authority! He should really stay silent, because when it comes to corruption discussions, I am sure you remember the UNC's \$300,000 gift to Mr. Panday, and I have a copy of the cheque here. You were the chairman of the North West Liaison office.

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** That is the Liaison office not the Authority.

**Sen. The Hon. J. Narace:** No, no, both, both, you were all; you were everything, and you know what is sad. [*Crosstalk*]

**Mr. Speaker:** Order!

**Sen. The Hon. J. Narace:** After all the wrong that you did they had to beg for you to become a Senator. Just like the other one in the other House, when they won the election they threw him out. [*Crosstalk*] The North West Liaison office is said to have paid the then Prime Minister \$50,000 a few days before the election. The alleged instruction to Republic Bank, Long Circular branch to pay Panday through the North West Liaison office on December 04, 2000, was signed by guess who, hon. Members? Guess who the cheque was signed by? The former



North West Regional Health Authority chairman, Dr. Tim Gopeesingh and Ramesh Sharma.

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** Mr. Speaker, on a point of order.

**Hon. Members:** What is the point of order? Which one? Which order?

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** Mr. Speaker, the point of order, 35(a).

**Mr. Speaker:** 35(a), okay, yes, take your seat.

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** He is imputing—

**Mr. Speaker:** No, no, no.

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** Or 36(5) or any one you choose. [*Laughter*]

**Mr. Speaker:** I think you really mean 36(5).

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** Mr. Speaker—

**Mr. Speaker:** No, no, no, you raised the point of order and that is all you need to do. For the benefit of the Minister of Health, 36(5) reads as follows:

"No Member shall impute improper motives to any other Member of either Chamber."

So, if you are doing that desist from doing it.

**12.00 noon**

**Sen. The Hon. J. Narace:** Mr. Speaker, I am stating facts from a report by Jocelyn—and it is laid in this Parliament, so I will continue. [*Interruption*]

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** I stand on 36(5), he is misleading the House. He is misleading the House.

**Mr. Imbert:** That is nonsense. [*Crosstalk*]

**Mr. Speaker:** Hon. Member, the Standing Orders provide you with an opportunity to address the issues being raised.

**Mr. Manning:** You start it, you start it. [*Crosstalk*]

**Sen. The Hon. J. Narace:** You want me to stop?

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** You said I—[*Inaudible*]—the High Court judge awarded me costs against the State.

**Mr. Speaker:** Order!

**Sen. The Hon. J. Narace:** The bank draft was reportedly issued on December 07—[*Crosstalk*]

**Mr. Speaker:** Hon. Members, we cannot continue this way at all. So, as I told the Member for Caroni East, there are remedies available to you, okay.

**Mr. Imbert:** Sit in silence. [*Laughter*]

**Sen. The Hon. J. Narace:** Mr. Speaker, this gives me no pleasure. I am saddened that I have to do what I am doing here today. I just want the Member of the Opposition to understand that "He who is without sin cast the first stone" because I am coming back. I know everything about most people here.

**Hon. Member:** You would like to know.

**Sen. The Hon. J. Narace:** I do! I do! I did not wish to do this. I get absolutely no pleasure in doing this, but your record is clear. Mr. Speaker, I will facilitate him, I will stop. I will stop.

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** My hands are clean and my heart is pure.

**Sen. The Hon. J. Narace:** I will stop, but let me tell you why I will stop. [*Crosstalk*]

**Mr. Speaker:** Order! Order!

**Sen. The Hon. J. Narace:** No. Mr. Speaker, I have not fabricated one thing here so far. In fact, I have a whole file here and the Prime Minister begged me, he said, "Look, doh do that, leave him alone." He said, "Leave him, let him go", and I know why. I know why he said that. What he wants is to lift the quality of debate in this House and that is what we ought to be doing. [*Desk thumping*]

**Mr. Maharaj SC:** What?

**Sen. The Hon. J. Narace:** That is what we ought to be doing. [*Desk thumping*] That is what we ought to be doing. [*Interruption*] Mr. Speaker, in the circumstances I will stop, but just to tell him that the Anticorruption Investigations Bureau wrote to the Permanent Secretary on September 08, and a team of police officers of the Anticorruption Investigations Bureau has been mandated to enquire into alleged irregularities resulting out of the commission of enquiry—same thing—into the delivery of health care services in Trinidad and Tobago. In order to carry out this enquiry it is necessary to obtain copies of all contracts or documents relative to the retention of services issued by your organization to the attached list of companies for the period January 01, 2000 to December 31, 2006.

I do not wish for anything ill to happen to the Member of Caroni East. Do you know what I wish? I wish that some divine intervention could be made and I wish that we can all say let us all collaborate, let us behave in a decent manner, let us work with each other and let us build a better Trinidad and Tobago. That is my wish. But because of my duty and my responsibility, I will have to allow the chips to fall where they must. *[Interruption]* The first lesson in this is, “Those with glass houses should not throw stones.” That is the lesson.

Mr. Speaker, I also want to respond to the dengue allegations. The Member of Parliament for Caroni East has called for the arrest of doctors—and I am glad you called for the arrest of doctors and not me—senior officers at the Ministry of Health, the CMO and myself. This is laughable. He wrote to the DPP asking that we be charged for the cover up of dengue and charged for misconduct in public office. He alleged that the ministry did nothing on dengue prevention and control. This is by far the most ludicrous, the most preposterous statement of all.

What can I say? This is jokey. He is a comical parliamentarian. The health sector is way too important for us to engage in anything else than serious discussion. In the case of dengue, let me say that one dengue case—as I have said all the time—is one too many and one death is one too many. I have said it before and I will say it again. The Ministry of Health has recognized that there is indeed an increase in dengue activity this year. Towards this end, all the necessary protocols and awareness procedures were followed to mitigate the risk of a dengue outbreak as seen in the year 2002. The Member for Caroni East told you, and I quote:

“The health Minister and the CMO along with the senior ministry officials engaged in a misleading public campaign to cover up the dengue outbreak. Their actions resulted in the population remaining ignorant of the preliminary symptoms of the disease as well as precautions they should take in such an instance.”

Mr. Speaker, nothing could be further from the truth. A disgraceful and outrageous lie! The truth is that the ministry has engaged in a comprehensive public awareness campaign on dengue since January 2008. In fact, from January 2008 until September 2008 the ministry has spent approximately \$4.7 million for dengue awareness in mass media advertising alone. That comprised: print advertisements; television and radio spots throughout the country's media. The television messages were aired on four television stations: TV6; CNC3; CNMG and ieTV and on at least 17 radio stations. While the print ads appeared in all nationwide newspapers. The messages focused on source reduction and symptoms of dengue.

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Additionally, in August 2008 we produced two new print messages focusing on dengue statistics from July 2002 to July 2008 as well as source reduction. These messages aimed at providing the population with accurate information on reported and confirmed dengue cases.

The Ministry of Health dengue campaign has been integrated and has been extended well beyond our advertising campaign, it included interviews, press releases and other promotional activities. An inter-sectoral forum on dengue was organized and held in August 2008. All major stakeholders including the Ministry of Health, the Ministry of Local Government, SWMCOL, insect vector control department and PAHO presented a summary on all the actions. The campaign on dengue is an ongoing one. Currently, a direct mailing campaign is in progress. We are going to send materials to every single house in Trinidad and Tobago and starting this Friday, every registered household in Trinidad and Tobago will be receiving information flyers from the Ministry of Health on prevention measures.

Hon. Members, in treating with this allegation of no proactive measures, permit me to once again repeat the following: The former CEO sent me a report on the management of dengue from as early as January 2008 until the present. In his report he explained that the ministry initiated its programme of heightened activity on dengue in January 2008 and integrated action plan which comprised the following elements: insect vector control, clinical management; health promotion, health education; inter-sectoral collaboration and resource/needs analysis and allocation.

The Ministry of Health, through the Insect Vector Control Division strengthened its activities imploring the following strategies: source reduction; chemical application; enforcement of legislation.

Mr. Speaker, Insect Vector Control expenditure in 2002 was \$35 million compared to 2008, \$58 million. We have bought 45 additional fogging machines, six ultralow volume machines, 13 new vehicles and additional insecticides totalling \$2 million. Moreover, 100 residuals sprayers are currently being recruited—additional—to complement the existing workforce. On the clinical management, the ministry circulated protocols for diagnosis and treatment of dengue fever and so forth.

Mr. Speaker, let me just tell the national community that while in Washington I met with the Director of PAHO and I am pleased to announce that a team is arriving on Monday—I got the correspondence from Dr. Boyd-Scobie this morning and it says:

“As agreed during the meeting, I hereby confirm that the following team of experts will be travelling to Trinidad and Tobago next week....

- Dr. Sylvain Aldighieri, Epidemiologist,...
- Dr. Rivaldo V. Da Cunha, Specialist and Clinical Management of Dengue, Professor at the University of Mato Grosso do Sul, Brazil,...
- Ms. Olivia Brathwaite, Advisor on integrated management,...
- Ms. Clare Forrester, Risk and Social Communication Consultant..."

The reason I did this is, everybody is making a pronouncement and I thought we would go to the very highest level, get the best advice and that is free to us at any rate and I just wanted to say that.

I had not intended to speak on health matters in the Lower House. I had intended to speak on health matters in the Upper House. I have recognized that I have taken a great deal of your time, unfortunately—

**Mr. Speaker:** Take as much as you want of my time, but you only have 75 minutes of it to take.

**Sen. The Hon. J. Narace:** On the clinical management front—

**Mr. Imbert:** Jerry, I have the section of the Integrity in Public Life Act that is relevant [*Inaudible*] then you could take your seat.

**Sen. The Hon. J. Narace:** Mr. Speaker, in closing I have been given the appropriate section of the Integrity in Public Life Act. [*Interruption*] Section 32(2) of the Integrity in Public Life Act states as follows:

“Any person who knowingly”—

And Member for Tabaquite, you either have to say you did not know. You would have to plead ignorance. [*Laughter*]

“Any person who knowingly and mischievously makes or causes to be made a false report to the Commission or misleads the Commission by giving false information or by making false statements or accusations shall be guilty of an offence and liable on conviction to a fine of \$500,000 and ten years imprisonment.”

And 10 years imprisonment. [*Desk thumping*]

**Mr. Maharaj SC:** I will not ask the question again. [*Crosstalk*]

**Mr. Imbert:** He “write” the Integrity Commission?

**Sen. The Hon. J. Narace:** He wrote! You wrote, the letters are in the papers.

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[*Crosstalk*] I do not know. I would like to know who is the person that has all of them singing for their supper like that.

**Mr. Imbert:** Jail for you.

**Sen. The Hon. J. Narace:** I know normally you would be wiser than that.

Mr. Speaker, I want to thank this honourable House for allowing me the opportunity to make a contribution. I want to congratulate the Minister of Finance, I want to indeed congratulate the hon. Prime Minister and I want to congratulate all the Members on this side. It is indeed a pleasure and an honour to be associated with such a forward thinking and progressive group.

I thank you very much. [*Desk thumping*]

**Mr. Speaker:** Hon. Members, the sitting of the House is suspended for lunch and we will resume at 1.15 p.m.

**12.12 p.m.:** *Sitting suspended.*

**1.15 p.m.:** *Sitting resumed.*

[MADAM DEPUTY SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

**The Minister of Public Utilities (Hon. Mustapha Abdul-Hamid):** Thank you very much, Madam Deputy Speaker, for this opportunity for me to make a contribution in this budget debate, the Budget of 2008/2009. Let me begin by adding my own words of congratulations to the hon. Minister of Finance. A budget as you know, Madam Deputy Speaker, is not an easy task. It is not an easy undertaking, particularly a national budget where there are many competing interests and demands being made of the Minister, and the Ministry of Finance, and all of it has to be taken in the context of the development objectives of the country. I think that the hon. Minister of Finance and her team, and the Government, would have done extremely well and the hon. Minister must be congratulated for that outstanding job, [*Desk thumping*] I am particularly proud to be part of this Government at this particular point in time, as I have been over the last six or seven years.

Madam Deputy Speaker, we have observed a number of budgets over the last six years and one ought to consider not any single budget standing alone, what instead we ought to consider in evaluating this budget, must be the cumulative impact of our budgets starting from 2002, right up to the present, examining each year, the particular prescriptions and proposals and measures that would have been included in each budget and making an overall assessment as to how the country would have moved forward from 2002 right up to the present.

This is an important exercise because it is in there, to some degree, that you would be able to assess the vision of the Government. Because some are only able to see vision in retrospect, after a period of time has expired and after the accomplishment or achievements would have been achieved, and those people are generally unable to see where you propose to go, they are only able to see what you would have achieved after you have achieved it. In any attempt to assess the vision of a political party or a government, or a political leader, sometimes it is useful; oftentimes it is useful to look back over the last several years and make your assessment on the basis of the tremendous progress we have made in this country, in our case, over the last six or seven years. [*Desk thumping*]

There were a number of notable and significant contributions made on this side of the House, and most particularly, it is not often that I speak after the hon. Prime Minister, but listening to the hon. Prime Minister speak on Tuesday, it became clear that yes, indeed, there are major challenges associated with governance and it gives some of us who are not as experienced as he is, an opportunity to understand and appreciate what some of those challenges might be. Because whenever any leader or any government proposes to go up against the established order, particularly in the interest of the people, you will find that they must ensure that they have the adequate measures of courage, determination, and in particular, of composure. [*Desk thumping*]

When I heard the hon. Prime Minister speak last Tuesday, I was comforted because I am quite sure having observed him very closely over the last seven years, that those are qualities which the Prime Minister possesses in an abundant measure, and that gives me as a Member of Government and as a citizen, a kind of confidence and comfort that really makes me look at my children and be comfortable and satisfied that they will indeed have a bright future in this country. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Deputy Speaker, I am very proud indeed to be part of this Government, so we must at all times look at the cumulative impact of the budgets gone and the impact on our citizens. I recall when we came into office in 2001 and delivered our first budget in 2002, we did not have an opportunity to deliver a budget for the fiscal year 2001/2002, but this Government was able to make some adjustments to ensure that our policy prescriptions were in fact accomplished within the confines of the existing arrangements. You would recall that over the last five years, immediately upon assuming office, we were faced with a situation where there were a large number of our citizens, particularly our single mothers, complaining that their interests were not being looked after, and they found

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themselves in very difficult situations. So immediately, priority number one at the time became the necessity to look after some of our single parents, and it was with that in mind, I recall that the CEPEP was established and launched, and a number of other social sector programmes were put in place to deal with some of those issues.

I recall as we went along, when the issue of access to medication became a national issue and became a national problem, we introduced the Chronic Disease Assistance Programme. I recall there were difficulties accessing—I think it is called the public pharmacies within the hospital system, and an attempt was made to allow the dispensation of medications through the private pharmacies. That has been a tremendous success, but I recall that was in direct response to a particular national issue or problem we had at the time. It was a problem that had existed for sometime before, but again, it was the very creative solution on the part of the Government, and again, it was the Government taking into account, the need to ensure that our citizens' needs were in fact being looked after.

I recall along the way as well, that education was established as priority number one at a particular point in time along our journey, and in the first instance, an effort was made to ensure that anyone who needed assistance to access tertiary education was afforded that, and a means test prescription was put in place. That did not last too long because in the budget of 2006, I think it was the hon. Prime Minister who declared that tertiary education would be free and that dealt with the needs of our citizens who were intending on pursuing tertiary education. That has been a tremendous achievement on the part of this Government.

As well in the past, you would recall that the personal income tax was reduced from 35 per cent to 25 per cent, and this year again, we have seen other adjustments. The point I am making, it is not what you achieve in any one budget, but the vision of a leader, the vision of a government is to be recognized [*Desk thumping*] and assessed by the achievement of the Government, but the cumulative impact of the prescriptions of the Government over a particular period of time. One of the weaknesses I think that we have as individuals and sometimes as groups in our society is that very often we plan in a period of time that might be too short. We have to make five year, 10, 15 and 20 year plans for our society.

As I am speaking about that, over the last 10 months or so, since I have been in the Ministry of Public Utilities, a number of proposals have come forward from our various agencies. You see what we are proposing to do with water—I will speak about some of that—what we are proposing to do with telecommunications in particular, and none of those ideas, none of that thinking could be possible if



we were not operating within the context of Vision 2020. It is Vision 2020 that is giving life to many of these tremendous proposals that we see coming forward because it is out of Vision 2020, that framework, that people are almost free, almost authorized to imagine the solutions and development in measures that represent a quantum leap forward. That is what is required if we are to transform ourselves from the status we now enjoy into that of a developed country. The point is that it is Vision 2020 that has expanded our minds as a people, as agencies, and allowed us to create the kind of solutions, the flexibility and the room to create the kind of solutions that we need to address some of the problems that we have in our society, and some of the developmental challenges that we have, some of which I will speak about as it relates to the Ministry of Public Utilities.

But, Madam Deputy Speaker, I am a little disappointed that we only have two Members from the Opposition Bench because there are few issues as they relate to some of the things they have said that I would like to respond to. I recall we were given an introduction to Latin by the hon. Member for Siparia, when she said *vox populi, vox Dei*, and the translation of that is roughly equivalent to the voice of the population, is the voice of God. I would not argue with that, neither the translation nor the meaning, except to say that I have concluded having listened to all of them and—before I go into that translation, I recall just after the election they were beating their chests. All of them were beating their chests, very proud that they represented this strong and robust Opposition and that they were coming into the Parliament with all this experience, this dream team, this powerhouse of opposition speakers and in many cases, they looked at this team as being a team of newcomers and neophytes.

Now, we have had two successive debates, one debate on a Motion of "No Confidence" in the Prime Minister and a second debate on the budget. Madam Deputy Speaker, in the two consecutive debates, the speakers on this side have been able to demolish the speakers on the opposite side. [*Desk thumping*] I am almost embarrassed and ashamed for them. Their responses have been so feeble and pathetic that it is unbelievable that this dream team of politicians has now had to recoil, in embarrassment. It amounts to, and it is nothing but licks, licks, licks to their inexperience [*Desk thumping*] and it really looks bad.

I would have thought that after all these years that they spoke about—but it tells you that there is nothing to substitute for substance and content. [*Desk thumping*] It is because on this side we are rich in substance and content, that we are able so very easily—inexperienced as some of us might be, as we are—and casually to dispense with the comments that they have made. Point after point,

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speaker after speaker would have gotten up on that side, and every single point that they made, whether it be a technical or political point, we were able to treat with and to ensure that the population is not in a position where it is liable or susceptible to being misled by those Members opposite.

Madam Deputy Speaker, it is easy for me to conclude, vox UNC, vox hypocrisies, the voice of the UNC is the voice of hypocrisy. [*Desk thumping*] I want to demonstrate that, by making a reference to the contribution of the hon. Member for Oropouche West, because she did say, attempting to ridicule our side, that the CEO of WASA made approximately \$900,000 in one year as the case might be. The facts are—and I think it was 2003, that the board of WASA awarded a salary of \$50,000 per month to the CEO of WASA. That is the basic salary \$50,000 a month. However, an error was made and it was not drawn to the reference of the public sector negotiating committee as far as I recall. I maybe wrong but that committee did not have an opportunity to adjudicate on the matter.

**1.30 p.m.**

From the minute they and the Government became aware of it, an adjustment was made and his salary was reduced to \$36,000. I must compliment and commend the present CEO, Mr. Grimes, because he did not make much of a fuss, but he accepted the salary and proceeded to work, as he has been working since then, for this new salary of \$36,000 a month. [*Desk thumping*] They took away his car, et cetera; all that was fine, because it was within the context of a judgment that was made on the part of the Government at that particular point in time.

You come in a very sanctimonious way, criticizing the Government for the salary of a gentleman, which was corrected soon afterwards, as soon as the Government became aware of it. This is where the hypocrisy comes in, because I happened to have found an article posted on August 13, 2002, at 12.23 p.m. in the *Newsday* online bulletin board, where it said:

"Vishnu Ramlogan, when he was the President of the Tourism and Industrial Company Limited (TIDCO), was paid over \$3 million in salary for a period of two years and 10 months."

We are comparing TIDCO with the Water and Sewerage Authority (WASA).

If you understand the complications associated with the organization that is called WASA, you will understand the demands of a CEO of WASA. This gentleman, Mr. Ramlogan, was paid \$3 million over a period of two years and 10 months. For the year 1999, he was paid \$75,649. I will jump to 2001, \$72,239,

and before that, in 2000, he was paid \$110,634 a month. That was the period they claimed that we were getting \$9 a barrel for oil. They claimed that oil was \$9 a barrel. The voice of the UNC, I am sure, is the voice of hypocrisy; and we continue to hear it persistently. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Deputy Speaker, when the hon. Member for Siparia spoke, she criticized the use of Chinese labour. Sometimes you learn things casually along the way. We have been subject to all kinds of harsh comments as they relate to the employment of Chinese in our development programme, never mind the kind of advantages and the protection it allows us, and all the economists could speak on that, in terms of the fact that it eases the burden and strain on the demand for local labour, among a number of advantages; in addition to the fact that our unemployment rate is now just around 5 per cent.

I recall driving through Bamboo No. 2, and under construction was the Bamboo Government Primary School; that was in 1999 or thereabouts. Do you know who I saw working on this school, constructing the Bamboo Government Primary School? Chinese labourers. That was a time when unemployment was about 13 per cent. So they were, in fact, employing Chinese labourers and Chinese contractors in development projects in Trinidad and Tobago. Nobody argued with you. The problem I have is that at a time when unemployment was 13 per cent, so there were Trinidadians looking for jobs who could not find jobs, and yet they find it easy to criticize us at this point in our history. The voice of the UNC is, indeed, the voice of hypocrisy.

They also referred to the OJT Programme; the same hon. Member for Siparia referred to the OJT as "white collar DEWD". I wish she were here, because the hon. Member for Caroni East has had two on-the-job trainees working in his constituency office. The hon. Member for Fyzabad has had maybe about eight on-the-job trainees, these same white collar DEWD, working in his office. I want to ask the same hon. Member for Siparia, but she is not here: How many on-the-job trainees have, in fact, been working in her office? This is the same DEWD. My issue is with the hypocrisy; that is where my issue is.

Today, the hon. Member for Tabaquite complained about the fact that they had exhausted all their speakers and that there were some of us to speak after. The math is simple; there is nothing we could do; there are 15 of them and 26 of us. So if it is a debate and there is a speaker and a response, naturally, any elementary school child could tell you that we would outlast them, that when they are finished we would still have a number of speakers. All you have to do is ask 15 from 26 equals what; but the hypocrisy is the point I am making.

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I throw you back to January 15, 1996, to a debate when the difference between Opposition and Government Members, when they were in government, was much smaller that it is now. Do you know what happened on that day? In spite of the fact that today the hon. Member for Tabaquite was able to accuse us of being coward, accuse us of not wanting to engage in real debate, on that day, January 15, after Mr. Harry Partap spoke, the hon. Member then, the following speakers spoke in strict succession: Eric Williams, Jarrette Narine, Barendra Sinanan, Vincent Lasse, Rupert Griffith, Fitzgerald Hinds, Eulalie James, Camille Robinson-Regis, Gordon Draper, Colm Imbert and Dr. Keith Rowley.

Eleven Members of the then Opposition were required to speak in succession with no reply. The then Leader of Government Business threatened that if you did not get up and speak, they were going to close the debate. After the then PNM Opposition exhausted all their speakers, then they started to put in speakers one after the other: Dhanraj Singh, Dr. Hamza Rafeeq, Pamela Nicholson, Trevor Sudama, ANR Robinson, Basdeo Panday and Mr. Kuei Tung. You understand. The then leader, the same Member for Tabaquite, the programme he put in place on that day was to have speakers waiting to speak. Never once in that debate did we ask two of their Members to speak consecutively. Every time they spoke, we responded; that is what the debate is. The problem this country should have is with the hypocrisy in what they say and how they behave. [*Desk thumping*]

The greatest hypocrisy of all—this is branching into what directly relates to the Ministry of Public Utilities—is the water for all by 2000. In 2001 our production nationally was 175 million gallons a day. Today, we are about 220 million gallons. Our unaccounted for water, which is water lost for various reasons, and we have spoken about that in the past already, was about 50 per cent as a result of leaks in the pipelines, improper use and so on.

We had very old pipelines at that time. In fact, about 25 per cent of the time we had cast iron pipelines from back in the 1850s, asbestos and cement pipelines, both from the 1890s. Those are the most susceptible to leaks. Galvanize and wrought iron, which were installed in 1915, about 15 per cent, we had a lot of problems, and we still do, with the pipeline infrastructure.

We had no metering system, so that we were, as well, susceptible to improper use by our citizens. We also had, just as we had today in many cases, unreliable sources. Sometimes we hear complaints about the water supply in South, but there is a very real technical problem for the difficulty in ensuring a proper water supply in South Trinidad, and that has to do with the quality of the ground water.

The ground water in South has a high iron content which makes it difficult to treat. Our wells in South Trinidad do not produce as we would like them to, so we have to take water from North Trinidad and get it to South. We have to come up with other creative ways of trying to deal with it.

In 2000, the percentage of the population getting water 24 hours a day and seven days a week was less than 15 per cent; five days a week supply, less than 25 per cent; three to five days was less than 20 per cent, and about 40 per cent of the population, at that time, was getting water less than three days per week. This is where the fraud comes in; it is more a political fraud that I am speaking about.

I call it political fraud, because it was an act of deceit perpetrated on the population. With all those problems that I have just outlined, all complicated and significant problems associated with the ability of a country to provide water to its citizens, each one a major project in its own right, they marketed to this population Water For All by 2000, on the basis of the construction of one desalination plant to produce 20 million gallons of water per day. A single plant that they intended to construct, adding to the production from 175 to make it 195, and they sold that to the population as being the measure required to ensure that the entire population would be provided with water. What else other than a fraud could I call that? It was a deception, and they knew it was not true.

There was no way in the world that a single desalination plant could be some kind of panacea for all our woes in the water sector: They knew that very well, yet that was the advertising campaign on which they embarked. Up until today, they shamelessly persist with making those kinds of statements.

We have demonstrated to them that what is required is a comprehensive master plan. There is no way you could deal with this situation in bits and pieces. From as far back as 2004, we undertook to secure the services of our consultants, you would be very familiar, Madam Deputy Speaker, to ensure that we had a comprehensive master plan, looking after every aspect of the provision, transmission and distribution of water. So we are proud now that, in fact, we do have, almost ready for submission, it is expected to be delivered to us by November, that comprehensive master plan.

When I say a comprehensive master plan would be delivered, we have already been in detailed discussions with the master planners, and in order to give us an advantage in terms of time, we have identified a number of projects that will come and will form part of the master plan, which we propose to begin to take action on immediately. We have already begun to take action on them.

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What is required is not an increase in production from 175 million gallons to 195 million gallons to achieve water for all. We propose to ensure that our water production capacity increases from 220 million gallons to just over 400 million gallons per day. That is what is required; that is the kind of strides you need to take if you are going to be in a position to make sure your population has an adequate water supply. It is not a single plan to a single measure that could resolve this particular issue. We must increase our water production, and we propose to do so.

We propose to increase our production with the expansion of the existing Arena Dam—and there is a reason I am identifying these—from 10 billion gallons capacity to 14 billion gallons capacity, which will give us an increased daily production from 175 million gallons to 195 million gallons a day.

**1.45 p.m.**

We propose a new dam at Moruga, with a capacity of five billion gallons to give us a production capacity of 20 million gallons per day. We propose as we have outlined before, five desalination plants and we also propose that four out of the five we are looking to just around 20 million gallons per day where we will treat water to industrial grade water at the Beetham Re-use Plant.

There is an important reason for my outlining these various measures. Every production source will have its own vulnerability, for example, we are familiar that most of our water, just over 56 per cent comes from what are called surface water sources; 32 per cent or 70 million gallons come from groundwater and only 12 per cent or 27 million will come from the desalination plant.

What we have is an overly heavy reliance on surface and groundwater and in particular, surface water. The problem with that is that surface water is particularly vulnerable to changes in the weather condition. In the dry season, our surface water sources dry up. You will recall, I think it was in 2003 when we were losing more water on a daily basis at the Caroni Arena Dam to evaporation than we were in fact able to pipe to our population, because we had an extended dry season that particular year.

We also know that a number of what we call our rural intakes—where we take water off the rivers—dry up in the dry season, so a number of our citizens who may rely on those intakes have problems in the dry season. They also have problems in the rainy season because our equipment is not designed to treat with the effects of turbidity which is mud, slush and stones coming into the system which is what takes place whenever rain falls and that is why in some parts of the

country, if you live in Tacarigua for example, and you are taking water from the Caura River and when rain falls, the system has to be shut off. You may say, the rain just fell, we are supposed to have water, but you do not because there is mud coming down the river and getting into the system, so we have to shut it off.

So there are vulnerabilities associated with surface water sources and similarly groundwater particularly over the long term. One thing we know for sure or are confident of is that the sea will not dry up and that gives us a situation where we are fairly confident that we would have a source of water so long as we have a functioning desalination plant.

Madam Deputy Speaker, all of that has to be considered in context of climate change. I do not want to get into any argument as to whether climate change is for real or not, but the point is there are countries in the world, in Canada in particular Nova Scotia has established a government department with responsibility for analyzing and overseeing the impact of climate change on the province of Nova Scotia. So serious are they taking it.

In my view, it would not be the wisest thing if any Government in the world were to ignore that reality. It is with that reality in mind too that this Government has embarked on a development programme in the water sector that takes into account the possible impacts of climate change. What we are doing in terms of our prescription to expand the dams and what is going on with our groundwater, because right now we are engaged in what is called deep ground drilling, where we are going deeper than traditionally we would have gone to find water in the deeper rocks. We have also embarked on a programme of construction of the desalination plant.

What is happening there is an attempt to balance very intelligently our water source portfolio. We are attempting to source water from various sources and ensure that in the event that any one source is threatened, that the country's water supply is not devastated as a consequence of that. That, we think is an intelligent approach and one to ensure that we are protected against the vagaries of nature and what the future may hold.

In addition to that I mentioned earlier that there are particular problems in terms of the groundwater quality in south Trinidad. What the desalination plants allowed us to do is to install production facilities in south Trinidad so that we have a close proximity of the production facilities to the citizens and that allows us to minimize the distance for the transmission of our water, and so minimize possible losses or complications that may arise as a consequence of any problems that may be associated with the transmission system.

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Sometimes people say to collect all the water in the north and pump all the water to the south, but what will happen in the event of a disaster where significant damage is done to the transmission system that is attempting to pump water from north all the way to south Trinidad and there is a problem occurring half way along the way, you can very quickly understand why it is necessary for various parts of the country to have its own water source, or production facility.

What the production facility also allows is a transmission network within a certain quadrant or grid, and within the distribution and transmission network, we are also providing for in the new design, a communication or interconnectivity among the various production facilities so that if there is a problem in La Brea we can easily rely on the desalination plant in Moruga, and if there is a problem in Moruga, we can easily rely on a nearby production facility as the case may be.

Madam Deputy Speaker, may I assure you and the population that the programme of action in the water sector is very well thought out, it is not as I have explained to the population a deception as was perpetrated in the country in 2000. We have taken the time, we have put in the effort and we are quite sure that the solution with which we present this country will be one that will give the lasting kind of benefits for which we have become known. [*Desk thumping*]

Where are we now with that? I am very happy to report that we have been working hard. One of the very good innovations in governance has been the improved and increased use of the ministerial subcommittees. That is something the hon. Prime Minister has been making use of and I would say as the Minister of Public Utilities which is the ministry that has responsibility for this project, it is a welcome scenario that we have this inter-ministerial subcommittee overseeing major projects like these. It is chaired by Dr. Saith and includes a number of Ministers and technical officers. It allows the experience of a wide range of colleagues to impact on the oversight of particular projects.

We have gone through this before; the Ministry of National Security with the offshore patrol vessels; the Ministry of Works and Transport in various projects and so it allows the persons who would have had the experience with those projects, to have that experience brought to bear on this project. I myself would not have been associated with those projects except for what I may have read in the Cabinet Note. So the experience of those persons in direct negotiations, those Ministers can be brought to bear on a project like this, so with every major project we have you see our capacity to negotiate and deliver is constantly and steadily improving. That is because as we move forward we learn the lessons of each and every project. [*Desk thumping*]



That is not something that any and every leader would have imagined, so again, it is a credit to our Prime Minister that he has been able to so constructively utilize this particular approach. But where have we reached with the desalination plant in particular? We are proposing to hire an independent procurement expert and I am happy to report to the hon. Members of this House that we have already issued the request for proposal (rfp) and that expert will advise the Government on all aspects of procurement for desalination plants.

We have issued the request for proposals for the independent procurement expert on September 10, 2008 and we are expecting him or her to commence the assignment on November 17, 2008. We have also issued the rfp for two programme managers who will be responsible for representing Government's interest on these projects, one for the Beetham re-use and one for the desalination plants. The issuance of those rfps was on September 12, 2008 and we expect him to begin his assignment not too long from now, perhaps by the end of the year.

Very interestingly, we have issued requests for information in respect of the contractors for the desalination plants and the Beetham Water Re-use on September 15, 2008. We have asked 20 different companies from all over the world: Spain, the United Kingdom, the United States of America, Jamaica, Germany, Israel, Singapore, Korea, France and from Canada. The best companies all over the world have been invited to give us information on their companies and how they propose we can move forward with these projects we have.

We are operating on the basis of design, build, own and operate and we are proposing that we will enter into water purchase agreements with these companies which will be responsible for designing, financing, building and owning these facilities and we are entering into purchase agreements with them. The reason I am saying that is that particular measure relieves the pressure on the Treasury to provide the funding upfront and so, sometimes when we talk about \$10 billion, we must understand that a significant proportion of that funding, while it represents a significant investment, a significant part of the funding will in fact come from an international private sector.

So having to produce the money upfront may not necessarily be part of what is being contemplated and so the strain on government resources is not something we expect in respect of these particular projects and we are quite happy and confident that as we move forward, we will ensure that by 2012 our water production will be up from 220 million gallons to just over 400 million gallons per day. [*Desk thumping*]

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In the meantime we have been working very hard to ensure that our population—it is not as though we have been sitting and waiting on desalination plants—gets an improved water supply and within the constraints of what might exist. I can identify a number of smaller projects we have undertaken in various communities, and sometimes when people accuse us of not doing what we ought to be doing and nobody in Trinidad and Tobago is happy, there are people in the country who are experiencing significant improvement in the quality of their lives and it is not reasonable for anyone to make that comment.

When you make that comment, make it to the people on Breves Road because we have completed and put into operation our booster station. Similarly Lady Young Booster Station was put in place in 2008, Sangre Grande Booster Station, Dades Trace Booster Station, Foncette Booster Station and a number of booster stations have been put in place.

**2.00 p.m.**

The effect of that would be to improve considerably the reach of our Water and Sewerage Authority in terms of getting water to our citizens.

**Mr. Speaker:** Hon. Members, the speaking time of the hon. Member has expired.

*Motion made,* That the hon. Member's speaking time be extended by 30 minutes. [*Hon. K. Swaratsingh*]

*Question put and agreed to.*

**Hon. M. Abdul-Hamid:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to hon. Members of the House.

We also engaged in the development of a number of wells and refurbishment of wells. As I said earlier, 32 per cent of our water supply comes from our wells: Caparo, Diego Martin, Palo Seco, Diamond and Daniel well in Tobago. Daniel well in Tobago is completed and in operation.

Let me say something about Tobago and the effect of wells. In Mason Hall, I think the water supply there was less than two or three days per week until a single well was drilled. As a consequence of that, we were able to move from less than two days to a 24-hour day 7-days-a-week water supply in Mason Hall. [*Desk thumping*] That is directly related to the performance of a particular well.

We have also been very busy installing pipelines. Sometimes we hear Members opposite complain about nothing being done in their constituencies;

discrimination and so on, but I will just read a few of the areas in which we have proceeded to install new pipelines. I will read from different constituencies:

- 800 metres of 200 mm pipeline from the upper Ariapita boosters A and B to provide a more adequate supply of water to customers on Ariapita Road;
- 300 metres of 100 mm PVC pipeline at Ajium Baksh Trace off Malabar Road;
- 631 metres of pipeline from Mausica Road South to Mausica Road;
- 185 metres of pipeline in Cuthbert Circular;
- 600 metres of pipeline from Calcutta No. 1 to Dairy Road, McBean, Couva;
- 2,000 metres of pipeline from Caparo Valley Road to Flanagin Town, to Mamoral Junction;
- 1,200 metres of pipeline from Naparima Mayaro Road to Eccles Road;
- 2,250 metres of pipeline along Berridge Trace, Fyzabad;
- 150 metres of pipeline along Boodoo Street, Siparia;
- 4,200 metres of pipeline from Dow Village Booster Station to Basta Hall Tank;
- 400 metres along Monteil Street, Fyzabad;
- 297 metres along Bernard Street, Penal;
- 376 metres along Lazzari Road, Poole Village, Rio Claro;
- 250 metres along La Fortune Trace, Bois Jean Jean, Moruga;
- 691 metres along Villabrera Street, Siparia.

I have just identified a few. It is a long list that I have here that I cannot read out to the entire population. But we do keep records and within the records you will find the evidence that will contradict all the accusations that they so joyously tend to make.

One of the things that we are proposing to do in this fiscal year—very interesting—is the adoption of the private sewer systems. For the first time we have introduced a line item in the budget. As you would recall, over the last

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several years we do get a number of complaints from our citizens who live in private developments where the developers may have abandoned the sewer treatment plants. So a number of these citizens find themselves in an extremely difficult situation. Nobody has responsibility for, and nobody is taking responsibility for the maintenance of these sewer treatment plants.

As a consequence of that—and the consequences are, indeed, dire, because citizens find themselves with sewage backing up in the pipelines because it is not being properly treated and exiting along the roadway in some cases; in some cases even finding its way into citizens' yards. There are a number of communities all over the country. There are over 200 private developments with problems. Not all of them would have problems like these.

What we have decided to do, the Government took a decision some time ago to take responsibility for that and that is a responsibility the Government is willing to accept, not because we are primarily responsible, you know, but because the character of this Government has always been a character that whenever you see your citizens in need, this is a government that always demonstrated its caring for its people. [*Desk thumping*] We could very easily say that is not our responsibility, you know, and ask them to go to court, and ask them to deal with the developers. But in circumstances where your citizens are made extremely uncomfortable, we are taking a proactive measure to make sure that our citizens are looked after.

So we intend to embark on a programme of treating with these private sewer systems, taking responsibility for them; bringing in the expertise of our sewerage division to bear on the repair and maintenance of these lines. They are quite expensive, you know; this is not an inexpensive undertaking; it is an extremely expensive undertaking but it is an undertaking that the Government sees it necessary and a responsibility which we propose to accept.

In terms of electricity, we are a fast developing country and important in any development programme is to ensure that you have an adequate supply of power, so that power generation becomes critical to the national development of Trinidad and Tobago, especially in light of some of the industrial activity that have been proposed and on which we are embarked, in addition to which, the normal commercial and residential development of the country will give you an additional demand for electricity.

So general growth and development; industrial activity, commercial activity and so on, cause us to have to make certain calculations as to what we require in

the future. So although that work has already been done in terms of those assessments, you would be happy to know that we have already proposed—and we are already far along the way in terms of our preparation for the construction of a 720 megawatt power generation plant.

Out of that, 240 megawatts will be reserved for the Alutrint Smelter and 480 megawatts will be fed into the national grid, which would make a significant mega-wattage of power available to our citizens. Now we expect the first power to be delivered by March 2010. That is on the basis of the schedule that we now have. But you would understand that there are a number of approvals that are required and so it is not always easy to predict exactly when you are going to commence. But even so, we have been doing a lot of our work in preparation for the delivery of our first power.

In addition to that power generation facility, in Tobago right now we are in the process of constructing a 64 megawatt plant at Cove Industrial Estate and we expect to get at least 48 megawatts of power by October 2009, which is not so far away. What that does, we have a number of advantages in there. First, Tobago will have its own source of power located within the island of Tobago [*Desk thumping*] and that is a tremendous bonus for Tobago and it is at increased capacity. So it also means that whatever industrial activity is contemplated in Tobago and Tobago, will be taken care of by the construction of the 64 megawatt plant. It also means that the power that now leaves Trinidad to go to Tobago, we have the opportunity to have that power fed into our grid in Trinidad, so that power becomes available to Trinidad.

So those are two major advantages again that reflect that this Government has, in fact, been very careful and very thoughtful in terms of how we approach our development, both in the water sector and in the electricity sector. So even as we go along with the construction of our generation facilities, we understand that a lot of time has to go into the transmission system, because when you have power being generated at one point you have to move the power about the country and it takes a lot more time to install your transmission infrastructure than it would take to develop your actual power generation plant.

So over the last two years we have been very busy with the development of our transmission system. I want to outline for you some of the things that we have been doing in terms of making sure that the day the power generation plant is ready to be commissioned, we already would have installed our transmission system, so that the power is ready to be distributed throughout the country the day the power begins to be generated.

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We have already so far undertaken the installation of the Bamboo to East Dry River transmission tower lines. That is 75 per cent complete. That will bring great relief to the residents—the load growth in Port of Spain. The Bamboo to Mount Hope, 132kv, from Barataria to St. Augustine, that is completed; San Rafael to Wallerfield is 50 per cent completed. That is important because it would impact directly on our eTeck Park as well as the Wallerfield substation. The Debe to Union, 200kv; Debe to Reform; Debe to Penal, all three of those are transmission tower lines. They are in the early stages, only 5 and 10 per cent completed, but we do have the time.

But you would notice for the first time in our history we are moving power at a kilo voltage of 220 and that is when you are moving a lot of power over long distances. I think the technical arguments are that you save a lot of your power when you move it at that particular kilo voltage. So what we are witnessing again, it is an attitude that reflects a comprehensive programme as we move forward, taking into account all that we need to do to ensure that our citizens have the kind of resources and access to utilities that they must have.

We have spoken already on what we have done in street lighting. We have revolutionized this country. [*Desk thumping*] This country is a different country from what it was some years ago and the impact that street lighting and lights have brought to this country is undeniable and irrefutable and we are extremely proud of that.

Just before I go, one last thing I want to talk about is NSDP, which was a particular programme that spoke to the compassion of the Government and the population needs to understand when and how that programme was born. It was born after a series of walkabouts that the Prime Minister undertook in the last government, where a number of our citizens—it was easily recognized that they were without electricity and water. It is out of the need of these citizens—and you have to understand how T&TEC operates. Under law, T&TEC operates on the basis of economic factors. T&TEC would have to make an assessment of their capacity to recover their investment before they move into an area to intervene to provide electricity. So it is, in many cases, uneconomical for T&TEC to install electricity poles and wires and so on.

So the Government took a decision that we will cover the cost of the infrastructure and bring electricity into some of our poorer communities. Again, it is the compassion of the Government that is being once more underlined in a case like this. And even as we went into these areas and brought electricity and water,

we recognize that some of our citizens were too poor to be able to pay for the wiring of their homes, so we expanded the programme and we have been able to provide assistance to our citizens to get the electricity, not only to their street but also into their homes. [*Desk thumping*] That is something phenomenal and it tells you something about the heart of the Government. We have done so with water, electricity and with a number of other areas.

**2.15 p.m.**

I go back to where I started. One has to look at the cumulative effect and total impact of the Government's measures that we have put in place over the last several years. Once you do that, you must recognize and come to the inescapable conclusion, that this is a Government that sincerely cares about its citizens.

Thank you. [*Desk thumping*]

**The Minister of Sport and Youth Affairs (Hon. Gary Hunt):** Mr. Speaker, thank you for the opportunity to contribute to the debate on the budget of this term of governance of the People's National Movement. First I will like to take this opportunity to congratulate the hon. Minister of Finance for her sterling delivery of what can be described as a brilliant budget. [*Desk thumping*] I will also like to take this opportunity to congratulate my other colleagues for their sterling contributions that they have also made to this budget debate.

Before I get into the meat of my contribution, I would like to deal with a few items that were expounded on by the Member for Chaguanas West who has just returned. The Member for Chaguanas West made a comment that nobody is the Minister of Sport and Youth Affairs. I would like to take this time to expound from the Greek writer, Homer, the story of Polyphemus. [*Desk thumping*] Polyphemus, a mythical semi-human monster of huge proportions with a single eye in the centre of his forehead is usually described as a one-eyed giant.

Polyphemus lived on an island in a cave eating raw flesh of any kind, including human beings. He also kept goats and sheep. Odysseus, the Greek hero and 11 of his crew members—incidentally the size of a football team. Odysseus and his crew of 11 on their way home from the Trojan War landed on the island of Cyclops. Odysseus and his men came across the cave of Polyphemus and wandered therein. That evening Polyphemus herded his flock of sheep and goat into his cave and rolled a huge boulder across the entrance, not knowing that the Greeks were inside. On seeing the one-eyed giant, Odysseus and his men gasped with disbelief giving away their hiding places. Polyphemus rushed forward; killed two of the men and devoured them both for dinner.

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Odysseus thought to himself, "How do I escape from this monster?" Next morning Polyphemus caught two more of Odysseus' men and ate them brutally for breakfast. Polyphemus then left the cave leaving the Greeks inside ready for his next meal. Odysseus set his men to work on shaping a stout pole which they did and then hiding it ready for that evening. As dusk grew close Polyphemus returned. He caught two more Greeks; killed them and ate them raw. After consuming both men he spoke to Odysseus asking, "What is your name?" Odysseus' reply was "Nobody." That night Polyphemus fell fast asleep. Odysseus and four of his men brought out the pole which they had sharpened and with one great thrust plunged the point into Polyphemus' eye, pushing it deep to ensure that they made him totally blind.

The agonizing pain made Polyphemus scream out so loudly, that it brought the neighbouring Cyclops, cronies of the Member for Chaguanas West to see what was wrong. "Who is hurting you?" asked the other Cyclops. Polyphemus screamed, "Nobody is hurting is me! Nobody is hurting me!" [*Desk thumping*] Thinking that his screams were the punishment from the gods the other Cyclops went away.

At daybreak Polyphemus rolled a great boulder from the mouth of the cave to let out his flock, but being totally blind, Odysseus and his men escaped from the cave. They quickly ran to their ship taking with them the flock. Odysseus and his men rejoiced in their freedom and at last they had escaped Polyphemus.

You see Member for Chaguanas West, as long as I am the Minister of Sport and Youth Affairs in this Government, my name is Nobody. [*Desk thumping and laughter*] On behalf of the innocent and the oppressed, of the many players, coaches, administrators and others that you have devoured, Member for Chaguanas West, my name is Nobody.

It is passing strange that the Member for Chaguanas West is championing the cause of Mr. Lincoln Phillips. Mr. Phillips was contracted by the Trinidad and Tobago Football Federation (TTFF) to be the technical director of the national football team. Mr. Phillips was abandoned by the Member for Chaguanas West and the TTFF. It was the Sport Company of Trinidad and Tobago that came to the rescue of Mr. Phillips. As a consequence of this action by the Member for Chaguanas West, the Sport Company of Trinidad and Tobago agreed to meet the contractual arrangements to Mr. Phillips and this commitment still obtains today.

Mr. Phillips was subsequently removed by the Member for Chaguanas West as technical director of the national football team to a low key position. The



Member for Chaguanas West has to renew the contract of Mr. Lincoln ‘Tiger’ Phillips. To put forward to this House, that the Ministry of Sport and Youth Affairs is withholding emoluments from Mr. Phillips is not true, it is not me, it is you. So please, “doh try dat”.

Further, I am informed that in 2006, this same Mr. Phillips was left outside the stadium in Germany begging for a ticket to try to get in to see the match. Imagine that. Is this the same Member for Chaguanas West who is championing the cause for the abandoned Mr. Phillips? False lie, I say, Polyphemus. [*Laughter*]

The Member for Chaguanas West also tried to paint me with a broad brush of corruption. I want to say to him, I am not of your ilk. I am not cut from the cloth that you are cut from. Foul, foul, foul.

The Member for Chaguanas West in a previous sitting highlighted a few instances of projects where there may be challenges. Let me assure this honourable House that an audit process is on the way and any culpability associated with any errant consultants or contractors because of impropriety, action would be taken of appropriately. Let me assure this honourable House that the challenges on a few, I stress a few projects of the Ministry of Sport and Youth Affairs are symptomatic of a larger problem faced by the Government in the execution of projects [*Desk thumping*] in particular, under the design/tender methodology, as opposed to the design/build methodology. [*Desk thumping*]

**Mr. Manning:** That is the issue.

**Hon. G. Hunt:** I will spend no more time on the arrant nonsense put forward by the Member for Chaguanas West in his contribution which was laced with the ramblings of a lunatic, lacking coherency. By the way—

**Mr. Speaker:** You can take that outside. You cannot call the Member a lunatic.

**Hon. G. Hunt:** Mr. Speaker, I apologize and I withdraw. However, I must qualify. I was commenting on the delivery of his contribution. I was not associating anything with the Member for Chaguanas West.

I would like to invite the youths of this nation to do a Google search on the name Austin Jack Warner and see what comes up. Controversy after controversy after bacchanal. You will have to walk with a wheelbarrow to carry that material to bring it to Parliament, which I will not.

I will now proceed to the meat of my contribution. May I invite the Members opposite to fasten their seat belt; sit back; relax enjoy the flight towards a

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developed nation on or before 2020. Member for Chaguanas West, be careful not to get your knickers in a twist. [*Desk thumping*] Listen carefully to the results of hard work, diligence from a visionary government. I will lay out strategies, accomplishments and projections for fiscal 2009.

We have heard from the hon. Minister of Finance that this budget is appropriately termed, “Shaping Our Future Together” and speaks to the importance of such issues as collaborative approaches between investor and facilitator; policy intervention and systems direction. This is not by chance. It is a budget of a statement of hope for all sectors of this national community. It narrates to a basic orientation of the new fiscal year and promotes the view that we can build a secure nation on the pillars that we have enunciated in the Vision 2020 platform.

In my capacity as Minister and as a Member of this visionary Government that instinctively puts the development and security needs of the citizenry first, the Ministry of Sport and Youth Affairs in 2008, has managed to determine where we are in the development pillar for sport and youth. The Ministry has assessed where we want to be and has developed a blueprint of that journey which will take us right into developed nation status by 2020. The concept of planning is central to the success of any process particularly when it involves human development. Human systems in particular can be quite challenging and is a constantly a changing environment even when all the variables have been considered. This notwithstanding and despite the unpredictability of human behaviour, I must say that fiscal 2008 has been truly a fantastic year for Trinidad and Tobago in the area of sport and youth development.

I am pleased to present the outcome of my stewardship in which there have been many accomplishments, key of which is a blueprint that has changed the landscape of which the physical recreation and sport product is being delivered and significant advancement in the process of empowering our youth through implementation of key strategies outlined in the National Youth Policy.

The Member for Oropouche West is not here today. In her presentation she said that there was no national youth policy. I want to show her a copy of the National Youth Policy—[*Minister lifts copy of National Youth Policy*—]which was established since 2004. The Member for Oropouche West asked me where she can access a copy of this policy. I guided her to the Ministry of Sport and Youth Affairs beta site which is currently under construction. [*Interruption*] Before she spoke.

It seems that she could not find the link on the website. I cannot help it if the Member for Oropouche West is not computer literate. Probably she needs lessons from the Member for Couva North on the intricacies of computer use and the Internet.

The National Youth Policy and all existing policies of the Ministry of Sport and Youth Affairs can be viewed on the Ministry's website that is currently under development. The beta site is live at [www.msya.gov.tt/home](http://www.msya.gov.tt/home). For the benefit of the Member for Oropouche West, when you access the progressive and dynamic site which she admitted is progressive and dynamic, select the Menu item Youth Affairs, then Youth Policy, scroll to the bottom of the page and click on the highlighted word "Here" where the user would be able to access a pdf version of the policy. There she just got a quick lesson from what a first standard student under a PNM education can do easily.

To the Member for Chaguanas West who is also misinformed in general about sport in this country, he does not know that we have a national sport policy. For his edification, I will show him the sport policy. Here it is. [*Minister lifts copy of the policy*] This was established since October 2002. For his edification, I will give him a little lesson on how to get it. You can also go to the Beta website. I do not know if he understands what Beta means. I do not know if he is computer literate. You know that he is from the Jurassic Age. I do not want to ascertain anything of him. Here is a little lesson for the Member for Chaguanas West.

When you log on to [msya.gov.tt/home](http://msya.gov.tt/home) access menu item, physical education and sport; select National Sport Policy; scroll to the bottom of the page and select the word "Here". Again you will be able to access a pdf version of the National Sport Policy.

Often times the Member will comment in many fora apart from this esteemed House that there is no national sport policy. How wrong and ill-informed is he and the rest of his colleagues on the other side. It is in the pursuit of achieving Vision 2020 that these two very progressive and forward thinking policies are formulated. Trinidad and Tobago is the only country in the Caribbean and possibly in this hemisphere with both a national sport and national youth policy. [*Desk thumping*].

The National Sport Policy speaks to total participation in sport for all, as well as high performance sport or elitism and the National Youth Policy seeks to empower and develop the young people of this nation.

I want to demonstrate that the Government is achieving delivery of both our national sport and youth policies. Prior to the introduction of these documents, never before in the history of our country have we been guided to anything other

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than the whims and fancies of individuals seeking partisan interests in the development and promotion of sport. We are aware that in the absence of a stated policy direction, there can only be chaos. We have certainly begun to see the benefits of efforts in this area as achieved by the pursuit of healthy lifestyles through physical recreation activities by the general public and greater recognition of Trinidad and Tobago on the international sporting map through the sterling efforts of our high performance athletes.

**2.30 p.m.**

In this context, permit me to elaborate on the achievements of my Ministry over the past year. Fiscal 2008 was a year of special achievement for Trinidad and Tobago in sport and youth development. Through our Olympic success and the imminent establishment of the National Youth Council of Trinidad and Tobago, this country stands as a nation proud of the hard work, dedication and impressive achievements of our young people. Most noteworthy of mention is the recent double silver medal performance of Mr. Richard Thompson at the 2008 Beijing Olympics. Mr. Thompson did this country proud by running his 100 metres sprint in a best time of 9.89 seconds.

Later, as part of the 4x100 metres relay team, Richard Thompson, along with Emmanuel Callender, Marc Burns, Keston Bledman, Aaron Armstrong and also Darrel Brown, placed second and established a national record 38 seconds flat, placing Trinidad and Tobago on the medal podium once again.

[*Holds up newspaper article*] Mr. Speaker, I have to show this: the embodiment of national sport and the national youth policy. Nurturing a caring society. Richard Thompson “Gift of Strength”.

“TEDDY LOVE: Double Olympic silver medallist Richard Thompson parted with his medals temporarily as he poses with six-year-old cancer patient, Shakira Robinson of the Just Because Foundation at the Naparima Bowl, San Fernando yesterday...”

*Trinidad Express*, front page, Thursday, September 11, 2008.

Mr. Richard Thompson and all the rest of our Olympic team are exemplars in their own right. These performances were a source of pride and encouragement for young people across the country. The population was bubbling with a sense of patriotism and nationalism that comes with the unifying element of sport.

Guided by the direction enunciated in the National Sport Policy, the Ministry advanced a policy implementation process. This was achieved by developing a number of key supporting policy documents and revisiting and strengthening

existing policy instruments consistent with the changing regulatory and technological environment. More specifically, we are able to streamline arrangements for the conduct of our business process. We held extensive consultation with our key stakeholders, many of whom worked voluntarily in the various administrative arms of sport development to improve the sport product.

One of the key objectives of the National Sport Policy is the development of sport as a business. Pursuing this role in the context of the rental of our sport plant was not without its challenges, much of which was played out through the media. But we at the Ministry remain strengthened in our resolve to deliver an improved product range that can stand scrutiny, be measured by the highest standards and serve the interest of every citizen of this beloved nation.

In keeping with the strategy implementation plan for the roll-out of Vision 2020 mandate, the Ministry has outlined a new and exciting vision for sport in order to maximize the considerable benefits available. The vision identifies sport as a fundamental component of national development, especially at the youth level.

Apart from its positive impact on the health and well-being of our citizens, sport also builds self-esteem while promoting the virtues of teamwork and self-discipline. In addition, our vision recognizes the tremendous commercial gains that can be acquired and we are seeking to develop sport as a sustainable industry.

Given this country's strategic geographical location and our numerous sporting facilities, there is considerable scope for new initiatives in sport tourism and similar business ventures. The Government is also aware of the many sources of revenue now available to our national sporting organizations through lucrative sponsorship deals and television rights.

Unlike the previous UNC regime, it is our intention to work closely with national sporting organizations to ensure that the benefits of these commercial arrangements are used for the development of sport and not the fame and fortune of any single person or group. In order to achieve this, I make reference to the transitory role of the Ministry from policy implementer to policy formulator, a strategy occasioned by the implementation process of our national policy instruments.

We will continue to build close collaborative relationships with our key stakeholders while upholding the core values of the Government for accountability, transparency and integrity at all times. We are prepared to ignore attempts at petty squabbling and ego tripping and focus on working together for the good of the country. Perhaps the best example of this spirit of collaboration is our recent success in medalling at the Olympic Games in Beijing last month.

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Mr. Speaker, working together with the TTOC and other representatives from national sporting organizations, the Ministry of Sport and Youth Affairs developed an innovative policy for assisting our athletes in their preparation for the Olympic Games. The disbursement of grants for our Olympic athletes, to facilitate their nutritional, transportational, training and psychological needs in preparation for the Olympic Games 2008 has paid off. This policy was so successful that it produced a most outstanding team in our Olympic history to date.

In our dealings with these organizations, there was always mutual respect and civility. Crude insults and distasteful remarks were never part of our collaboration and there was never a case of any one individual trying to dictate what should or should not be done.

Under the strategic plan, a one-year operational plan was designed with deliverables for implementation in 2008 to incrementally achieve the strategic objectives, I am pleased to announce the results of our efforts in this direction.

Draft guidelines on the disbursement of funds for youth and sport activities outline the process, conditions and requirements under which grant funds would be considered for disbursement. This is a comprehensive policy which seeks to put structure and order to a process. This policy replaces subjectivity with objectivity and above all is very stringent with accountability from NSOs.

Listen carefully, Member for Chaguanas West! Policy on the use of the Ministry's sport and youth facilities outlines conditions for priority use, improvements to the operational efficiency and revenue generation potential-fee structure. We also have a draft policy for a system of recognition and rewards for outstanding sport performances, which outlines a system to recognize outstanding sport performances based on the geographic regions in which Trinidad and Tobago is required to compete.

The Ministry is in the process of reengineering its operating systems and revisiting its public image and service through a rebranding process. A consultant has been identified and activities have commenced towards the process.

The development of the Ministry's website is 93 per cent complete and a beta version can be viewed, [msya.gov.tt/home](http://msya.gov.tt/home). Other planned activities in progress include:

- (1) Creation of a Ministry-wide information system;
- (2) Proposed re-launch of the Ministry's website later this year;
- (3) Development of an intranet;

- (4) Establishment of a change management team;
- (5) Preparation of terms of reference for the development of a master plan for the utilization of sport and youth facilities;
- (6) Determination and procurement of specialized software applications to improve the facility booking and maintenance systems;
- (7) Construction of sport and youth facilities.

These are all part of the package that will enable us to meet our strategic goals for sport for all and high-performance sport.

I am pleased to announce that our legislative planning process this year has led to the drafting of a policy document for the establishment of a sport commission of Trinidad and Tobago. This document has been circulated and the Ministry is awaiting stakeholder comments. In addition, plans are under way to update the Boxing Control Act, the legislation that regulates professional boxing in Trinidad and Tobago. This is long overdue as the Act which dates back to 1932 was last updated in 1988 and has not kept up with the recent worldwide trends in the administration of professional boxing.

As a member of the World Anti-Doping Agency and a signatory to the UNESCO International Convention against Doping in Sport, Trinidad and Tobago is obliged to set up a national anti-doping organization and create its own anti-doping policy and legislation. I am to announce that a comprehensive anti-doping policy has been brought to the Cabinet that establishes rules for the prevention of sport doping that are in accordance with the World Doping Code.

Based on the National Sport Policy of Trinidad and Tobago, the key responsibilities of the Ministry of Sport and Youth Affairs is that of formulating, monitoring and evaluating policies related to sport and physical recreation in 2008. The Ministry placed emphasis on developing supporting policies for sport and the delivery of community-based programmes. As we pursue the implementation of the national sport policy, which mantra is “To enrich our lives through total participation, quality training and excellence in sport”, 2008 saw the expansion and heightening of the delivery of the Ministry's sport programmes to reach a wider geographical range.

In this regard, the sport company was instrumental in attracting the attention of hundreds of idle and otherwise unoccupied young citizens in urban and rural communities and facilitating their participation in sport-related activities. The company organized community sport programmes and sent trained coaches into a

number of previously unserved areas to develop the sport of small goal football, wind ball cricket, netball, hockey and basketball to participants.

You see, Mr. Speaker, these initiatives were consistent with the sport for all concepts enunciated in the national sport policy. It generated considerable interest and increased the participant base, instilling camaraderie, discipline, sacrifice, commitment and a no-time-to-idle approach to the programme. This is an example of how this Government builds strong, healthy communities and contributes to the collective well-being of society. In terms of performance, we have taken the development of sport to another level with a prevalence of community sport activities throughout the nation.

Trinidad and Tobago is a signatory to the 1994 Brighton Declaration on Women and Sport. To this end the Ministry hosted the Fourth Annual Women and Girls in Sport. There were 1,500 participants competing in volley ball, basket ball, tennis, hockey, aerobics and football. Twenty women administrators and outstanding sporting athletes who have shaped the local sport sector in the field of tennis, boxing, cricket and netball were honoured at the festival; approximately 120 participants in five sporting disciplines, the Step Programme, and 1,500 participants in 40 communities throughout Trinidad and Tobago.

Through the sport company and through our own efforts, we have enabled teams, leagues, clubs, administrators and athletes to pursue their dreams and plans to build and develop sport to enhance their performance, to attract new entrants to sport and physical recreation; in short, to improve their holistic well-being and to develop the concept of sport participation as a regular stable regime on the weekly calendar of every citizen. We are indeed on a roll, as we seek to make our programmes available to every community throughout the nation.

It is initiatives like these that inspire to bring relevance to the Ministry's mission to "coordinate and facilitate the development services with special emphasis on the enhancement of youth and sport for recreation and industry"; indeed, a splendid example of how we are shaping our future together.

I want to go a bit into the role of the sport company, which was set up with a mandate to develop programmes for ten sporting disciplines. In 2008, this figure was increased to 14, with the addition of shooting, sailing, tennis and amateur golf. The establishment of the company also enabled the Ministry to accelerate project mobilization efforts in the development of community, regional, and national sport facilities apart from the mandate to develop programmes for 14 sporting disciplines. The sport company assists the Ministry in project management and development and in the upgrade of recreation and sport facilities.



Mr. Speaker, the 14 major sports receiving assistance through the sport company are currently enjoying an unprecedented period of funding. However, It is my hope that the national sport organizations will utilize this funding smartly, effectively and efficiently in order to ensure the sustainability of the organization and its sport.

To date, the achievements of the sport company include:

- (1) Provision of financial and technical assistance to national sporting organizations, clubs and community leagues of over \$38.2 million in 2008 to support their development programmes—unprecedented indeed;
- (2) Conduct of a vacation sport youth camp in over 70 communities attended by over 12,000 participants, a truly national programme.

**2.45 p.m.**

I want to put that into perspective. The United Kingdom, with a population of over 58—60 million, ran a similar programme and they were able to achieve a participation of 15,000. Trinidad and Tobago, with a population of 1.3 million, was able to achieve a participation of 12,000; over one million positive hours expended by the youth of this nation.

I want to read an email as a testament. When you work so hard and receive this sort of correspondence, it is a testimony to the good work that the Government is doing. The email goes like this:

“My name is Aileen Williams...My son Zachary Williams just completed the sports camp at Eddie Hart grounds in the field of cricket...First let me say that I was a bit skeptical not knowing what he was getting into, it being free and all. But then as he got into it I realised that it was really a good programme with the objective being to get the kids off the streets for that period of time. I can say that it worked but what I am really writing to let you all know is that in the three short weeks the children were there, a bond was formed between the coaches and the children. The coaches...both of which deserve a medal for what they have done for these children. As a single parent I can tell you first hand that my son has changed as a result of this as well as the other children. The discipline at this camp was second to none these children were actually looking forward to getting up every morning and working hard to put into practice what they learned everyday.”

Mr. Speaker, the Member for Chaguanas West, in a previous sitting, tried to criticize and denigrate this programme. I hope he is listening carefully.

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The third achievement from the Sport Company is:

- (3) conductor of the community sports programmes in 90 communities throughout the country in the disciplines of basketball, small goal football, wind ball cricket, netball and hockey, at an estimated cost of \$5.5 million; and
- (4) provision of basic motor skills training from experienced coaches of hundreds of active young people and primary school students from urban and rural communities.

I have spreadsheet before me detailing all the grants of NSOs, et cetera. From the Ministry of Sport and youth Affairs, there is over 42 national sporting organizations to the tune of \$25.495 million. Grants to youth NGOs, we worked with eight organizations: the Tobago Youth Council; the Trinidad Youth Council; President's Award of Trinidad and Tobago; YWCA; YMCA; Girl Guides and Scouts Association; and the Heroes Foundation. The total grants to these organizations, \$916,000.

I also have a spreadsheet from the Sport Company. They worked with 16 organizations spanning 14 sporting disciplines. At the top of the list is the Trinidad and Tobago Football Federation. In 2007, \$8,353,735; and 2008, \$3,457,652. The Member for Chaguanas West does not want to account to the people of Trinidad and Tobago. My name is nobody.

Mr. Speaker, I now turn my attention to the youth portfolio. The hon. Member for Oropouche West appeared out of her depth in her remarks made in a previous sitting nights before in her knowledge of youth development, youth work and the Government's budget for funding youth programmes. She simply does not know what she is speaking about. Our youths are our greatest asset. The National Youth Policy, approved since 2004, along with an accompanying three-year strategic implementation plan, identifies 15 courses of action to be implemented towards achieving the goals and objectives of empowering young persons, creating an enabling environment and supporting institutions and systems which strengthen and sustain youth development.

Before I proceed, youth as a concept or period in one's life has been variously defined by international groupings all over the world. Our youth policy is not 15—29, as the Member for Oropouche West was expounding. Our youth policy defines a youth in Trinidad and Tobago as: A person between the ages of 12 and 29, who is becoming independent of parents and learning to master the biological, psychological, political, economic and social changes associated with this period of transition.

In the context of the Ministry's mandate, the above definition is a guide by which the Ministry of Sport and Youth Affairs treats with this sub-group of the population. The enabling environment of a youth in 2008 was shaped by the ability of youth-serving, youth-led, private and public sector agencies to respond to the daily challenges of this sub-group of the population.

We have recognized that a lot of the characteristics of youth are seldom static. In fact, they are like moonbeam, shifting in the shadow of the sun. Our experience in treating with youth and youth issues has taught us that one of the best principles to adopt is collaboration. The Ministry of Sport and Youth Affairs has increasingly fostered a collaborative and cooperative approach to youth development issues that lend themselves to a nexus of ideas that run along the development continuum to project completion.

Today, may I make my contribution on the collaborative and cooperative efforts of the Ministry of Sports and Youth Affairs, in treating with the affairs of youth. I ask you to be receptive to the creature that is youth. It seeks its existence in this constantly changing social environment.

Mr. Speaker, the highlight of this year's youth activities was the celebration of National Youth Month. When I look at this side of the House, our side, what comes to my mind is youth month. When I look at the other side, the movie Jurassic Park comes to mind. I cannot help it.

In July, scores of young people came out in their numbers to participate in several activities, geared at showcasing their positive attributes and those of their peers. National Youth Month was a grand celebration of the central theme: Achieving the Dream. The emphasis was on young people having dreams and recognizing those dreams in areas that address their holistic development. The hon. Prime Minister was an integral part in making this dream a reality. He had first-hand experience of the level of intelligence of some of the country's budding young politicians, entrepreneurs and activists. He recognizes that this country's path to developed nation status is safe and secure in their hands.

The celebration of National Youth Month reflects the Government's continued commitment to the development of the young people of Trinidad and Tobago. We recognize that it is important that young people have dreams. Government's continued focus on providing for and supporting the dreams of our nation's youth, as evidenced by the celebrations of this month and its success, has been the dreams of our youth. The dreams of our youth were pursued in 10 areas, which address the holistic development of our young people. They were:

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business; participation; empowerment; leisure; faith; expressions; sport; relationships; health and technology. These dreams manifested themselves in 41 projects, Member for Chaguanas West, listen carefully, throughout the nation. Some of these projects included a career fair; round table discussion; and the premier project: Elect a Youth. What a fantastic project that was; the publication of youth news in a magazine; retro games; youth rally; youth quiz; competitive sport; football Sundays; faith days; and a skit depicting the theme: Badness out ah Style. The Research and Planning Unit of the Ministry of Sport and Youth Affairs estimates that over—I want to say this loudly—210,000 young persons participated in this month's activities. That represents approximately 50 per cent of the youth population in this country, at its first onset.

The Member for Oropouche East asked about output and outcome. Listen to outcome. If you have to extrapolate the budgeted cost of National Youth Month to the number of participants, it works down to \$33 per person who participated in this project. Is that value for money?

We at the Ministry plan to sustain these activities, since many young participants have expressed considerable interest in being part of the Ministry's future projects and activities. We have also proposed that young persons who participate in the National Youth Assembly become youth ambassadors within their respective communities.

I do not have much time, but I would like to move to my projections for 2009, quickly. As we embark on another year of planning, our strategic initiatives, product development and facilitation of service to the national community, in furtherance of the sport and youth products, our focus would be placed on the following:

1. talent identification, development and creating the critical mass for high performance in sport, through the use of appropriate technologies; and
2. adopting a more sustainable approach to the development and nurturing of a productive, well-informed youth resource, through our youth programmes, to build a developed nation.

A part of the investment in 2009 by the Ministry of Sport and Youth Affairs, in shaping our future together, key activities will include:

1. Hosting of the Caribbean Games in 2009.
2. Roll out and support of the National Youth Council of Trinidad and Tobago.

3. Restructuring of youth delivery system to better serve young people.
4. Efforts to promote health and wellness through physical education.
5. Conduct of a national youth survey to determine the needs of young people in an effort to provide a more aligned service delivery for the target audience.
6. Re-engineering of the sport and youth programmes.
7. Advancement of the arrangements and the conduct of a comprehensive assessment of the Ministry's sport and youth facilities, which will allow for the structured approach of the management and development of facilities.

I have so many more, but I think I would run out of time.

The outcomes of these initiatives; we have several:

1. A health and physical education curriculum for all educational levels in Trinidad and Tobago, including private educational institutions.
2. Standards for coaches by category of a sport based on curricula.
3. A health and physical education curricula in the curricula of teachers' training institutions; and
4. A framework to encourage schools at the primary and secondary levels to promote sport and recreational opportunities during school hours and facilitate links with community sporting organizations that can provide out of school hours participation.

Mr. Speaker, I know that the other side is hurting, especially the Member for Chaguanas West. For what I have just outlined, it says the following to them, perpetual opposition. There is hope for them. If they care anything about this great land of ours, we can shape our future together.

Mr. Speaker, I thank you.

**The Minister of State in the Ministry of National Security (Hon. Donna Cox):** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I am pleased to participate in this debate on a Bill to provide for the Service of Trinidad and Tobago for the financial year ended September 30, 2009.

Mr. Speaker, before I begin, I wish to congratulate my colleague, the hon. Minister of Finance, for presenting her first budget in the Parliament. It was an

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excellent presentation. The initiatives outlined in the budget showed clearly that people remain the focus of this Government's plans.

When the hon. Minister of Finance presented her budget, she indicated that the theme of this year's budget is: *Shaping our Future Together, Vision 2020*. This theme gives a clear picture that any moves forward for Trinidad and Tobago, over the next fiscal year, involves both Government and people.

Vision 2020 speaks about a quality of life for all our citizens, consistent with developed nation status, on or before 2020 and it outlines five developmental pillars. The developmental pillar for which the Ministry of National Security is responsible is governing effectively. One of the four components which comprise that pillar is national security and public safety.

**3.00 p.m.**

Mr. Speaker, I propose to share with the citizens of this country Government's ongoing initiatives in the divisions under my purview, all of which impact on the lives of people in a very real way.

I also propose to respond to an issue concerning national security which was raised by the Member of Parliament for Chaguanas West during his contribution. The Member of Parliament for Chaguanas West, Mr. Jack Warner, spoke of an incident at the West End Police Station recently.

The model station initiative is designed to improve the quality of services delivered by district stations to the public of Trinidad and Tobago. This programme was pilot tested in five station districts namely West End, Morvant, Arouca, Chaguanas and San Fernando. Mr. Speaker, the ultimate goals of this programme are to increase public confidence in the police and reduce crime.

Mr. Speaker, key to the success of the model station initiative is policing for the people, an approach which underscores the service part of the police service agency's name.

During his contribution last week Friday, the Minister of National Security indicated that the model station initiative is showing signs of success in curbing crimes in all the five districts, but the Member of Parliament for Chaguanas West claimed that he recently had to call the West End Police Station for help for someone, and was told that there were only two officers on duty that night. He also claimed that it took two hours before the lady received help. According to a report from the Trinidad and Tobago Police Service, this is not true which was also stated by the Member of Parliament for Lopinot/Bon Air West. I would like

to read the full report at this time which was received by the Trinidad and Tobago Police Service and I quote:

“On Tuesday 23rd September 2008 around 9:55 pm, a female adult who is a resident of Diego Martin arrived at West End Police Station and made a report that threats were made to her by her ex-husband via telephone. This report was investigated by a Corporal and two Constables.”

I want to repeat that.

“This report was investigated by a Corporal and two Constables.”

So, we are talking about three persons. [*Desk thumping*] We heard from the Member for Chaguanas West that there were only two policemen on duty that night. So, something is wrong somewhere.

“They left the station within five minutes of the report being made accompanied by the female adult and went in search of the person against whom the allegation was made. He was not located. His mother was interviewed at her home and based on information that the officers received from her, they made further checks in the district to locate him without success.

It is not true that only two officers were on duty at West End Police Station at 9:30 p.m. on Tuesday 23rd September 2008. There were sixteen (16) Police Officers on duty at West End that night including two (2) Sergeants, one (1) Corporal, one (1) Ag. Corporal and fourteen (14) Constables. MP Jack Warner did call West End Police Station around the time that the report was made by the female adult. He had a conversation with Corporal St. Aude. He identified the female adult as one of his employees at Centre of Excellence. It was not true that it took two hours for the female adult to receive attention from the West End Police Station. The officers responded to her report within five minutes of the time that the report was made.”

**Hon. Members:** Polygraph!

**Mr. Warner:** Thank you, Member for Laventille/East Morvant. Mr. Speaker, I want to go on record and state that I called Corporal St. Aude and I spoke with him at 9.25 p.m. on September 23, 2008. He told me that there were only two persons in the station, he and a constable. I asked him who is in charge and he said Detective Sergeant Sankar. I said where is he and he told me that he was out on enquiries. I asked who is the Superintendent in charge and he said Doreen. I cannot remember her name, but it was a lady. I then said to the corporal this

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cannot be good enough. He said Mr. Warner we are under strength, but I would take a statement from her and see what I could do.

Mr. Speaker, it took two hours before the lady was taken care of. More importantly, after two hours she was then told that she should not go back home, because her life might be at risk. She slept at a friend with her children and they issued a warrant for her ex-husband who threatened to kill her. The case was today and the warrant that was taken out for this man who threatened to kill her and whom he said he knew has not been served. Today, the case was adjourned and the lady is sleeping by a friend with her children. We could come here and talk, but that is okay.

**Hon. D. Cox:** Mr. Speaker, from the Trinidad and Police Service report it stated that within five minutes the officers went with the lady and they also interviewed his mother. Member of Parliament for Chaguanas West, clearly, you were misled.

I would now move to the Trinidad and Tobago Prison Service. In fiscal 2007/2008, the prison service retained the services of a consultant to complete a pilot project to monitor the rates of re-offending within the prison service.

The prison service has since developed and implemented a strategy, which involves a correctional intervention programme, specifically to modify behaviour. This will be done by exposing convicted offenders to a three-phase programme aimed at their moral, social, cognitive, spiritual and cultural/sporting development. This programme is expected to be implemented within the next few months, and a review of the pilot project will be conducted during the final quarter of fiscal 2009.

Mr. Speaker, concerning the parole system, the Parole Introduction Committee's report in fiscal 2007, detailed the requirements for the establishment of a parole system in Trinidad and Tobago. As a result, a consultant has since presented a proposed action plan entitled "Design and Implementation of a Parole System in Trinidad and Tobago". The proposal is presently under review by the Ministry of National Security.

With respect to manpower, during 2008 the prison service was strengthened with the recruitment of 223 Prison Officers I, using a revised training curriculum. This recruitment formed part of the phased increase in the prison service, which was approved in July 2006, when 485 additional positions were created in the prison service. Mr. Speaker, 1,588 positions are to be created on a phased basis over the period 2007—2011.



Additionally, 264 applicants have been processed up to the final interview stage, and are awaiting formalization of the final order of merit list and medical examination for final recruitment into the prison service. A senior administrative officer was also recruited in fiscal 2008 to support the activities of the Penal Reform and Transformation Unit.

Mr. Speaker, in the area of training, a major human resource development project undertaken by the prison service during fiscal 2008 was the conduct of a staff empowerment retreat the aim of which was:

- to educate officers on the prison transformation process and their roles and responsibilities in the process;
- to provide a forum for officers to express their opinions and concerns to administration; and
- to develop an awareness of those factors that affect the health, motivation and overall well being of officers and their families.

Mr. Speaker, 1,490 officers of all ranks participated in this retreat, over a three-day period which was facilitated by the Commissioner of Prisons and his senior executive, who were assisted by a number of professional facilitators and motivational speakers.

Over 700 members of staff were exposed to training locally, regionally and internationally in topics such as financial management, restraint training, HIV/AIDS in the workplace, emergency response and conflict management.

The Trinidad and Tobago Prison Service in collaboration with the Trinidad and Tobago Chapter of the United States and Caribbean Alliance of Criminal and Social Justice Professionals, also hosted a training summit entitled “Stepping up to the next level”. This was to expose officers to international best practices through a series of workshops on key topics relevant to that sector.

With respect to the prison service infrastructure, a proposal for the construction of a prison complex in Caroni has been completed and is under review by the Ministry. This modern prison facility will house a remand facility, a psychiatric unit and a juvenile female facility. In the interim, however, in the interest of the health and well being of its staff, the prison services has expanded and outfitted fitness centres, both at its administration building and prison facilities across the country.

The construction of the Emergency Response Unit (ERU) is under way and this facility will also provide a secure storage area for critical items, including protective gear and equipment.

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With regard to the construction of the Tobago prison, land has been allocated through the Tobago House of Assembly to the ministry for construction of the prison. Proposals have been submitted for the development of that facility. [*Desk thumping*]

Meanwhile, the Youth Training Centre and prison facilities at Carrera, Tobago and Golden Grove are being refurbished with a view to upgrading the prison service infrastructure in keeping with correction facilities internationally.

In terms of the procurement of vehicles and equipment for fiscal year 2008, an audit of the prison service IT system is currently being undertaken with a view to expanding the Division's Local Area Network (LAN) for better interconnectivity and greater access to 21st Century communication options.

The prison service fleet has also been strengthened with the acquisition of a 28-foot sea vessel to transport officers, inmates and cargo. Additionally, 15 vehicles were refurbished and 12 new vehicles were purchased. The new vehicles include five vans, four buses, two Land Cruisers and a truck.

Mr. Speaker, for all its hard work, the Trinidad and Tobago Prison Service has proudly copped the Prime Minister's Innovating for Service Excellence Award for 2008, under the category "Breaking new Ground". [*Desk thumping*] The award was attained for the Prison Service's Behind Prison Walls Project, which is a public education initiative, and part of a wider public education programme launched in June 2006. The project focused on restoring public trust and confidence in the prison service.

With respect to the prison service and disaster preparedness, the prison service is also part of the emergency response structure under the Office of Disaster Preparedness and Management. A working committee has been established to audit the emergency preparedness systems of the prison service, with special emphasis on natural disasters and occupational health and safety concerns. I wish to point out that the support and vision of leadership of the Government has made it possible for a climate of reform and restructuring to take place.

[MADAM DEPUTY SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

With respect to the Trinidad and Tobago Fire Service, over the years, the challenges facing firefighters have become ever more complex. Other than fighting fires, they now deal routinely with a range of emergencies such as road traffic accidents, incidents involving harmful materials, flooding and rescues. They also work closely with the Office of Disaster Preparedness and Management to give assistance in the event of a natural disaster.

Madam Deputy Speaker, the Trinidad and Tobago Fire Service is an important arm of the protective services in this country. As such, it is Government's intention to follow the best practices and standards that apply to fire service departments internationally. Based on the 2005 directive from Cabinet, the ministry immediately initiated a comprehensive and robust countrywide programme to rebuild and strengthen the fire service.

Madam Deputy Speaker, the Ministry of National Security has been focusing considerable attention to ensure that the Trinidad and Tobago Fire Service has the necessary resources to do the job.

The Government through the Ministry of National Security engaged the services of a two-member international team comprising of former fire chiefs. The team, which was headed by Captain James R. Jobes of the Wilmington Fire Department in Delaware, USA, reviewed the operations of the Trinidad and Tobago Fire Services, and submitted recommendations to the Ministry.

### **3.15 p.m.**

The outcome of that exercise, referred to as the James Jobes Report, addressed the following:

1. The adequacy and reliability of water supply systems, particularly in the Port of Spain area;
2. The availability of adequate and proper appliances, equipment and vehicles for firefighting, with a particular attention to airports;
3. The adequacy of the Fire Service's Communications Systems;
4. The existing procedures regarding Fire Investigations; and
5. The training of fire service officers.

A working committee was established to ensure the successful implementation of the recommendations of the Jobes Report and this is ongoing. The Division also focused attention during fiscal 2007/2008 on the expansion and refurbishment of its vehicular fleet. The sum of \$1.1 million was spent on refurbishment and \$2.2 million spent on the purchase of 14 double cab light trucks to be used in the inspection of all commercial and industrial premises, in keeping with the requirements of the Occupational Safety and Health Act.

As Government's infrastructure developmental agenda moves full speed ahead, safety management systems are being introduced to address the risk factors

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involved with such expansion. The Government has upgraded and refurbished the supply of water for firefighting in downtown Port of Spain and its environs. Government is spending some \$30.1 million for the following projects:

1. We have already acquired lands on the City's Port, for the location of 500,000-gallon storage tanks;
2. The provision of two electrically driven water pumps to replace the existing diesel pumping system, which is currently ongoing;
3. The installation of emergency standby power generators to ensure reliability. This is currently ongoing;
4. Tenders have been awarded for the installation of new dry-barrel type hydrants to replace all defective and missing hydrants.

The actual strength of the fire service now stands at 2,371 regular fire officers and approximately 440 auxiliary fire officers. In January 2008, a total of 184 regular fire officers were inducted in the Service. During the last fiscal year, 44 fire officers benefited from training: 20 officers received courses at local institutions in substance abuse detection, early intervention in the workplace and conflict management.

Additionally, 24 officers were exposed to a programme on matters arising from the implementation of the Occupational Safety and Health Act (OSHA), certifying them as Fire Safety Inspectors. Facilitators for this particular programme were sourced from the Fire Service College in the United Kingdom.

Significantly, a new training regime for the auxiliary fire service was introduced during this fiscal year to upgrade the level of efficiency of auxiliary firefighters to enable them to more effectively support the regular firefighters when necessary.

I now come to the Office of Disaster Preparedness and Management (ODPM). Madam Deputy Speaker, the ODPM accomplished the following in 2007—2008. They continued to respond to requests for assistance from the regional corporations. During the year, the office received requests for assistance for a variety of hazard impacts, including fires, floods, severe weather conditions. In the floodings of August and September in particular, the office distributed mattresses, sheet sets, blankets, tarpaulins, food hampers; chain saws and power washers were loaned to the residents. The ODPM has assisted the fire service and corporations with such items.

The ODPM also worked with numerous organizations, including Government ministries and schools, in promoting preparedness and recovery. Presentations were delivered, they provided expert guidance in the preparation of disaster preparedness plans and provided brochures, checklists and other material on the topic of disaster preparedness. They also restarted riskland school tours in May and visited more than 40 schools in Trinidad and Tobago.

Other key activities: They completed an assessment and review of emergency incidents for 2007, and compiled an action report. This document is being used to direct preparedness and planning activities. Concerning institutional capacity strengthening, in December 2007, the ODPM hosted a UN consultant, as part of its ODPM Development Programme Capacity-Strengthening Project.

The consultant produced a document detailing a 5-year work programme, and is to return to complete the design of a wider project on strengthening the disaster management systems. Concerning the Summit of the Americas, as a key member of the Security and Transportation Committee for the Summit of the Americas meeting, the ODPM has commenced development of a disaster plan for the event.

In addition, in conjunction with the US Army South, are preparing a national disaster management exercise which will be held in December 2008. This exercise will test the plans being put in place for the Summit. To date, two planning sessions have been held. In July 2008, the team assisted the ODPM in redesigning the Standard Operating Procedures for the National Emergency Operations Centre, and in September, held an Initial Planning Conference with the ODPM and several ministries and agencies involved in this exercise.

Medical First Responder Team: In conjunction with the Ministry of Health, the medical protocols for the Medical First Responder Team were finalized. The services of the team will be utilized for the Summit of the Americas and the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meetings to be held in Trinidad and Tobago next year. Additional team members were trained in September 2008.

Shelter Management. The ODPM collaborated with University of the West Indies and the Association of Professional Engineers of Trinidad and Tobago in the development of a comprehensive shelter inspection training programme and inspection tool. The training programme was conducted in January, with 22 participants including representatives from the regional corporations, NEMA Tobago, the Ministries of Works and Transport and Social Development.

Shelter Management Plan: Continued work toward the development of a National Shelter Management Plan and completed preliminary inspection of

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shelters located in Trinidad and Tobago. From this inspection, the shelter list has been revised and has been shared with the public and stakeholders for review and comments. The ODPM has also taken steps to ensure the availability of emergency supplies in the event of a disaster, and has initiated the process to secure a warehouse facility for storage of relief items.

In the interim, supplies are being stored in heavy-duty containers. Supplies have been significantly increased with a variety of equipment in place to aid the response process. Madam Deputy Speaker, I am happy to say that we have received some very useful comments and recommendations concerning our shelters, even from Members on the opposite side, which we are actively pursuing.

The Ministry's Youth Programmes: The Cabinet established the Specialized Youth Service Programme with the mandate to manage youth programmes falling under the purview of the Trinidad and Tobago Defence Force. The Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) is the oldest with over 10,000 young persons benefiting from this programme since 2002 to date.

I had the pleasure of attending my first CCC graduation ceremony last Thursday, and I am very pleased to say that despite all the negatives being said about our young people, there is hope. [*Desk thumping*] The young men and women of the CCC are filled with confidence. They are willing to make a change in their lives. That was very obvious.

The MYPART/MILAT programmes were launched in April 2007 with an initial intake of 104 young men between the ages of 16 and 25. The programmes are scheduled to run for a period of three years in the first instance. They are being done jointly during the pilot phase, but will be conducted as two separate programmes when fully implemented. The programme seeks to expose the MYPART trainees to technical or vocational skills while the MILAT trainees pursue academic disciplines.

The second intake of approximately 150 young men is expected to take place in April 2009. Nonetheless, reports emanating from the programmes have been positive, in terms of the progress made with the young trainees to date. More specifically, it has been reported that the trainees are more confident and self-assured, with stronger interpersonal and social skills.

This Government has remained committed to finding ways to change the downward spiral of some of our nation's youths into being more productive and responsible citizens. Again, our vision for the youths of this country remains constant and unwavering.

Expansion of the Cadet Force. The Trinidad and Tobago Cadet Force is in the process of re-structuring and expanding its operations. The current trend of development within the Trinidad and Tobago Cadet Force occurs at a time when the Government is working steadfastly to encourage more of our nation's young men and women to adopt nation-building virtues, such as respect for authority, self-discipline and an appreciation for hard and honest work. [*Desk thumping*]

This expansion reflects the Trinidad and Tobago Cadet Force's mandate from Government to implement the Cadet Force programme in all secondary schools across the country. Currently, there are 29 cadet units operating in secondary schools throughout the country, impacting the lives of thousands of young men and women. We expect that all our young people participating in the Cadet Force programme will become better exemplars, in their schools, their homes and their communities.

The Cadet Force Programme is only one of several other Government initiatives that form part of the Ministry of National Security's thrust aimed at preventing youths from engaging in unacceptable behaviours and anti-social activities. The hon. Member for Siparia, in her contribution, had spoken about preventative measures in the fight against crime. Madam Deputy Speaker, our youth programmes, as well as our citizens security programme, which operates in 22 high risk areas are indeed preventative measures.

Our policy initiatives for the Ministry of National Security for fiscal 2009:

The Prison Service. During fiscal year 2009, the Prison Service will do the following:

- continue its strategy to increase the percentage of convicted offenders who are exposed to the various remedial programmes;
- review of the pilot project to monitor re-offending and recidivism;
- pursue a programme at the University of the West Indies in which several prison officers will participate in training in the use of the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) software. Implementation of this training proposal will allow improved data collection and analysis, and lead to more informed decision-making in respect of reduction in re-offending behaviour;
- the ongoing review of the draft prison rules will be completed;
- in terms of its human resource, the Prison Service has proposed an increase of 734 officers for the post of Prison Officer I to the Service;

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- infrastructural works will include projects aimed at strengthening the internal and perimeter security systems.

The Prison Service also plans, in the interest of safekeeping of inmates and staff safety, to purchase specialist fire equipment, which would also be useful for suppression, in the event of a riot at the facility.

The Fire Service: Training is a prominent feature in the strategic growth of the Fire Service. In fiscal 2009, the service will focus on equipping firefighters with adequate technical and operational competencies to cope with the rapid pace of development in the industrial, commercial and construction sectors. Toward this end, a training schedule was prepared for the 2007—2011 period.

Additionally, 25 senior officers are due to participate in overseas training at an estimated cost of \$4.8 million, and 30 middle and lower rank officers will receive training at an estimated cost of \$1.4 million.

Further, as the fire service responds to the changing national landscape, a High Rise Readiness and Response Committee was established to formulate strategies to address this situation. During fiscal 2009, specialized training will be provided to better equip officers to respond to any emergency that may arise at high-rise structures.

The fire service will also continue to upgrade its operations with the acquisition of the following:

Vehicles/Vessels:

- 6 ambulances;
- 4 water tankers;
- 6 water tenders;
- 2 medium-range ACT;
- 2 firefighting vessels.

Equipment:

- 400 hydrants;
- 5 rescue equipment packages;
- 400 lengths of hose;
- 12 portable pumps;
- 2 search cams;



- 24 extension ladders;
- 6 bomb disposal toolkits;
- 25 chemical suits; and
- rescue team equipment.

Its physical infrastructure will be enhanced with construction, reconstruction or refurbishment works to be undertaken at the following stations facilities in fiscal year 2009.

### **3.30 p.m.**

Refurbishment: Stations at Arima, Roxborough, Scarborough, Crown Point Airport, Chaguanas and Couva North will be refurbished.

Construction: There would be construction at San Fernando, Arouca, Mayaro, Friendship Estate and Tobago.

Reconstruction: Rio Claro, Point Fortin, Mon Repos, Princes Town, Siparia, Four Roads, Woodbrook, Tunapuna, Port of Spain and Chaguaramas. These are stations that will be reconstructed.

In conclusion, it is clear that our developmental programme is in harmony with the theme of this year's budget, "Shaping our Future Together, Vision 2020".

Clearly, law enforcement is more than just building more jails. It is about investing in our nation's youths and providing timely interventions and support systems to ensure that they do not break the laws of the land.

This Government will continue to do all in its power to make sure that the country is provided with an improved level of law enforcement that would make our community safer and more secure. At the end of the day we all want a safe and secure country to live, work, to be attractive for our investors, to be safe for our family, friends and of course, our visitors.

I thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker.

**The Parliamentary Secretary in the Ministry of Works and Transport (Mr. Nileung Hypolite):** I thank you kindly, Madam Deputy Speaker. It is an honour and a privilege for me to contribute to this first budget debate for the current People's National Movement administration, a Bill entitled an Act to provide for the service of Trinidad and Tobago for the financial year ending on September 30, 2009.

I wish to compliment my colleague the Minister of Finance in her first presentation of an annual budget as well as her being the first female Minister of

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Finance in the history of this country. [*Desk thumping*] The PNM is truly gender balanced. [*Desk thumping*]

May I also extend an invitation to the Member for Oropouche East to join me on a tour of Laventille any day, any time to see the kind of infrastructure that Laventille has [*Desk thumping*] that can clearly handle the tourism that I spoke about a couple weeks ago. May I ask if he has ever been to our Lady of Laventille, to the Desperadoes Pan Yard, to the Laventille Youth Facility, to Fort Picton or to Fort Chacon. [*Desk thumping*] The invitation is open any day any time without any security I will carry him. [*Desk thumping*]

This budget which I support is, in reality, the fiscal plan to manage the administration and operations of the Government of Trinidad and Tobago as we deliver services and manage the business of the people for 2008/2009. This development plan is to move Trinidad and Tobago to developed country status by the year 2020 or before. This concept of Vision 2002 is one which is also very similar to the biblical philosophy in Proverbs 29:

“Where there is no vision the people perish, but he that keepeth the law happy is he.”

This biblical guidance, as well as, state-of-the-art business practices dictate that those who fail to plan, plan to fail. We in the PNM have a vision and a plan, a business plan, which are critical for our success.

The 2008/2009 budget which was presented by the hon. Minister of Finance is a major part of this plan. This budget outlines the proposed finances to be spent on specific areas for the continued development of this nation through the delivery of quality services to our citizens during 2008 and 2009. As I listened attentively to the debate, I must mention that with all that has been contributed from those on the other side, there has not been any kind of advice, solution, initiative, recommendation or suggestions coming from their end. [*Interruption*] The contribution is really and truly meaningless so far that we have gotten from their end.

The Government's vision is to see this country's economy strategically managed so that all citizens will enjoy the positive economic rewards. The vision is also to see the development of our most valuable resource, our people.

I wish to touch a bit on the amazing eight letters. The amazing eight letters are U-R-P, C-E-P-E-P. Eight letters! The interest of those on the other side in the employees of these two programmes is alarming. As the song goes, they only have eyes for them, they only have eyes for those URP and CEPEP employees and

they actually went looking for URP and CEPEP employees on September 12 in Woodford Square. That is exactly what they did. They went across to Woodford Square to specifically look for these URP and CEPEP workers.

I also went across to Woodford Square and what did I see? I saw persons coming from many different employment agencies. [*Desk thumping*] I saw people from the banks, from the private and public sectors, from all over, were there at Woodford Square. Even from the Centre of Excellence. [*Desk thumping*] But they only had eyes for URP and CEPEP workers.

**Hon. Member:** Do not fire them.

**Mr. N. Hypolite:** This attention has not stopped. Those on the other side came here to this honourable House and they continue to have eyes only for those employees. Only for those employees! Why? It is because every one of them who stood up spoke about the URP and CEPEP employees. It is said that words have power and the repeating of those eight letters will no doubt continue to empower these employees and strengthen them as a workforce as they continue to contribute to nation building.

My support for the fiscal measures outlined in this budget is as a result of the fiscal approach in the integration of the people, the environment and the economy which this budget will facilitate. This fiscal plan when executed will without doubt facilitate development and sustainability as it strengthens all sectors of the nation.

I wish to look at the quality governance that the PNM administration is prepared to deliver to the people of this nation. I am certain that we will deliver with integrity, accountability, systems and structures and at the end of day produce value for money. [*Desk thumping*]

I wish to look a bit more into the URP programme and more so identify with some of the major achievements that this programme has accomplished to date. Creation of employment opportunities for the unemployable: over 15,000 persons every two weeks are employed in the URP programme, construction of box drains, footpaths, slipper drains, retaining walls. One of the most successful aspects of the programme has been that of the removal of over 90 per cent of the young people between the ages of 18 to 25 from the unemployment programme to one of the more sustainable employment training programmes that this company has produced. [*Desk thumping*]

The introduction of the debit card system, access to financial products. Once upon a time the Unemployment Relief Programme employees could not have

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gone to the bank to get a loan or do any kind of transactions. Under the management of the Member for Tobago East, he introduced what is called the debit card system, and to date those employees can now go to the banking institutions and get such. [*Desk thumping*]

Under this same programme a pilot project was launched some two years ago dealing with agriculture. It is nice to note that in Carlsen Field right now there are approximately 40 employees who work the land every single day. [*Desk thumping*] The strange thing about it is that some of those workers come from Laventille and meet with some in Chaguanas to work those lands in Carlsen Field. [*Desk thumping*] I can go on and say much more on the URP programme, but with limited time I want to touch a bit on CEPEP.

CEPEP, has been moved out of SWMCOL and it is now under a special purpose company called the CEPEP Company Limited. The Member for Siparia made mention that by doing so there is no accountability and all those sorts of nonsense. Let me state that all state enterprises have to follow this manual called The Performance Monitor Manual. All! In that manual it spells out that you must submit your annual financial statements every three months. It also states that your board minutes from your meetings must be submitted to your line ministry as well as the Ministry of Finance one week following the confirmation of those minutes. It also asks for your quarterly reports and your cash statements three weeks after each month—the monitoring manual. [*Interruption*] This does not only go to the line ministry, it also goes to the Ministry of Finance.

**3.45 p.m.**

Madam Deputy Speaker, under the SWMCOL/CEPEP, CEPEP did a great deal of training and I want to share a few with you. They did training in—this training was for the contractors, foremen and even the workers—personal management; health and safety; critical awareness; health and wellness; workplace issues; and community preparedness.

**Mr. Sharma:** [*Inaudible*]

**Mr. N. Hypolite:** CEPEP my friend, not UTT. Some of the topics are: conflict resolution; anger management; safe work practices; financial management; personal wellness; stress management—I think some of us on this side need to go for some of that stress management because when we have to come here on a Friday and listen to some of them on that side, maybe we need some of that training also—just to name some of the training programmes that they went through.

Madam Deputy Speaker, under the CEPEP there are 110 contracting companies, more than 50 contracting trucking contractors and 25 uniform manufacturers. This programme is about creating small businessmen and women, but yet still, those on the other side continue to cry down the programme. The Member for Fyzabad spoke from a poll and I would also like to speak with respect from a poll also.

**Hon. Member:** What poll are you talking about?

**Mr. N. Hypolite:** The MORI poll. A total of 2,362 interviews coming from CEPEP and one of the questions are:

- How much if anything, do you know about the CEPEP programme?

Madam Deputy Speaker, in 2008, 73 per cent knew a great deal about the CEPEP programme.

- How successful or unsuccessful do you think CEPEP has been so far in achieving the following:
  - enhancing the environment—90 per cent; [*Desk thumping*]
  - providing employment for semi-skilled and unskilled people—86 per cent;
  - establishing new businesses—42 per cent.
- How much activity if any, have you seen by CEPEP workers in your community over the past 12 months—70 per cent.

A great amount of activity. I can go on and on with respect to the poll, but again, time does not permit. One would probably want to go back to the URP and look at the polling that was done on that programme. Same set of questions:

- How much if anything do you know about the URP programme—68 per cent.

A great deal.

- How much activity if any have you seen by URP workers—activities we are talking about—52 per cent.
- How satisfied or dissatisfied are you with how the URP operated in your community—51 per cent. [*Desk thumping*]

**Hon. Member:** More than half.

**Mr. N. Hypolite:** More than half. While we on this side continue to try to build the people of Trinidad and Tobago and turn some of them into successful businessmen and women; those on the other side continue to cry down on them.

Madam Deputy Speaker, the success of these employees as they transition into two powerful, effective and efficient groups of employees under the Ministry of Works and Transport, you will see a strengthening of the workforce in our infrastructure and in the environment. The URP and CEPEP employees are now a most knowledgeable workforce for the realities and needs in their communities. They have had hands-on-skills enhancement within their communities. These men and women over the years have had an investment of time and money by the Government of Trinidad and Tobago, and they have taken this opportunity to be better persons to contribute to nation building, as we move on to achieving our goal of developed country status by the year 2020.

We in the PNM have a plan. We will work with the people of this country and will partner with those who are ready to make this vision real. We will partner not only with the URP and CEPEP programmes, but with all of Trinidad and Tobago. This goal can only be achieved when each person makes that effort as these workers do every morning to go to their tasks, to work and to enhance our environment.

I urge all citizens in like manner, those in offices, administrators, managers and workers of both public and private services to do their part in nation building. Be efficient, be diligent, work hard, work as a team with the Government, and then and only then we will be able to rise above the negative forces, and as a mighty positive force we can guide our country to developed country status. We must know our role and assume our responsibility, honesty and diligently deliver quality service.

**Mr. Warner:** I thank you.

**Mr. N. Hypolite:** You are welcome. Madam Deputy Speaker, this is required by each and every citizen in order to build this nation, and to move to the level of developed country status as we use the finance to deliver services and build infrastructure to sustain our nation's development.

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

**Mrs. Indra Sinanan Ojah-Maharaj (Toco/Sangre Grande):** Madam Deputy Speaker, I thank you very much for the opportunity to contribute to this very important debate, which is also my first budget debate in this honourable House.

In endorsing the budget, I first want to congratulate my female colleague, the hon. Minister of Finance in being the first lady in the history of Trinidad and Tobago, to present the country's fiscal package for the year 2008/2009, the theme being, "Shaping our Future Together". The hon. Karen Nunez-Tesheira presented the first budget of this new PNM regime, this new PNM administration that is being spoken about by many. Look around, Madam Deputy Speaker, eight PNM women right here in this House, representing their constituencies and by extension, this beautiful country.

Madam Deputy Speaker, women in this country are on a sustained growth path, and it is only a matter of time before they break other traditional glass ceilings. And it is a fact, the hon. Minister's presentation also made history in that it represents the largest budget in the history of Trinidad and Tobago with total revenue projected at \$49.6 billion, plus total expenditure of \$49.44 billion. It is a signal hallmark of this Government.

I am very proud to be associated and to be representing the people of Toco/Sangre Grande and to take part in this budget. Under education, tertiary education and training provide the skills necessary to increase the competitiveness of the nation and it is essential to economic development. The World Economic Forum notes that today's global economy requires that countries and I quote:

"Nurture pools of well-educated workers who are able to adapt rapidly to the changing environment."

In recognition of the importance of tertiary education and training, the Government of Trinidad and Tobago set the target that by 2015, 60 per cent of the graduates from the secondary school system would move on to some form of higher education. This is an achievable target and one that requires significant investment, planning and cooperation, between government and the private sector. The importance of tertiary education is underscored by the international institutions, including the World Bank and the United Nations.

Madam Deputy Speaker, given the importance of tertiary education and training to achieving developed nation status by 2020, the Government has invested heavily in tertiary education, to programmes and tuition expenses, such as Government Assistance for Tertiary Education. GATE funding is on the spotlight. GATE funding covers 100 per cent of tuition expenses for nationals of Trinidad and Tobago.

The Government has also introduced scholarship programmes up to PhD level for citizens with First Class Honours degrees. It is indeed a tribute to our

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Government that it is attempting to benchmark the percentage of graduates accessing tertiary education, and to pitch that future at 60 per cent by on or around 2015. That, Madam Deputy Speaker, is an extremely noble progress ambition because 60 per cent will match that of several developed countries. More than ever, the future of this country is in the book bag as stated by the late, Dr. Eric Williams, and today, it is also in the computer.

The proposals at the primary level are also welcome, but I want to particularly salute the Minister for her commitment with respect to early childhood care centres. Another 150 of these centres are to be built during the forthcoming year. I have looked at a list of the completed centres and they are located across the country, including I am proud to say, at Salybia in the heart of the electoral district I have the honour of representing in this honourable House. These centres are not only assisting with early childhood education, but are also boosting family lives and aid to young mothers. Yes, young mothers. I can testify that several young mothers are utilizing the time they now have for themselves as an opportunity to gather more skills and for overall self-renewal. These centres are a silent contributor to the welfare of young mothers and their young children.

#### **4.00 p.m.**

On another matter, the formation of local school boards as part of the new school management is a great opportunity for women to play an even more vital role in leadership and governance. I see this as a formal opportunity for women again, since they have been traditionally more deeply involved in school management only at a PTA level. Now they are becoming even more embedded in shaping the well-being of future generations, including, quite possibly, another Minister of Finance and several other scholarship winners.

I want to quickly turn to social protection, which is another flagship accomplishment of this Government. The Minister must be commended for deepening the Government's commitment to the most vulnerable among us, a large number of whom are women. There are now more social benefit programmes than any other time in Trinidad and Tobago's history. That, as they say, put flesh to the saying, a "government that cares". These benefits are varied and relevant to the needs of those who they are geared to. They are playing a vital role in reducing the poverty level and improving the quality of lives of many in our country. It means that social services would be more easily accessible, especially to rural residents.

Madam Deputy Speaker, I now switch to another area. Women are great



community builders, and the plan to construct new community centres or refurbish old ones is another purposeful undertaking of this Government. A total of 110 centres are to be upgraded and restored, that would clearly strengthen and add fresh vitality to our villages and communities. I could picture more energy and purpose in our communities, with the youths and women once more taking a dynamic lead role. This is one example of building sustainable communities.

I am also happy about the renewed focus on the youth through a number of specific measures. The plan to improve recreation grounds all over the country is another positive development that I salute; also the lighting up of these recreation grounds. In fact, I look forward to several grounds in my own constituency being improved soon.

In the area of Toco and the surrounding areas, we produce, quite possibly, the most number of quality track and field athletes, also cricketers like Mervyn Dillon and Ian Bishop; who knows whether the improved sporting facilities would lead to another Richard Thompson or Ato Boldon or maybe a Hasely Crawford; all of this from the North Coast.

Family life is being boosted by this Government through an ongoing accelerated housing programme. This permits many families to share a home and a vision. This housing agenda is a landmark in national development. I look forward to the development of new towns for the areas of Sangre Grande, La Brea, Princes Town and Chaguanas, and also to the development of new towns at Wallerfield, which would also comprise the eTecK Park close to our hometown. There has never been an equal to this programme at any time in Trinidad and Tobago's history. There could hardly be a greater investment in family and the home, including our women, by providing a shelter, especially to those who need it most, and this Government has done it.

I wish to reinforce a point made by the Minister responsible for housing, that a family home leads to "a sense of self". I am also grateful for the explanation of the Minister that the houses are, indeed, affordable and that financing is carefully arranged for the working class through the Trinidad and Tobago Mortgage Finance (TTMF), from as low as 2 per cent. That is a boost for families, for mothers and fathers, for children and, yes, for women.

On another subject, it is noteworthy that the Opposition largely ignored the Government's plan to bring an end to the gambling industry. This industry has had a negative fallout by severely hurting persons who have become addicted to this harmful way of life. Many families, including despondent mothers, have suffered at the hands

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of addicts and other family members. Some family members' lives have been turned into a nightmare. I see this measure as another solid move on behalf of family life.

I want to point to some other matters in support of the Minister's budget. One is that Trinidad and Tobago is enjoying virtually full employment, an ambitious reality that many countries strive unsuccessfully for with their underdevelopment rate. There was a decline to 4 per cent in 2005; it was 5 per cent and now the current position is 4.2 per cent. This is quoted from the UNDP Human Development Report, 2007/2008.

One aspect of this is that more women than ever are in the workforce enjoying career growth, personal and professional independence and bountiful esteem. Educational opportunities and personal ambition are permitting more and more women to enter fields in which they had never dared to enter in times gone by. It is clear that more innovative and ambitious people are being developed in Trinidad and Tobago, and a purposeful revolution is taking place right here in this part of the world in work in Trinidad and Tobago.

Another matter for which I applaud the hon. Minister is the tremendous emphasis being placed on infrastructure development; this too is an example of the historic progress and development. The infrastructure improvement is the most widespread ever undertaken throughout Trinidad and Tobago, even in Opposition constituencies. I am particularly happy that emphasis is being placed on roads and highways development, expansion of rural communities and a comprehensive drainage programme.

I also applaud the creativity and vision with respect to the new highway network, which would not only make the traffic flow smoother, but will also further integrate our people. Some infrastructure works have already taken place at Toco/Sangre Grande, and I look forward to the incoming projects in North East Trinidad.

You could now leave Arima, drive to Matelot and pick up ice in Toco; never before was anyone able to buy ice in Toco from an ice machine, all under this PNM regime. I invite you to enjoy the drive on the North Coast. I invite you to enjoy the drive on the newly paved roads, the upgrading of the 10 miles from Salybia and going onwards.

The Paria Main Road is about to get another facelift under this regime; it is along the North Coast and it was also due for attention. I am sure that would have some positive effect on domestic tourism which would be done in three phases and will commence in the first fiscal year of 2009. Toco to Matelot, here we come under this Government. [*Desk thumping*]

On that score, improvements are already on the way at several tourism sites in Toco/Sangre Grande from the Valencia gateway to the Toco Lighthouse, and much more to come. It is obvious that there must be an overhaul of the infrastructure if we are to march towards developed nation status and if we are to continue to be a nerve centre for foreign investment.

Another agency that must be commended is the Public Transport Service Corporation (PTSC), which has just acquired 70 new buses and is expanding its fleet from 77 to 112 routes. I am pleased that the PTSC is focusing on rural communities in both islands, not forgetting my constituency. We are working closely with the PTSC and the Ministry of Works to have this service commence in the immediate future from Toco to Matelot, after almost 12 years of no buses. With a fleet of 300 buses, I expect that the bus company would provide an increasingly efficient service to the districts that require public transport at most.

In recent weeks, I have been impressed by the strides being made by the Ministry of Tourism and the TDA with respect to domestic/international tourism. I have also noted the figures quoted in the Review of the Economy which speaks of the increased arrival during recent months. It is my view that tourism is on a purposeful growth path.

The constituency of Toco/Sangre Grande is well known for its ecotourism, where we have several tourism sites like the Matura Park. We also have the Valencia River, the famous Shark River in Matelot, Salybia Beach, Toco Beach and many more, where efforts are being made to upgrade these facilities in the immediate future.

I want to make my constituency a role model. It will be a major player in the development of tourism in Trinidad and Tobago, where we already have 33 guesthouses registered and several bed and breakfasts, with one hotel.

Turtle watching has been a major tourist attraction, not only for locals but our foreign visitors. We praise the BHP Billiton for the work it has been doing, as they are working closely with my constituents for the development of the turtle watching industry. I expect that the reward of our infrastructure would be improved, and under this PNM administration much more would be coming.

With respect to agriculture, I am also heartened by the emphasis on megaprojects, but I also want to comment on the aspect of Government's programme. The improvement to agricultural access roads is an initiative that must be commended; this will now come under the purview of National Roads Authority. I look forward to this being undertaken in relatively quick time at prime farming communities.

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As a former Director of the Agricultural Development Bank, I support the effort to create efficiencies between the bank, the Estate Management Business Development Company (EMBD) and Namdevco. I anticipate that this would foster greater coordination between these agencies and would redound to the betterment of the farming community. I also wish to commend favourably on the easy access for credit which was made available by the Agricultural Development Bank (ADB) at a lending rate of just 6 per cent. [*Desk thumping*]

**4.15 p.m.**

This agricultural bank is becoming more and more friendly towards food producers of our nation. I wish to state that the ADB is in Sangre Grande and has contributed tremendously to the farmers in my constituency and even in my colleagues as far as Mayaro. I endorse the bank's lending programme and I recommend it to the farmers across the country.

Madam Deputy Speaker, the critics have been talking about declining production in agriculture but this is not altogether true. Domestic agriculture is expected to grow by 10.7 per cent this year. It is clear that we are on a deliberate growth path and no doubt the Tucker Valley Farm would lead to a jump in food production. Also, the 2-acre plots given to the Caroni (1975) Limited workers are yet to come on the market.

With respect to health, I have examined the statistics with respect to the HIV/AIDS and I wish to state in a very guarded manner that it appears that we are winning the war against this disease. Credit must be given where it is due and I look forward to Trinidad and Tobago becoming a model to other countries about how a successful battle like this is being won. This is a victory we must appreciate because only a few years ago our country had one of the highest infected rates in the Western world.

Madam Deputy Speaker, I want to make one more statement on the health sector, and that is to take note of the upgrading and the expansion of the primary health care facilities and hospitals. I am particularly looking forward to the Sangre Grande enhanced care facility. I want to say quite briefly a word about the Local Government Reform that is now being formulated. I have participated in that process and I am convinced that the transformed structure would lead to sustainable development of communities and to active participation at ground level. I also anticipate the new look Local Government Reform creating a range of benefits including more effective management of resources and improved delivery of goods and services to the community.

Madam Deputy Speaker, I have spent the last few minutes briefly analyzing a few ways in which our Government is advancing and in which the budget is impacting positively on our nation. I have shied away from discussing macroeconomics even though it is clear that Trinidad and Tobago is in a most healthy financial and economic state. In my view our country is in a good place and on the verge of further achievements in every area of life and every discipline of activity. We are indeed journeying to another level.

In a few months, April 17 to 19, 2009 Trinidad and Tobago will hold centre stage of 34 Presidents and Prime Ministers gathering here in Port of Spain for the Fifth Summit of the Americas. It will be the first such event to take place within the Caribbean Community since Caricom, since their wide summit—sorry Madam Deputy Speaker. Caricom since the hemisphere wide summit will begin—had begun 14 years ago and the Prime Minister of this country, the hon. Patrick Manning has stated that he sees this country's involvement as a Caribbean effort.

The theme that Trinidad and Tobago has selected for the Fifth Summit of the Americas: Securing our citizen's future by promoting human prosperity, energy security and environmental stability. All of which reflects a number of critical and crucial concerns in today's headline.

Madam Deputy Speaker, our Government is addressing our basic needs and ensuring our future prosperity. On that note, permit me to say that I interrupt by saying that Vision 2020 is right upon us. That is a noble and purposeful aspiration. It is similar to a person having ambition for success and aspiring to reach a goal.

I commend the Government for maintaining the focus on its goal and for making deliberate strides towards Vision 2020. As I end, I wish to extend on behalf of my constituents, the party I represent, myself and my family belated Eid Mubarak to the Islamic community. I also extend best wishes to the Hindus who are observing at this time the solemn occasion of Nau Ratum and are preparing for Divali, for this is one of the most auspicious occasions in the Hindu calendar of this holy festival of lights.

Madam Deputy Speaker, I thank you for the opportunity to share these thoughts with this honourable House.

**Madam Deputy Speaker:** Hon. Members, the sitting of the House is suspended until 5.00 p.m. We will now take the tea break.

**4.21p.m.:** *Sitting suspended.*

**5.00 p.m.:** *Sitting resumed.*

**The Minister of Finance (Hon. Karen Nunez Tesheira):** Mr. Speaker, with the greatest respect to this honourable House, we on this side had to endure what I would call quote after quote after quote from the hon. Member for Siparia in her response to budget 2009. In fact, I counted the *Hansard* and there are at least two quotes per page.

Mr. Speaker, we on this side choose to be more economical in the use of quotes—no pun intended—and I am going to follow in the good example set by my colleague, the Minister of Information. We did not confer but I want to sum up the contribution and response of the Member for Siparia in the words of the celebrated playwright, William Shakespeare: “Full of sound and fury signifying nothing.”

Mr. Speaker, I left out the first few words which were: “It is a tale told by an idiot.” I know one thing for sure that the Member for Siparia may be many things, but an idiot the Member is not. So why do I say what the Member said was sound and fury signifying nothing? Because the budget 2009, as with other budgets of this PNM administration commencing from 2002 must be set within a contextual framework and located in a framework of a strategic plan. So when I heard those on the other side speak about same-old, same-old, cut and paste and plagiarism, I said to myself they clearly did not understand what the budget represented in the context of our strategic plan.

I see the Member for Chaguanas West looking at me and I know he is a businessman, and I know in running his organization he has a strategic plan, and he knows it incorporates a strategy for achieving organizational goals and objectives within a specific time frame. So you have to have goals and set them within a time frame, you must measure those goals and, therefore, when we speak of a strategic plan we are speaking of Vision 2020. That is the Government’s strategic plan, and it is a clear compelling statement of this Government and how it sees itself leading the country towards developed nation status.

Mr. Speaker, we speak of the vision of the People’s National Movement as stated in the Vision 2020 plan and what we envisage if I may quote:

“...is a united resilient, productive, innovative and prosperous nation with a disciplined, caring and loving society comprising healthy, happy and well-educated people and built on the enduring attributes of self-reliance, respect, tolerance, equity and integrity.”

Implicit therefore, in that strategic plan is the process of measuring the progress of how the most efficient implementation, must be defined within clearly stated milestones. It is in that context that we speak about a budget. So every year

as the law requires we come to this honourable House and report to the national community as to where we have reached along that strategic plan giving effect to those milestones and targets that we have set ourselves.

Mr. Speaker, I have heard the Member for St. Joseph speak about the IT and he said it is four years, so you are going to hear it next year because he recognizes, as we recognize, as you should recognize that it is a strategic plan. So what we are doing is rolling it out and setting milestones as we deliver to the people of Trinidad and Tobago. So our budget 2009 is a continuum of that strategic plan setting and tweaking and deciding in particular, what kind of emphasis we wish to place. And for this budget 2009, we continue with education, health, shelter, social protection and we put special emphasis on infrastructure and agriculture.

Mr. Speaker, before I go on to the performance of this economy with which I am very proud to be associated, I want to speak a little of—the Member for Siparia has now joined us—that Member whom I had the opportunity I would say to be in class with, is wont if I may say, has a proclivity to use carefully constructed and crafted language replete with innuendoes and half truths with one intent only, to mislead this honourable House and members of the national community and in doing so, feigning ignorance.

### **5.05 p.m.**

Why do I say that? When we came to this honourable House I have had the experiences and time does not permit me to go into detail, but I can give you two examples. I think it was only about a few weeks ago, she brought the Auditor General's report, waving it around and saying, "A deficit budget", knowing very well—as she should because she has been here long enough. Sorry for using "she". I always correct myself. The Member knows well enough that the Auditor General's report only deals with the Consolidated Fund; it does not deal with the IDF, the Unemployment Fund, et cetera. So, in fact, if you add that all up, we have a surplus which we have had every single year since this PNM administration has been in office.

The Member spoke about no allocation under the IDF for Tobago, knowing full well Tobago's capital expenditure is located in the THA's budgetary allocation.

The one that I want to speak to—and the Member spoke to in her response to the budget—is the Integrity Commission, again a good example of using language well-crafted, intended at the end of the day to give the wrong impression and mislead the public. What did the Member say? She started off using all kinds of—as the Member is wont to do—melodramatic language. She spoke about a

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trailblazer —thank you—a pioneer in this Parliament; a role model, and so on, but then she says:

“Mr. Speaker, that is part of the problem, but it is compounded by the fact that the names of these persons were not published by the Integrity Commission. It is selecting who to publish and who not to publish.”

Then she goes on to say:

“I want to know why if you did not file, why there was no action taken against you in the courts of law.”

The Member for Siparia, knowing full well what she was saying was not true, because if the investigation had been properly conducted, the Member would know what she was saying—ask the Member for Caroni East; it appears as if it is a malaise that the other side suffers from. She continued to get support from the Member for Oropouche East, talking about a sinister plot and all kinds of language as if I were in a spy movie.

But I am not going to spend too much time on that. What I am just going to say to bring an end to that topic—and I would like to lay this document in this honourable House and give copies to members of the media. This is from Mr. Martin Farrell; he is the Registrar. [*Interruption*] Say “Hmm”, but then you would have to go outside there and say that he is lying!

Mr. Martin Farrell wrote to me on September 30—the same day that the Member for Oropouche East was making all kinds of innuendoes and half-truths. The letter states:

“Dear Madam,

Acknowledgement of Receipt and Declarations of Account of Income, Assets and Liabilities and Statements of Registrable Interests—2003, 2004, 2005, 2006 and 2007

I hereby acknowledge receipt of the declarations at caption on the following dates...”

That is the important thing; the dates on which it was registered—the dates, that is what we must listen to.

“2003 declaration received April 09, 2008”

Not September 30—April 09.

**Mrs. Persad-Bissessar:** 2008.



**Hon. K. Nunez-Tesheira:** It does not matter—April 09, 2008.

“2004 declaration received April 25, 2008

2005 declaration received May 12, 2008

2006 declaration received February 22, 2008

2007 declaration received July 30, 2008”

Now if the Member has a problem with the Integrity Commission, argue with the Integrity Commission, but do not cast aspersions on my good character! That is my point! [*Desk thumping*] If the Member wants to take it up with the Integrity Commission and question the Integrity Commission as to why they did not insist that I do it before, ask the Integrity Commission that! But do not come in this honourable House to give this honourable House the impression that I did not file! I have filed and I filed before September 30. Not only did I file, to date, unlike what you can say on that side, I have not had one query with regard to my filing.

**Mr. Partap:** We do not believe you.

**Hon. K. Nunez-Tesheira:** Well, that is your choice. I understand you all have difficulty believing. It is a problem you all suffer from, but I will not be distracted. So I go on—[*Interruption*]

**Mr. Speaker:** Please, before you do, Hon. Members, we have had four days of sittings and it is coming to an end. Let us behave properly, please.

**Hon. K. Nunez-Tesheira:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. That is one example. I will not spend too much time on the two other examples because I believe the Minister of Information spoke very well on the issue of delivery. What the Member for Siparia said about this administration, taking from the PWC report and misrepresenting it, all I want to say on that is of 121 projects identified by PWC, 95 projects have either been completed or are in the process of being completed.

That is consistent with our strategic plan. I do not know if they expect every fiscal year you are supposed to finish build a road; you are supposed to finish build a hospital. I do not know! But as far as I am aware, the fiscal year you have to report, but this is a continuum of a strategic plan which we have given a date of 2020! That is all and it is simple, and we are being consistent in our application.

The last thing I want to mention with regard to the Member for Siparia’s contribution, is the allegation that it is a rich man’s budget. If it were not so tragic—I mean, it is almost laughable—I do not want to spend too much time on this; I think a lot of the other Members on this side have spoken well on this issue.

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All I want to say on this issue again—and it is important to make the point—the fact of the matter is, since 2005, this Government has laid out a number of social development programmes for the people of Trinidad and Tobago. In 2008/2009 we are continuing what we have continued to do. We are not going to come with a whole new set. You just continue and what you do, you tweak; you top it up; you adjust it.

But to come and say, “All you came with is pension; all you came with is public assistance grant”, I have a whole document here called the Social Sector Investment Programme speaking to the number of programmes and the number of social services this Government has given to the people of Trinidad and Tobago and when I come to the end I will speak more on that.

But the one thing I want to speak to in the context of those programmes—I just made a note of some of them. For example, we have the Community Education Skills Training Programme. Of the 7,492 persons trained, over 6,000 were female; the Women in Harmony Programme—these are people who have no skills; unskilled, unemployed or unemployable; those who are the most vulnerable in our society—the age group, 26—45, 609 graduates; Civilian Conservation Corps, for the 18—25 catchment group—unemployed and unemployable—of that group, 61 per cent of the graduates were female. I am sure the hon. Member knows why I am making that point.

The Senior Citizens Grant, I am no actuary but I know that the persons who live longer—that is what you get from UNDP; when you look at your age grouping you will discover that women live longer than men, for whatever reason. We have increased the old age pension; we have also increased, as we have said, the public assistance grant and the disability grant.

But the one I want to spend a little time on is CEPEP and I know that the hon. Member for Laventille West spoke on this, but the only reason I am going to mention it is because in my constituency—I mean, to be honest, I am a little tired of hearing people who are members of the CEPEP being vilified and spoken about in the most pejorative terms. So what I did, I asked my constituency to do a newsletter on CEPEP which we have not published yet but I will give you a copy if you are interested.

What it is about is, CEPEP is not about painting stones. The Minister spoke a lot about the programmes available. He spoke about the life skills management for all workers, which is conflict resolution; anger management. Cycle two deals with health and safety training; cycle three deals with time management; cycle

four deals with a number of programmes, including personal wellness, entrepreneurship, industrial relations, gender relations, stress management and so on.

But what was the most touching for me were the testimonials of persons who had been the beneficiaries of those programmes and they just happen to be women, because most of the beneficiaries of this programme are women. This is what some of them had to say: A mother of seven children, Lenora Williams, appreciates CEPEP as it helps her to provide for her children. This programme has helped her financially as well as personally in her daily life. The lessons learnt about drug abuse, HIV/AIDS and communication skills have offered useful lessons that she can now pass on to her children. Katherine Singh explained that CEPEP had made her more aware of her surroundings. Being a member of this team for a year and a half has encouraged a greater love for her natural environment. Nolene Samuel presents the picture of pure joy. Nolene Samuel has been promoted from a labourer to an operator and after four years of CEPEP she is now the assistant team leader.

There are a number of other examples. What this speaks to, we are touching people's lives, persons who are the most vulnerable, unemployed, unemployable, giving them an opportunity and treating them with dignity. [*Desk thumping*] To hear the other side say to us that they should go on dole and welfare, do you know what it is? Those are replete with problems. But not only that, what this allows these persons to do is to give them dignity. You treat people with dignity and give them an opportunity to uplift themselves. That is what CEPEP does for many of those participants.

So I have given you an indication of some of the programmes which this Government is very well proud of and for which this administration, through budget 2009, continues on that strategic plan called Vision 2020.

One of the things I would like to turn to now is arriving at the budget. There was a lot of talk on the other side and the Member for Siparia advised us that we should put the budget price at US \$60 a barrel. The thing about that is, if I were to listen to the Member for Siparia, what I will do is throw caution to the wind. Why should I ignore all the experts? Who are they to tell us? The Member for Siparia knows better! That is the expert! Who am I to listen to the *IMF World Economic Outlook* that publishes a survey twice a year, presenting IMF staff economic analysis of global economic developments? World renowned! Who am I to listen to them? What do they know? Who am I to listen to bp and BPTT, the oil companies that do their budget pricing every year? What do they know? No, I must listen to the Member of Parliament for Siparia; that is the advice I must take!

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But this is a prudent Government; this is a Government that is committed to sound management of this economy and we know better! We know better for many other reasons other than to listen to the Member for Siparia.

So in fixing the budget price, I just want to make it clear—I have gone through that before—those are some of the factors that we take into account; the same factors they took into account. The only difference is that we added one more thing. We added in the 11-year moving average and we put it in the legislation. It is section 11(3) of the Heritage and Stabilisation Act. The reason we did that is, we understood the volatility of the commodity on which we were determining our budget.

So we used that moving average in order to smooth out that volatility. That is what we added in determining the budget price and put it into legislation. That was our contribution. I should say that that sets a ceiling. You cannot go above that ceiling. Anything, it is beneath that ceiling and we have always gone beneath the ceiling.

For those who question the budget price and whether \$70 is too high a price, I want to refer to a report from the IMF of this month, speaking about oil prices. I will just quote a little from it. They spoke at page 5 of a paper written by John Lipsky, the First Deputy Managing Director of the International Monetary Fund. He said:

“Commodity prices have retreated recently, but are expected to remain high and volatile.

Oil prices have moved off their highs, but uncertainty remains high.”

The point I want to say, going on to his speech he says:

“Nonetheless, market supply-demand balances remain tight. Strong demand growth—fuelled by the acceleration of activity in resource-intensive emerging economies—sluggish supply responses, and declining inventories and spare capacity, are likely to keep prices high and volatile.”

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** What date was that?

**Hon. K. Nunez-Tesheira:** September, and I have one of September 24, and this is what they had to say:

“Against this background, the baseline projections for food and fuel prices are broadly similar to the Spring 2008 World Economic Outlook (WEO). Oil prices are projected to stay high, although current future prices suggest a price

path below the baseline assumptions underlying the September 2008 WEO exercise. Specifically, future markets suggest annual average prices of US \$107 and US \$100 for 2008 and 2009, respectively, compared to US \$113 and US \$118 in the September baseline projections.”

**5.20 p.m.**

On what have we based our budget? Is it 100, 95, 90, 85, 80? It is \$70. That is what we have based our budget price on. I wanted to deal with the issue about how we arrived at the budget price. We are being told now do not listen to OPEC; the International Monetary Fund; DDTT; BPTT. Listen to the Member for Siparia because somehow, the Member for Siparia has become an expert on fixing oil prices.

I want to turn to something that I believe is critical because we hear it all the time. They are speaking about this Government and their clarion call about performance beat ol’ talk any time. I remember that very well. I do not intend to spend too much time on that because so much has been said by my colleagues. I want to focus on one or two things. The reason I am choosing them is that I am taking them from their UNC website. It says UNC track record 1995—2001. I will not go on about the education with the deshifting. We completed it. You can tick off that. [*Interruption*] They did not shift one. We did not know that. We did not talk about providing books for the needy. We are giving all the children books.

We did not have to talk about computers in 44 schools. We gave computers to all primary school students. I do not want to spend too much time on a dollar for dollar programme. We do not have dollar for dollar programme. It is from nursery to tertiary, free education. We do not have to talk about increased tertiary level education through the College of Science, Technology and Applied Arts of Trinidad and Tobago (COSTAATT). We founded the University of Trinidad and Tobago (UTT) which has over 5,000 students.

We do not have to talk about health. We are making drugs more available. We are getting free drugs. We do not have to talk about that. What I want to talk about is amusing. When I was preparing for election I went on your website to see what your track record was. There on water infrastructure—it is funny though—this is your claim and you do not know this. Delivered water, more than 85 per cent of our families now receive pipe borne water. You did not know that. You talked about build to repair road. I thought what road are they talking about? Then I remembered Tidco, \$1 billion. They took the Tourism Development Company to promote tourism to pave roads like it was going out of style, just on the eve of a national election. We ended up with a deficit that year.

*Appropriation Bill (Budget)*  
[HON. K. NUNEZ-TESSHEIRA]

*Thursday, October 02, 2008*

Housing was amusing. I took it from your website. I am not making up this. They said providing houses for the people, 1,300 houses were built in one year under the UNC. I read it from their website. I started to think from where did that come? I started to think Aranguez Villas. That is what they counted. That is the only thing that made sense. We know that they built 461 houses. They talk about the efficiency model. You had a ministry of housing that you kept for five years to produce 461 houses. In five years how many houses was that a year? About 85 houses a year? That is their model of efficiency. We can go on and on.

One thing we know that we are most proud about on this side is education. We know that if you are going to make this country developed nation status and go to the tertiary level of the economy, it is important and critical to develop your intellectual capacity and human capital. That, we can be very proud of.

The Minister of Science, Technology and Tertiary Education corrected me. Out of the students leaving secondary schools we set ourselves a target 60 per cent of secondary students achieving tertiary level education. We have reached about 40 to 50 per cent and this is 2008. That is a fantastic achievement!

I want to speak a little about what we are the most proud. As Minister of Finance this is something about which I feel most competent to speak, our macroeconomic indicators. It speaks to the competent execution by the various ministries of the Government's strategic plan. It is seen through the way in which the macroeconomic indicators speak so well of this Government's management of the people's money and the country's economy. We have all heard the negatives. They talked about PWC.

I want to speak a little about a report from Ernst & Young. In their report the first paragraph says:

Riding the tail winds of strong energy prices, T&T's economy continued its unprecedented record of economic expansion with GDP increasing by an average of 9.6 per cent from 2002 to 2006; by 5.5 per cent in 2007 and by an estimated 3.5 per cent in 2008.

This enviable growth has brought with it strong economic fundamentals, such as current account surplus which was recorded at 20 per cent of GDP in 2007, and compares—because I love to compare—very favourably with an estimated deficit for the same year of 6.8 per cent in Barbados; 14.4 per cent in Jamaica and 5.3 per cent in the United States. In addition, the country's foreign exchange reserves now stand at an impressive US \$8.5 billion or 11 months of import cover and our Heritage and Stabilisation Fund at US \$2.46 billion. It is more than that now. We

have just deposited, I do not have the figure at the top of my head. In essence, at the end of 2008, we have TT \$19 billion in the Heritage and Stabilisation Fund. This represents about 12 per cent of our GDP. Clearly, we have gotten it right. Ernst & Young is not a member of the People's National Movement. They are well respected auditors. I wanted to highlight some of the things that show that we have managed the economy prudently. We have demonstrated fiscal responsibility. That is with regard to debt management.

We have ensured that all the money that is used—debt is created, as you know, by borrowing. We have ensured that we have managed our debt in an efficient manner. When I speak of that we look at what our debt comprises. Public sector debt is made up of central government which is essentially the ministries and contingent liability which is not off budget. I do not know why the Member is always saying that. It is there in the statement in the documents that you received. It said gross public sector and talks about central government's debt and contingent liability debt. That is what it is made up of.

The Member spoke in absolute terms saying that it was \$9 billion and \$10 billion with us and we have less money. That is not how you measure it. If I have \$10 and I owe \$9 obviously, I am not in a good position. If I have \$1,000 and I owe \$9, what is \$9 compared with \$1,000? You have to put it in a context. In that context, we have brought down the public sector debt which is the central government and the contingent liability from nearly 50 per cent in 2002 to 28 per cent by the end of 2007. [*Desk thumping*]

That is not the only thing that we have done. This is fiscal prudence. It is not only in the context of public debt. Our external debt is about 6 or 7 per cent of GDP. When you look at our Heritage and Stabilisation Fund which is made up of 12 per cent of GDP it is an impressive figure. It says that any day we have to pay off our external debt, we will be in a good position so to do. It is not only in terms of our external debt that we have managed so well.

We looked at our savings. When we look at our savings again, we have every reason to be proud. You heard me speak about our current account surplus. When you look at our current account surplus which is our balance of payment with other countries—right now, countries owe us more than we owe them. They are indebted to us. We are on a credit situation and have recorded a surplus on our current account for the last five years. It means that the value of our export exceeds the value of our import. We talked about our current account surplus. I spoke about it representing 20 per cent of the GDP in 2007. It is not only a current account surplus, but also it is a heritage and stabilization fund.

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I will correct an impression that was given by Gregory. I do not remember his last name. He gave the impression that the Government only put 53 per cent of the surplus revenue in oil in the Heritage and Stabilisation Fund.

**Hon. Member:** Mc Guire.

**Hon. K. Nunez-Testeira:** Mc Guire. Quite apart from anything else, the Heritage and Stabilisation Fund as required by law is a direct charge on the Consolidated Fund. It is not appropriated; it is transferred directly from the Consolidated Fund to the Heritage and Stabilisation Fund. We have now closed off that account. At the time when that statement was made, we had projected our surplus oil revenue to be approximately \$16 billion. It ended up being \$24 billion. The difference between \$24 million and \$16 million, I am averaging, was \$7.87 billion. Sixty per cent of 7.87 billion came up to \$4,723.38 million. That is exactly how much we put into the fund. The point that I am making is that contrary to what was said we have put in 60.88 per cent of the surplus revenue from oil into the Heritage and Stabilisation Fund by way of a direct charge. I want to put that to bed. What is being said is not correct.

Let us speak about saving, GDP. We have gone on revenue from \$55 billion in 2001, and almost tripled it in 2007 to \$152 billion. From 2002—2007, our GDP has grown on an average of 9 per cent.

For unemployment we have something to be proud of. In your UNC track record you talked about unemployment. You reduced it from 10.1 per cent in your last year. In 2008, we are down to 4.3 per cent. In the United States, their unemployment level is 6.1 per cent. We have to measure ourselves against developed nations. I said that 4.3 per cent of people are unemployed. That is to give you an idea of how we have managed the economy.

I want to spend a little time on poverty eradication. The reason I want to spend a little time on that is that the last report of the Central Statistical Office in 2005, said correctly and that was an important year for the People's National Movement, because in that year a number of non-cash benefits were added to the social benefits for those at the lower end of the population. According to the information I have here, there are two ways in which you can measure poverty using income and expenditure. The income data is done on a quarterly basis which is more or less up to date. Expenditure data is done every five years. The last time it was on that basis was in 2005. When it comes to income it is done every three months. From 2005 to 2008, with regard to income, it moved from 23 per cent of persons living below the poverty line based on income to 18 per cent.



What is critical about it is that the trend in both estimates of expenditure—I said that we have not gotten expenditure information because it is done every five years.

The point that I am making in that the trend in the estimates for income and expenditure is almost the same from 1997—2005. In both cases, poverty is shown to have fallen at almost the same rate. It is only reasonable to conclude if that information is not correct that if incomes are increasing and less people are living under the poverty line, there is an income, it only stands to reason that the same thing would happen when you measure it by expenditure.

**5.35 p.m.**

So, Mr. Speaker, it is only reasonable to conclude that, if that information is accurate, if incomes are increasing and less people are living under the poverty line based on income, the same thing is happening when you are measuring it by expenditure.

The last time we measured poverty by income, the figure we were using in 2005 was \$665. We calibrated it to take into account inflation and to get to the poverty line and the figure is \$815. When we use \$815, which is a line used when measuring by way of income, this is what we can tell the national public: the number of persons in the three lowest income groups in this country has been falling steadily. There are fewer and fewer persons earning low incomes in Trinidad and Tobago.

For the income rate between \$1,000 and \$1,499 per month, whereas there were 200,000 persons in this group in 1995, by 2006, there were about 75,000. It has fallen by over 100 per cent. For the lower income rate, between \$500 and \$999, the number was close to 140,000 in 1995 and fell to around 30,000 by 2006. So, less and less people are below the poverty line using the income measurement.

When you use it for middle-class people, you see the opposite happening. I have a diagram here, which is a study done by Carl Theodore and U. N. Scott from the Department of Economics, Labour Market and Poverty Studies Unit, University of the West Indies. This diagram unambiguously demonstrates that the number in four of the five middle- and higher-income groups in this country has been increasing steadily.

For those between \$1,500 and \$1,990, it remains fairly stable over the period, starting with a little more than 50,000 and peaking to almost 75,000 by 2001. There is the group between \$2,000 and \$3,000 almost. This group started with only 20,000 in 1995, but is almost 180,000 persons in 2006. Time does not permit me to go on as much as I would like, but the point is, using the income measurement, you see that there are many less persons living under the poverty line as compared to 2005.

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Another thing that is critical is that when we measure poverty in Trinidad and Tobago—and many countries are looking at it—how do you measure it? Do you use income expenditure or should you include non-cash benefits? When we add non-cash benefits in the mix, as many countries are doing now—United States is doing that; they are looking at using non-cash benefits to measure poverty.

We have done it. It is some rough science here, but when you look at the number of programmes that this Government offers to persons who fall within the lower income, which includes, as we already know, schoolbooks for children in primary and secondary schools, transportation, meals—and we took into account that they are not in school all year. We calibrated it based on that.

We took into account CDAP, the Food Debit Card, the Disability Grant, the Senior Citizens Grant, the Public Assistance Grant, the fuel subsidy and we go on and on and we estimate that we are starting with \$3,600 to \$6,000 in non-cash benefits to the people of Trinidad and Tobago. When you factor in the income and the non-cash benefits, we are confident that when the next CSO study is done, we are going to see a drastic drop in the poverty line. This talk about 16.7 per cent, remember, was done in 2005 and it did not include the non-cash benefits.

I just want to make a point about inflation. This Government recognizes that inflation is our challenge. It is not only the challenge for Trinidad and Tobago; it is the challenge for all economies, whether you are a centre economy, an emerging economy or a developing economy. We are all struggling with that.

I have a report from the IMF that spoke about it. This was the same report; it is dated September 18 and it says that in the advanced economies headline inflation accelerated to around 4½ per cent in July, driven mainly by oil price rises. However, underlying our core inflation has remained contained and the commodity prices are now in retreat. It goes on to say that inflation resurgence has gone much further in emerging and developing economies although risks have recently receded.

The point is that in countries such as ours, emerging and developing economies, you are looking at the issue of demand/supply equilibrium. You are always trying to get the demand and supply in equilibrium. The reality is that in economies like ours, with substantial growth, you will see the demand outstripping supply in the short term.

What this country is dealing with, as many other emerging and developing economies, is the issue of demand pressures outstripping supply. In addition to that, there is imported inflation. In fact, it is my understanding that a study will be

done by the IMF on the impact of imported inflation because the demand and supply is a domestic inflation, so they are looking at imported inflation to see its impact on inflation in general.

We recognize that inflation is our challenge and we recognized it in the budget and put forward the prescriptions. One of them is the supply side. We recognize and the Governor of the Central Bank has said it many times; it is in all the reports that the major cause of our headline inflation is food inflation and much of that food inflation is domestic agriculture—fruits and vegetables. We know that the dairy products and oils also contribute. Much of it is exogenous: outside of Trinidad and Tobago, but much is domestic. So how do you address that? You address that by increasing your supply side and taking initiatives.

Mr. Speaker, we hear all those things about agriculture and I just want to show you a book, *Incentive Programmes for Agriculture*. I have said it before and I will say it again: The Ministry that has the most incentive programmes is the Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Marine Resources.

We recognize that apart from that we need to deal with the institutional arrangements. I have spoken to that already and we have said that we put in place a chairman who will chair NAMDEVCO, ADB and EMBD. All state lands will come under EMBD to drive agriculture to deal with food production.

We recognize that liquidity management is important and we have done a number of things in conjunction with Central Bank's open market operations and we know many of them in terms of selling foreign exchange, bonds; we have passed legislation to pull liquidity out of the system, sterilize it and put it in blocked accounts, so that the money will not re-enter the system. We have done a number of things in conjunction with the Central Bank. Reserve requirements have been increased—the 15, the repo rate, the lending rate from the Central Bank; the policy rate has gone up by I think 50 basis points to 8.75 per cent. We have done a number of things in terms of liquidity management.

In addition, I have already said that this Government has set the example by saving, not only in the Heritage and Stabilisation Fund, but also in a current account surplus. Our foreign exchange reserves, while they are not strictly savings, if you are in a downturn in your economy and you owe money, you are going to drawdown on your foreign exchange reserves.

So, we have demonstrated on this side the understanding that we must also save. In fact, Ernst & Young praised us for so doing. We know that we have to encourage persons to save in order to reduce consumption because that is putting pressure on liquidity, the money that is being generated in the system.

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The consumer has a lot of power. The Ministry of Legal Affairs has done a tremendous job of encouraging consumer awareness. We recognize that we live in a market economy. In a market economy, you cannot do what you do in China or Singapore; you cannot take a part of someone's salary and put it as savings. The way you influence is by consumer power. In America, the Consumer Influence Index is critical to determining the health of the economy. We in Trinidad and Tobago do not know the power we have and therefore we must recognize and exercise that power.

We are leading the way. Certainly the Ministry of Legal Affairs is doing that by encouraging people to be more discriminate in how they spend their money. I am not advertising for any bank, but I was very happy to see one of the banks put out an advertisement in the newspaper, rather than encouraging people to take out loans to buy cars and consumer goods—

**Mr. Speaker:** The hon. Member's speaking time has expired.

*Motion made,* That the hon. Member's speaking time be extended by 30 minutes. [*Hon. P. Manning*]

*Question put and agreed to.*

**Hon. K. Nunez-Testheira:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As I was saying, I was happy to see one of the banks have an advertisement encouraging people to save. We recognize that in dealing with inflation—we have supply-side initiatives spoken to in some detail in the budget document, liquidity management, savings, consumer power and education.

The Central Bank, in conjunction with the Government, has launched a financial literacy programme, encouraging people to save. I cannot remember the slogan, but it speaks to people encouraging them to save.

Just as an aside, in the United States of America, one of the issues with which they are dealing right now is that they have put themselves in a situation—no aspersions, but I am just encouraging people to understand the need to save—partly because they have lived on credit, not savings. We encourage the people of Trinidad and Tobago that they have power to save.

When we dealt with inflation, we understood and many critics say to us that the Government is the creator of money. We are the ones with the big projects. The Member for Siparia gave us a dissertation on how the money operates. It goes into the system, the banks lend, the multiplier effect and down the line. We recognize that, but what are you saying to us? Are you saying that we must not continue? Are you saying that we must not build the ports? Are you saying do not

build the roads? Are you saying do not increase power, not only for domestic purposes, but for commercial and industrial purposes? Are you saying do not increase the water supply, not only for domestic purposes, but for commercial and industrial purposes? Is that what you are saying because the infrastructure is not putting it down in a black hole? Infrastructural is absolutely critical to the building of productive capacity to take us to the next level. [*Desk thumping*]

It is not expenditure; it is an investment, but we recognize that in order to continue to develop and to increase productive capacity; in order to take the country to sustainable development levels, which is critical to the infrastructural development programmes, that we must do it in a way that it does not minimize its impact on inflation.

We spoke about it in the budget. We spoke about two things; one is efficiency models. We recognize that we have to use more efficient methods. I believe that the Member for St. Joseph spoke about being more efficient in the way that we do things. We have created umbrella organizations, whether it is the drainage authority, the road authority; whether we have done that in agriculture in terms of putting one chairman to manage three arms of our agriculture. In other words, we are putting in place models to allow us to be more cost effective and efficient in the way we invest the people's money to take Trinidad and Tobago to developed nation status.

Mr. Speaker, it is not only the efficiency models for infrastructural development. It is also the financial arrangements. We are moving towards the design/build/operate/transfer and transfer. We are moving to the fixed price contract. The Prime Minister has said, and certainly said it to us, that no one is to bring a Cabinet Note for any funding unless the design is completed because we have gone that way already and we recognize that when the designs are not completed, you get variance upon variance which adds up to cost overruns. This Government is committed to ensuring that the way we manage and finance the infrastructural programmes is done in a manner that would minimize its impact, so we will have international tendering.

### **5.50 p.m.**

We talk about capacity constraints. The fact of the matter is, are we to stop the projects until the local contractors can participate? We cannot do that. We have a responsibility, not just a minority, to the people of Trinidad and Tobago. If we had listened to them, we would not have had the Hyatt. The Hyatt is turning a profit next year. If we had listened, there would be no Hyatt. If we had listened to them, there would be no Point Lisas. If we had listened to them, there would be no

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Atlantic LNG 1, 2, 3 and 4, but we know better than that because we have a track record to support what we do. This is why this Government is committed to taking Trinidad and Tobago to developed nation status. We recognize the concerns and we have factored that into the efficiency models and the financing arrangements.

In addition, I heard the Member for Tabaquite, when he made his contribution, talk about efficiencies, training and educating people; almost as if we are doing it in a haphazard way. I want to assure the Member for Tabaquite that nothing could be further from the truth. If we look at UTT—Why was UTT set up, was it in competition with UWI? No, it was set up in order to do research and development in the energy sector, which is an important part of our national economy. You set up institutions and put in programmes to align them to your national economy.

When we talk about financial services, it contributes 14.5 per cent of GDP. What did we do? We have Arthur Lok Jack School of Business; UWI; USC and a number of institutions. You did the same thing I did, Member for Siparia, the EMBA, IMBA, CFO, CFA, all those programmes. Why? It is because we have the institutions and we have the programmes to filter into the diversification of our national economy.

Tourism and the construction industry, what did we do? Again, an alignment. What did we get the MuST Programme for? That programme is there to train persons for the construction and tourism industries. Mr. Speaker, I could go on and on. The point I am making is, there is alignment. We recognize that there is more to be done.

That is why the Minister of Science, Technology and Tertiary Education spoke about Tech Voc when she spoke about the National Training Agency (NTA) partnering with us to make sure we create more efficiencies and also partnering with the private sector.

As I finish my presentation, because I know that I am running out of time, I would speak to the implication of the international financial crisis. I am talking in the context of diversification. We on this side are always accused of not diversifying. We looked at it this way, you can diversify into—I am borrowing from Minister Enill—the energy sector, downstream, where the values are. We have gone beyond methanol and urea. Mr. Prime Minister, we are going into what, polypropylene and propylene? In other words, we are going into plastic. We are going downstream. We are not only going downstream, we are going upstream. Why are we saying upstream? It is because Trinidad and Tobago's International Financial Centre; one of its five niches that we are going into, based

on Oliver Wineman's report. I have the report here. Their recommendation is the commodities hub. When you get in the commodities hub business, you are going into trading. You are not just getting the money when they pay you for your gas, as in Point Fortin, you are going into trading, where the real money is made. We are going upstream and we are going downstream.

We recognize the international financial crisis. We just heard of the US \$700 billion bail out rescue or restructuring, whatever you want to call it, was passed in the Senate. We recognize that there is going to be a slow down. I have been quoted as saying that we do recognize, or the Ministry does not recognize, the impact of the sub-prime mortgage crisis. What we have said all the time is that the world is not the same as it was 10 years ago. If there is a global recession, there is no question that Trinidad and Tobago must be impacted by that, but we are in a much stronger position than we were 10 years ago. The world has changed somewhat. While growth is going to slow down in China, India, Brazil and so on—I do not mean to be facetious—I recognize, if there is going to be an impact, the fact of the matter is that we do not trade caviar. Our product is not a product; it is a product still in demand called gas and oil, but more so gas. We recognize the impact, and, therefore, understanding that, we have taken that closely at hand and we are, like the rest of the world, looking on to see.

One of things I want to correct. Member for St. Augustine, I want to give you the benefit that you were not being mischievous. You talked about—I said in a media release that the immediate response, both from the Central Bank, the insurance companies and the banks was that there was no immediate impact in Trinidad and Tobago on the international financial crisis. The Member for St. Augustine came here and said: How could I say that? He quoted from the Central Bank Governor saying that we had invested in Lehman Brothers. Let me put it correctly, Lehman Brothers is the investment manager. We did not invest in Lehman Brothers. They were our investment manager and we appointed a custodian to ensure that Lehman Brothers, as investment manager, did not take those funds and invest it in Lehman. When I said we did not invest in Lehman's, we did not. [*Interruption*] I will forgive him.

The next point I want to make is about Caricom. As the Member for Siparia said, 37 per cent of our trade was reduced because that represented oil and gas. Are you saying that we cannot get a market for oil and gas? Are we saying that? The manufacturing sector has not suffered. The manufacturing sector had remained as strong as before. That 37 per cent, I am pretty confident, Mr. Prime Minister, we would get a market for it somewhere in Japan, Brazil or Argentina?

**Mr. Manning:** Absolutely.

**Hon. K. Nunez-Tesheira:** What “yuh” think? Do you think we could get a market for it? I think we could get a market for it. The manufacturing sector grew by an average rate of 9.9 per cent. I think the Minister of Information spoke on this, so I would not go into detail. We have spoken about the diversification.

Tourism, when the Member for Siparia misrepresented, what was it, 129 out of 130? You corrected it. When the Member uses indicators, do not take it from Wikipedia. We went on the site. I went to see where that information came from. It was not there. That is the intellectual rigour of the contribution. It is from there. The UNDP published it in 2008, based on 2005 statistics. *[Interruption]* Whatever, I am saying that the source was from the Internet; questionable, I would be kind. A questionable source.

I just want to end on the part with diversification in TTIFC and the statement made: What are we doing about the human capital development? There is a whole section from the Oliver Wineman report on human capital development. We did the necessary studying to align the human capital development with the TTIFC. In the report from Oliver Wineman, they spoke about the things we had going for us. They said:

“Tertiary enrolment is growing strongly with 70,000 students enrolled in public and private institutions. Quality tertiary education is perceived to be of a high calibre. Employers are impressed by the university’s graduates’ skills and capabilities. Financial services experience and skill sets Trinidad and Tobago as a vibrant financial servicing industry and human capital pool.”

What they were asked to do is to make sure that we align what we are doing in education and how we are spending money in education, to the Trinidad and Tobago International Financial Center and the financial services sector. We have been in consultation with the Minister of Science, Technology and Tertiary Education in regard to that exercise. We on this side want to say—I believe that we have managed the economy of Trinidad and Tobago prudently, responsibly and we take pride on this side to say, not only have we done that prudently, but we have done it with compassion.

I do not want to abuse the oft-quoted words of transparency, accountability and integrity because sometimes you say it so often, people wonder if you are just saying it. I can say on this side, we can really say, perhaps the other cannot say that, I do not know; it does not appear so from my own—*[Interruption]* I am not going there. On this side, we are proud to be part of this administration. We are proud to be part of this administration.



Before I end my contribution, I want to thank the Prime Minister for posing that confidence in me and having confidence in all my female Cabinet Ministers. I thank you, Mr. Prime Minister. I want to thank my colleagues for the support they have given me. Sen. The Hon. Conrad Enill is not here today, but he came on the Saturday before the budget and spent the Saturday and the Sunday. That is a colleague. I want to thank him. I thank the Minister of Information who came too and gave that support. I thank all my colleagues on this side.

The theme we took for this year's budget: Shaping our Future, is important. All of us have to work together for the good of Trinidad and Tobago. I am sure that at end of the day, we all love Trinidad and Tobago. You said that I said nothing about being a woman. I would say this. When I read about this young girl, Jordana Deane, 18 years of age, I saw it like a mother. She made me so proud. I do not know the young lady. I read what she said: "I owe so much to my country. A lot of money is being spent for my education, so I definitely would be coming back." Mr. Speaker, if that is any indication of what this Government has done and the investment we have put in the young people, we are sure that we would shape a future; a future of which we can all be proud. Not just Miss Deane, I singled her out because I was really moved by it.

Before I end, the TT Card was an initiative we took on with the Chamber of Commerce, First Citizens Bank and the Supermarkets Association. It was a joy because they collaborated with us in order to ensure that the poorest of our community; the most vulnerable in our community, were taken care of and recognized in a way that shows the desire and willingness to collaborate as a people.

The productivity centre is another example of working together with the Chamber of Commerce, the Ministries of Labour, Small and Micro Enterprise Development and Science, Technology and Tertiary Education and the NTA.

Before I end, I again want to thank all my colleagues, my Minister in the Ministry of Finance, Sen. The Hon. Mariano Browne, who was also very supportive in this effort, my Prime Minister, my colleague Ministers and you the people of Trinidad and Tobago for having faith and confidence in me.

I beg to move.

*Question put and agreed to.*

*Bill accordingly read a second time.*

**Hon. K. Nunez-Tesheira:** Mr. Speaker, I beg to move that this House now resolve itself into Finance Committee to consider the Bill clause by clause as well as the Estimates.

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**Mr. Speaker:** Hon. Members, the House will now go into Finance Committee. At this stage, I will invite all strangers to demit the Chamber until the conclusion of the business of the Finance Committee. All strangers, you are required to leave the Chamber and you can re-enter, you would be told, at the conclusion of the Finance Committee meeting.

*Bill and Estimates committed to Finance Committee.*

**6.05 p.m.:** *House resolved itself into Finance Committee.*

**6.47 p.m.:** *House resumed after Finance Committee.*

*Question put and agreed to, That the Bill be reported to the House.*

*House resumed.*

*Bill reported, without amendment, read the third time and passed.*

**COMMITTEE OF PRIVILEGES  
(APPOINTMENT OF)**

**Mr. Speaker:** Hon. Members, before I take the Motion on the Adjournment let me inform you, pursuant to Standing Orders 71 and 75, the following Members have been appointed to serve on the Committee of Privileges: Mr. Colm Imbert and Mrs. Kamla Persad-Bissessar.

**ADJOURNMENT**

**The Minister of Works and Transport (Hon. Colm Imbert):** Mr. Speaker, I beg to move that this House do now adjourn to a date to be fixed. Having said that, it is not the intention of the Government to have a sitting of the House of Representatives during next week unless some emergency arises—like an outbreak of war or something like that [*Laughter*—but it is the intention of the Government to have a sitting during the week that commences on October 13, 2008 and ends on October 17, 2008. That day has not yet been selected and this is why I beg to move that we adjourn this House to a date to be fixed.

*Question put and agreed to.*

*House adjourned accordingly.*

*Adjourned at 6.51 p.m.*