

Leave of Absence

Wednesday September 16, 2009

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
Wednesday, September 16, 2009

The House met at 10.00 a.m.

PRAYERS

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

PAPERS LAID

1. Customs (Import Duty) (Caribbean Common Marker) (Amdt.) Order, 2009. [*The Minister of Finance (Hon. Karen Nunez-Tesheira)*]
2. Excise Duty (Alcoholic Beverages) Order, 2009. [*Hon. K. Nunez-Tesheira*]
3. Excise Duty (Tobacco Products) Order, 2009. [*Hon. K. Nunez-Tesheira*]
4. Review of the Economy, 2009. [*Hon. K. Nunez-Tesheira*]

APPROPRIATION BILL

(BUDGET)

[Fourth Day]

Order read for resuming adjourned debate on question [September 07, 2009]:

That the Bill be now read a second time.

Question again proposed.

Mr. Speaker: When last we met, the hon. Minister of Finance was on her legs. She has 43 minutes of her original time remaining.

Hon. K. Nunez-Tesheira: Mr. Speaker, before I resume the winding up of the debate on the 2009/2010 Budget, I propose to introduce certain amendments to the Draft Estimates of Expenditure 2010 at the committee stage.

These amendments will neither increase nor decrease the total figure proposed in the Appropriation (Financial Year 2010) Bill, 2009 but are merely administrative adjustments.

Mr. Speaker, there are two changes to the Schedule to the Appropriation Bill emanating from a fairly recent decision of Cabinet which, in essence, removed the responsibility for the cardiovascular and diabetes services initiative with the Johns Hopkins University from the Ministry of Health and placed it under the Ministry of Science, Technology and Tertiary Education.

As a result of this decision, there has been a reduction in the allocation to the Ministry of Health by \$54 million and an increase to that of the Ministry of Science, Technology and Tertiary Education by an equal sum.

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Mr. Speaker, I wish to resume where we had adjourned on the last occasion, I believe in the wee hours of the morning. I was really commenting on what the Member for Chaguanas West had said because I think it really encapsulates the view that the other side would want the national community to believe.

He said that he had only one problem with the Government, they cannot leave money alone, and I would imagine that the implication of that is that this Government has indulged in profligate spending, squandermania and has been irresponsible. That is the clear implication of that.

This morning, I am going to set out in a very convincing and comprehensive way in the time allotted to me, the hypocrisy of that statement and put a lie to the truth or veracity of that statement, and the hypocrisy with which the UNC appears to want to be labelled as we move forward.

Mr. Speaker, I can do no better than refer to Standard and Poor's report because that report for those who may not know, are world renowned providers of financial market intelligence and expertise. Very important. Independent providers of data for credit ratings, indices, investment research and risk evaluation, and the largest source in the world of independent, and I stress the word "independent", equity research.

Mr. Speaker, when Standard and Poor's rates a country, they are looking at a country's creditworthiness and they determine its credit rating. They look at the likelihood of debt repayment and the nature and provisions of the debt obligations. And when we talk about the likelihood of debt repayment, I have on record, I believe, Prof. Watson making the point that it is not an issue of whether Government finds itself in a deficit position, it is the ability of a government to manage its debt moving forward.

So they look at things such as your savings profile, your debt profile, and what is called the macroeconomic fundamentals, the fancy terms but, more importantly, they look at whether your economy is sustainable, meaning: Are you in a position to take yourself out of a debt situation? Those are the key indicators.

So whilst the other side wanted in their acts of lack of patriotism—and I am putting it very kindly—invited Standard and Poor's, an independent rating agency to downgrade this country, it was to no avail. Because Mr. Speaker, I do not think we recognize the implication of that request coming from the Member for St. Augustine who, unfortunately, is not here with us this morning.

What this means, Mr. Speaker, when a country gets downgraded, a poor credit rating, means that that country will have to face higher interest rates on loans,

tighter credit conditions with creditors being more cautious in the way they lend money to the country. It is just like an individual if he/she has a poor credit profile, when he goes to the bank, it is going to take into account those circumstances and will increase the interest rate, be more cautious or reluctant perhaps to lend to that particular individual. It is the same way it applies to a country. That is what those people on the other side—who speak about unity and about love for the country—wanted Standard and Poor's to do to this country. That was their idea of unity and patriotism. [*Desk thumping*].

Mr. Speaker, Standard and Poor's is independent and they said, and I have a copy of it and I am just going to read briefly from it because these are the critical points. They said:

“Although Trinidad and Tobago's bailout of the CL Financial group could cost up to 6% of expected 2009 GDP...”

They recognized that, this is the point.

“its solid fiscal and external position support its policy flexibility. [*Desk thumping*] In addition, the Government's debt profile and burden limit external vulnerabilities.”

This is the point.

“As a result, we are taking the ratings off credit watch negative, affirm them and assign a stable outlook.”

Mr. Speaker, you know what is very relevant about that, they said in their report, they assumed that the debt could not be paid off at CL Financial and even taking that into account, they still had the confidence in this Government's prudent management of the economy that nevertheless they were of the belief that we could manage the deficit and bring us back to a balanced budget, and have signalled to the national community the confidence in the Government's management of this economy. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Speaker, Standard and Poor's rating must be understood in the context of the global economic crisis. Something perhaps the other side would want us to forget, because when one looks at that, one has to understand that we are moving towards Vision 2020 developed nation status and, therefore, it is critical that we benchmark.

Prof. Watson in a contribution to a forum asked why are we looking at Barbados and Jamaica, we must benchmark against the advanced economy, and he is right. Because if we did that, the figures are so—I mean, they are our brothers and sisters and charity begins at home.

What is the point of coming to the national community and saying that some of these countries have an unemployment rate of 25—30 per cent? What is the point of saying to the national economy that some of those countries have a debt to GDP of over 115—120 per cent without a programme for sustainable growth? So what we did was examine ourselves in the context of what is happening in the world and benchmarking.

Let us look at the "World Economic Outlook" of April 2009, advanced economies, growth and real GDP: the United States of America, -2.6%; Canada, -2.6%; Japan, -6%; Euro area, -4.8%; the United Kingdom, -4.2%; France, -3%; emerging Europe, -3.7%; Commonwealth of Independent States, -5.1%. And the newly industrialized Asia, the tigers, Hong Kong, -4.5% and Singapore, -10%. That is the outlook for real GDP for 2009.

Unemployment rates: the United States of America, 8.9%; Canada, 8.4%; Japan, 4.6%; Euro area, 10.1%; Hong Kong, 6.3% Singapore, 7.5%.

Mr. Speaker, we looked at our balance of payment, whether we are in a surplus or deficit, and we looked at the other countries and we see for example the United States of America, -2.8%; the Euro area, -1.1%; emerging Europe, -3.9%.

Fiscal balances: the United States of America, -13.6%; Canada, -3.4%; Japan, -9.9%; Hong Kong, -2.3%. So Mr. Speaker, I think the point is what is the situation in the rest of the world—

Mr. Speaker, I want to look at Trinidad; remember that we are a developing country, moving towards developed nation status. What are the indicators for Trinidad and Tobago? Real GDP, -0.9%; not even 1 per cent, Mr. Speaker. The unemployment rate is estimated at 6.5 per cent, we know that the last unemployment rate was 5 per cent but this is the entire estimate for 2009.

Inflation rate: We know that the inflation rate has fallen from a high of 15.4 per cent in October last year to 5.9 per cent in July of this year with all indications that the inflation rate is going to stabilize at that figure. [*Desk thumping*]

Total public sector debt which includes central government and contingency liability 31.3 per cent of GDP, when the benchmark that is used internationally—because we have to benchmark is—50 per cent.

The external debt as a percentage of GDP: These figures have been adjusted, the projection was 5.3 per cent, it is now in the region of 6 per cent, but when you look at the Heritage and Stabilisation Fund and what it represents, 12 per cent of GDP, it gives you an indication of how this Government has saved well and managed its debt well. [*Desk thumping*]

Finally, on that one last figure I want to use is the import cover. Whilst the reserves have gone down, a combination of the contraction of the economy together with low commodity prices, the import cover is in the vicinity of 11 months and the benchmark for developing countries is three months.

So, Mr. Speaker, I think what I have indicated here really supports and vindicates this Government and really says to you that when Standard and Poor's says that this Government gets an A rating, they looked at all of those things and have really shown and affirmed their confidence in this Government's management of the economy. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Speaker, as we move forward—[*Interruption*] You see what happens to them, when we use our figures, it is bogus; when it is IMF, they say IMF is bogus too; now it is Standard and Poor's. All the time Standard and Poor's was good enough, all of a sudden—they are so predictable. Now they want to question Standard and Poor's.

Mr. Speaker, they talk about deficit and it is true. A deficit budget of itself is not a bad thing, what is important is how you are going to finance it and what it is going to be utilized for. So when you listen to them, they get on as if a deficit is the worst thing that could happen to the economy, but they have very short memories or they are suffering from what I call bouts of self-induced amnesia. I want to refresh their memories this morning because they like to forget and they want the national community to forget.

10.15 a.m.

Let us look at the UNC budgets; let us look at that. Three consecutive years: 1998, deficit budget; 1999 deficit budget; 2000, a deficit budget. When this Government took office in October 2002, we ended up with a small deficit but it is my understanding, the reason for that was—does Tidco ring a bell?—\$1 billion in road paving. They said they even paved—well, I do not know, but they said they even paved dogs; they were so enthusiastic. I wonder why? Let me think. Was there an election in the looming? The fact of the matter is, since this Government took office, we have run fiscal surpluses every single year. [*Desk thumping*]

The hypocrisy and the inconvenience of their memory, I have to say, does not stop there. The Member for Couva North, who I expect is recuperating and I wish him the best, on the expenditure point, according to him, he was very convenient. All he told you was expenditure, but you cannot take expenditure without looking at what your revenue position is. So let us remind them of their revenue to expenditure. In 1998, their revenue to expenditure exceeded it by 9 per cent; in

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1999, their expenditure exceeded revenue by 3 per cent; in 2000, it exceeded it by 2 per cent and as I have indicated, in 2002, when we came into office at the end, after their wild spending spree with Tidco which I thought was a tourism company, but who am I to know that; maybe it was supposed to pave roads, who knows—we had a small deficit of 1 per cent.

Do you think that the hypocrisy ends there? No, it does not end there, that self-induced amnesia. You see, when you have the Member of Parliament for Siparia who is not here—look at what the Member had to say; this is the kind of love they have for this country. Do you know what she said? I have the quotation. And she was very careful, you know, because she is a lawyer, so she says: "I have been advised; I have been informed." Very careful, you know, to couch her language. She said:

“Mr. Speaker, as we speak, that people who are presently cashing cheques at the Treasury, that the Treasury has run out of cash. This information has just been passed to me. We are in dire straits.”

That is what she said. This is the kind of thing that the Member of Parliament for Siparia says to us. So can you put any truth or any credibility to them? No! Because they have amnesia about their deficit; they have amnesia about their level of expenditure.

But it does not stop there, you know. Does Alutrint ring a bell? The Member for La Brea reminded us that they were the ones who signed an agreement, and at that time Alutrint was the best thing in the world; it was the best thing since sliced bread, but now they are not in power, it is not a good thing.

Does it end with Alutrint? The Caribbean Court of Justice—do you want to know why it is headquartered in Trinidad and Tobago? It is them! But now they are not in power, it is not a good thing. They are hypocrites!

But you want to think it finishes there? They talk about caring, but who shut down OJT? They did! Who shut down the Civilian Conservation Corps? They did! That is how much they love the young people of this country.

But another inconvenient truth like—lapses of memory—the Member for Couva North in his contribution said they never raised taxes when they were in power. But you see, I know better than to take their word, so I went and checked. And do you know what I found out? And do you know what is the most curious thing? I see, again, the Member for Princes Town North is not here. This is really curious. When he made his contribution I could not understand; it defied logic.

Imagine his argument was when the Government increases the taxes on the road traffic offences, that we want to encourage people to break the law because we want to raise money. That is the logic, you know. But let me ask you something. You see, when they were in power, let me ask you if that logic held. According to my notes that I have here from Monday the 5th of October, 1998: "Imposition of a penalty of \$300 on holders of driving permits which have expired for a period of six months or more."

I want to ask him if, when they were in power they did that in order for people to break the law. I just want to know—convenient memories. That is one tax they increased. They did not stop there, you know: Moneylenders licence fees and Pawnbrokers excise duties:

"I propose to increase the moneylenders' licence fees to \$500 and pawnbrokers' licence excise duty to \$2,500."

It did not stop there, you know. Alcoholic beverage tax:

"We intend to increase the import duty on these items as set out in the Provisional Collection of Taxes Order."

It did not stop there either, you know: Import duty on motor vehicles, and they gave a list of it; and in the case of gasoline powered private motor vehicles, and in the case of diesel powered motor vehicles. They also have a special registration on locally assembled foreign-used vehicles. So all I have just indicated there; you cannot trust their word.

I go on now to something which is always said, not only in this House, but on other occasions: big buildings. Big building being, I believe, the metaphor for Government's profligate spending and squandermania. So I am sure when they speak of big buildings, they are not talking about Point Lisas Industrial Estate. No, they could not be talking about that. Is it the Hyatt? That is another case of hypocrisy, because if my memory serves me right, I remember seeing the Member of Parliament of Oropouche East at the Hyatt Regency.

The Government Campus: Is it the Government Campus that bothers them? Is it the Twin Towers for the International Financial Centre? Let me just say something on that point. You know, the Member of Parliament for La Brea made a good point. Do they want us to be carriers of water and hewers of stone? Do you know why I say that? They want us always to be tenants, never to be landlords. That is what they want! Tenants, never landlords! [*Desk thumping*]

I am going to tell you this and, I mean, I am amazed at this. Many of the buildings that this Government leases are owned by the private sector and you

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should see—I am not going to call the names, you know, because you see them; you drive down the road; they are owned by the private sector and you should see the condition; if I have to judge from the outside, the condition of the maintenance of these buildings, and on top of that, charging us huge rents, and on top of raising the rents, we have to go inside there and recalibrate the entire building to suit the ministry. That is what they want us to do; they want us to be renters, never to be landlords. That is the problem behind that.

I have figures here from the Minister of Public Administration saying that it costs this Government \$6 million approximately every month just in paying leases and that does not include refitting these buildings. Could that money not be better used to maintain the buildings that we own, the people of Trinidad and Tobago? No, they do not want it so; we must be renters, not landlords.

So they ask you, where the money gone? Coming back to the Member for Chaguanas West; that is how I started. Where the money gone? Well, Standard and Poor's, Moody's, CariCRIS and IMF, clearly are satisfied about where the money has gone. But I want to refresh their memory and I am just going to use snapshots because I have limited time available to me to speak on these issues.

But if I use tertiary education—and that is important, because you are investing in people and a tertiary economy which is important to becoming a developed nation. At UWI, the intake for 2002—2003 was 9,968; for 2008—2009, 16,000. [*Desk thumping*] UTT, which is aligned to our national economy, began in 2004 with 1,600, today an increase of 6,500 for 2008—2009. [*Desk thumping*] The University of Southern Caribbean, from 760 in 2001—2002 to 4,100 for this academic year. [*Desk thumping*]

And talking about education, there was delivery to 133 schools, audio visual equipment and multimedia resources. If I go to the education and skills training: OJT, previously, 2002—2007, nearly 38,000 persons benefitted; for this fiscal year to date, nearly 5,000; MuST, nearly 12,000 persons trained between 2004—2007. Today, we have 1,500 in construction; nearly 700 in hospitality, and I could go on and on with that. Schools built: Under construction, 16; under construction 12. I could go on and on with our successes and seamless education that no child should be left behind, but I said limited time.

Infrastructure and transportation: We know that if you want to grow an economy, it is important to put in, according to the pillars, an enabling business environment and sound infrastructure. So let me give you some facts. You know, they made a lot of noise about, only the interchange. Well, I want to know

something. They want us to put 12 interchanges in the rural areas? You have to be targeted; you have to be efficient; you have to make sure you get value for your money. That is the most traversed artery in Trinidad and Tobago and it impacts on thousands and thousands, if I may say, of commuters. So we get value for our money; we minimize the impact and we are efficient.

The water taxi service: I believe some of those on the other side utilize the service.

Mr. Imbert: All the time.

Hon. K. Nunez-Tesheira: All of them use it? But it does not stop there, you know. Do you know the bridges? I got an education. I am serious. When I heard the Member for Diego Martin North/East, I had even greater respect for you, Member. I am serious. Look at your track record: Bridges: 31 new bridges built under the IDB Programme, including Erin, Moruga, Caura, Royal Road, Toco Road, all in rural areas, Member of Parliament for Chaguanas West. Apart from those 30, there are other bridges under the PURE Programme, about 20. In total, 51 new bridges between 2006—2009. [*Desk thumping*] Where the money gone!

It does not end there, you know. Drainage: major walling and paving; clearing and dredging of nearly every main watercourse in this country, widening and straightening: Caparo River, Cipero River, Vistabella River; Goolcharan River; Honda River.

No wonder—Mr. Speaker, I am sure you have noticed, because I certainly have, and now the reason is clear, why you are not hearing about flooding in Central Trinidad. It is clearly because of the impact of the dredging and clearing of the watercourses. Where the money gone? [*Desk thumping*]

Roads: Over 1,000 road improvement projects, including widening of the Churchill Roosevelt Highway from Port of Spain to Trincity to six lanes; literally thousands of road paving and road strengthening, and we just raised a bond for PURE Programme of \$100 million to facilitate that. Where the money gone?

Public utilities: Listen to the Member for Chaguanas East. Because this country is on an industrialization path, 60 per cent of the power is used for industrial purposes. There are five power generating stations and a new power generating plant at the Cove Industrial Estate in Tobago. It is soon to be opened, I think, in a month or two. TGU in La Brea, they have already manufactured the turbines and the site is being cleared. Advanced metering infrastructure; 95 per cent completed; installed over 100,000 new lamps. We have revolutionized electricity generation in this country. [*Desk thumping*]

Water—again an example of hypocrisy, but it reminds me of what the Member for Couva North said, you know. He quoted from Goebbels: the bigger the lie and the more you repeat it, the more that people believe it. I see what he means, because they wanted us to believe when they said, "Water for all"—you remember that? I remember it: "Water for all" Let us see what they did with water for all. They built one desalination plant. And do you know what else they did? When they left office, after this Government cleared off the debt of WASA, as they did with Caroni (1975) Limited—not once, but twice with Caroni; after clearing off the debt—they left a debt of \$4.2 billion in WASA. Where the money gone? They need to answer that question. [*Desk thumping*]

10.30 a.m.

I can go on with health, the construction and upgrade of district facilities in Siparia, Diego Martin, Chaguanas, St. James, Carenage, Morvant and Upper Laventille. Over 1,200 persons have benefited, between October and December, from the Adult Cardio Disease Programme. I know persons who have been the recipients of cataract operations—they have reduced it to a shorter waiting period. Construction has started or is about to be started on the Point Fortin Hospital this year.

I have a list on community development. These are important. It is not only health, infrastructure and education, the culture of our people is important. Community Centres built in the last two years, 24; 32 under construction and 43 carded to start in October.

The G-pan, the refurbishment of Queen's Hall, the upgrade of the Little Carib Theatre, the Academy of the Performing Arts, almost completed, the National Steel Symphony Orchestra and, under the Office of the Prime Minister, the National Philharmonic Orchestra, the National Arts Theatre of Trinidad and Tobago commenced in July 2009: where the money gone? I think I have given enough examples. When Standard and Poor's and other rating agencies express confidence in this Government's management of the economy, it is those things that they take into account.

I want to address another point—the question of rehashing. They come here and say "same old". Everyone has his own private budget. When you are doing a personal budget, you have things for immediate monthly expenditure, but if you have ambition and vision, you want to make something of yourself. Maybe you want to open a business; maybe you want to get an education—you are getting it free here, so you have to take that off your list. The point about it is that you are going to do some planning where you want to see yourself in the future. In that context, you are going to set the budget, recalibrate it and address it with an eye on the medium, short and long term. It is a continuum; a building upon, not a rehashing.

According to law, we have to account to the people of Trinidad and Tobago and the Parliament every year as to how we have expended the allocation of resources in a fiscal period. Does that mean that your budget starts afresh? If we did that, do you know what you would tell us? Scattershot; we do not know what we are doing; every year we are coming with something new. No. We are better than that. We plan with a strategic plan called Vision 2020. That is why you call it managing an economy. An economy does not self-manage. You have to manage the economy and that is what this Government does. Just like the household does it, the national budget is managed. We have to account to the people on what we have done, where we have reached and where we are going. In that context, we have to make the necessary adjustment in the budget.

So, on that point about rehashing, if we did not have to come to the national community and account for what we have been doing and where we are going, I think that you would say that we are being irresponsible and that is one thing we will not be associated with. This PNM Government, in planning a budget, does so with a strategic vision; always our eyes on 2020.

Let us ask the other side what is its strategic vision.

Hon. Member: Get the PNM out of office.

Hon. K. Nunez-Tesheira: The point, which is the most outrageous, is that they are unapologetic about it—to get the PNM out of office. Can you imagine that is their strategic objective? So we can have another Club 88. You know what? We do not have to wait for that. Right now they are in Club 88 motion. Right now, as we speak, they are imploding. They want to run a country, but they cannot run a party. Not so, Member for Chaguanas West, Member for Tabaquite and Member for Mayaro? [*Desk thumping*] They cannot run a party, but they want to run this government.

And do you know what they do? They air all their dirty linen in public. Every Monday morning, I feel I am in a soap opera. Sometimes I cannot remember who is and who is not vexed or who made up. But I remember now what the Member for Chaguanas West said. "Yesterday is yesterday and today is today". It boggles the imagination; you cannot keep up with them. As the old people say: "Do not take flambeau to see in the dark what you can see in the light".

I will go now to address the budget theme—I cannot say it enough—with Standard and Poor's confirmation of how we are doing it. They say that you do not pelt stones at an empty mango tree. I am getting pelt plenty right here. But thank you very much.

We have indicated how we intend to manage our way through the deficit. Even Prof. Watson or any writer on economics will say that the deficit budget is not in itself the bad thing; it is what you spend it on, how you manage the deficit and whether you have a plan to come out of that; in other words, sustainable growth.

Let us look at that. We indicated in this budget how we intend to do that. One of the things we indicated was a medium-term framework, moving from a deficit position to a balanced position by 2012. We said that, for example, in moving forward, in terms of the contraction in the economy, which all countries experience now, our short-term approach is to deal with employment. Our employment levels have been the lowest they have ever been—certainly not under their administration—and we intend to maintain those levels. What is one of the major initiatives? We have the United States shovel ready and all those infrastructural programmes. We are focusing on construction.

As I say construction, does the number 462 ring a bell to us in this House? I understand, and I am subject to be corrected, at that [*Inaudible*] in which they built houses because they are so caring. Two of them, I understand, were going to the Member for Caroni East, but they had to persuade him to take back one. You know there is a saying "how it go look"? Take back one; it looking bad—not that that bothers them unduly.

I do not have to say how we are going to deal with the construction and the housing, but I want to say that in the fiscal measures we thought of everyone because we understand it is important for the Government to be more than a facilitator. We are going back to the Keynesian model of economics.

What have we done in construction? The large contractors have not been left behind. The approved property development allowance was reinstated. For the small and medium contractors, we have increased the amount of their contracts from \$1 million to \$5 million and the mobilization fee upfront to 30 per cent. We dealt with the small and medium contractor and the large contractor. What about the home owner?

They were not left behind. For mortgage company programmes, we have increased the tax exemption from \$450,000 to \$850,000. It was not by "vaps" that they can get preferential interest rates. The Central Bank informed us that the average cost of a home is between \$825,000 and \$850,000. That is why we did it. That is why I said that we are on the continuum.

Last year, we increased the exemption for stamp duty to \$850,000. Those are some of the initiatives we are pursuing in housing. It is not only housing, we gave an indication of the infrastructural programmes already undertaken and, as the

Member for Diego Martin North/East has said in his contribution—and it is in the budget—the National Highway Plan, making sure that the entire Trinidad and Tobago is connected. That could be Pillar 2, too, because it is a nurturing society. It is also a sound infrastructure and enabling business environment. We are doing it in a focused, targeted way. That is not the only thing we are doing. It is infrastructure, focusing on housing, a medium-term framework and diversification.

I really got an education when the Minister of Tourism stated that tourism contributes 10 per cent of GDP, employs directly over 33,000 persons, contributes 39 per cent of the GDP to Tobago and 31 per cent of the people in Tobago are in some way depending on tourism for employment. This year in the budget, we talked about the licensing issue with regard to Tobago and the foreign investment. We have put in place a licensing regime that is friendly to the foreign investor but, at the same time, taking into account the rights and patrimony of the people of Trinidad and Tobago; a balancing act. I have to tell you that the private sector and the THA are very pleased with that. If anybody listened to the forum on Tuesday, they would have seen that there was a representative from the tourism sector who said that.

We go on to the financial services sector which contributes 12 per cent of the GDP. Their financial assets are over \$300 billion. We have done work on the legislation, the Financial Institutions Act and the Securities Act, which they would not support us with—that is their idea of unity; when we came with the Securities Act, they did not support us. The Financial Intelligence Unit Bill and the credit union legislation—we anticipate before the end of this year to come with new credit union legislation. But do not forget the Trinidad and Tobago International Financial Centre. That is a huge diversification thrust and as we move forward into 2010, we shall hear more about that.

When we say that we need to diversify, strengthening the manufacturing sector, there was a fiscal incentive for retooling, increasing it from 75 per cent to 90 per cent, including a wear-and-tear allowance of 25 per cent, effectively getting a tax rebate. We have done something for the manufacturing sector apart from the menu and slate of incentives already in place.

The manufacturing sector, the financial services sector, the tourism sector and the energy sector: we have a finite resource and it is clearly the Government's responsibility to maximize the utilization of that resource. We have indicated that we are going to diversify further into the energy sector closer to the consumer and closer to where value is added. We have indicated the initiatives—the plastics industry: polypropylene and polyethylene. We have a plan in terms of energy. We have a new fiscal package to make the energy sector, with oil and gas, more competitive: looking at the production-sharing contracts, looking at the current tax structure, those are the initiatives.

Finally, on the diversification, I cannot not mention agriculture. Those who listened to the forum on Tuesday would have seen that the agricultural sector was widely represented. They said—I am quoting them—that for the first time agriculture was put on the front burner. They were so pleased with the initiatives that we have indicated, including the public/private sector initiative for building access roads, the impact of the packing houses, which we have indicated we are going to be putting in place, and the vexing issue of tenancies and access to financing. One Member talked about the issue of persons being able to access financing through ADB—they do not have tenancies.

We have put in place probationary tenancy arrangements that would allow persons to register and be able to access funding from the Agricultural Development Bank. That, in our understanding, is one of the major issues. There is also the input into agriculture. We have indicated that Yara is providing over 2,000 tonnes of fertilizer at cost and we intend to further those discussions to lower the cost of input. So those are the initiatives—medium-term framework, diversification, a targeted approach to infrastructure, our programmes on output budgeting.

10.45 a.m.

We indicated this year that we are going to introduce output budgeting. We are working together with international agencies and we are starting with the Ministry of Social Development and two other Ministries, which we have in mind to use a pilot project. What that does is that it really speaks to the issue of efficiency, because you are allocating resources on the basis of output, what you produce and what you deliver. We spoke about the output budgeting.

Apart from output budgeting, diversification and the short-term measures with regard to construction and housing, we also have a huge initiative in Information and communication technologies (ICT). I am going to read, lest I am accused of plagiarism, from an executive summary from the World Economic Forum. What did they have to say about ICT? The source *The Global Information Technology Report 2008—2009*.

“Information and communications technologies (ICT) has proven to be a key enabler of socioeconomic progress and development, enhancing productivity and therefore economic growth, reducing poverty and improving living standards in many ways. ICT is increasingly revolutionizing production processes, access to markets, and information sources together with social interactions.

ICT also has...”

[*Interruption*]

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. C. Imbert*]

Mr. Imbert: I wish it could be two hours.

Mr. Speaker: It could only be two hours if you address the Standing Orders.

Question put and agreed to.

Hon. K. Nunez-Tesheira: Given the constraints of time, let me finish the quotation.

“ICT also has an impact on government efficiency, fostering transparency and better communication and services with and to citizens.”

I would give you an idea: ASYCUDA World in Customs; property tax; government net; tconnect; the IHRIS Programme; the National Health Information System; Government Data Centre; Ministry of Legal Affairs, electronic birth certificates; the Companies Registration; machine-readable passports; Tradenet, the single electronic window for trade facilitation; tconnect mobile; tconnect hotline; and e-payment. Mr. Speaker that gives you an idea of our IT infrastructure development.

I want to turn to two vexing issues, I believe, that must be addressed. One is the issue of property taxes, which I want to address from two points of view. I think it has been clear by now, in spite of all the propaganda, I have to call it, that the residential taxes are based on rental value not on capital value. We have removed the differentials between some. In San Fernando, it is 10 per cent; Point Fortin, 2.5 per cent; and Port of Spain, 10 per cent. You are seeing the differentials. It is one range and one percentage, which is 3 per cent, based on your assessed rental value of your property. That, I think, is bringing equity into the system and removing the anomalies, remembering that in many parts of our country, we are paying property taxes based on 1948 valuation.

What I really want to address is the propaganda that says that this Government does not care about people who are on fixed incomes. What are they to do? I hope they are listening. I want them to hear that the current lands and buildings taxes do not make provision for a person's financial position. In fact, the relevant section for the Lands and Buildings Taxes Act only provides relief in these circumstances, when there is the destruction of a building; grievous damage or an act of God. Those are the only circumstances.

The new legislation is going to give relief to those who find themselves in a fixed income situation and because of their financial hardship, we would give relief. The legislation says that it will have regard in the deferment of the tax or

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reduction of the tax where we are satisfied, that is the Inland Revenue Authority, having regard to the impoverished condition of the owner and his inability to improve his financial position significantly by reason of age, impaired health or other special circumstances which caused undue hardship, which that owner would otherwise ensue. Even when we defer the taxes and say whoever owns the property, the taxes will be transferred to them, we even made provision that any period of deferment specified in an authorization shall be determined on the death of the owner concerned and, therefore, the tax in respect of which the deferment is authorized, shall become immediately due, provided that where the authority is satisfied having regard to the impoverished condition of the heir, that is the person inheriting the property, and its inability to improve his financial conditions significantly, that will be taken into account. So much for saying that this Government does not care.

The Land Settlement Agency: They want to masquerade, as if they care. They are the ones that passed the legislation. They are the ones that passed the Squatter Regularization Act, No. 25, 1998. There is a definition of "regularization" in the legislation and it is very clear. I am looking for it right now. It is speaking to persons who are able to get a Certificate of Comfort by January 1998. The intention is to contain the spreading of squatting by putting a date. Why then did you put a date? You have put a date because you are saying after that period, persons who do not come under that by January 01, 1998, are considered to be squatters. Do you know what they did? In their legislation, that is the regularization point, there is a definition which talks about how they would improve the infrastructure for designated areas.

Do you remember 462 houses? Let me tell you what they did; not one piece of road, box drain, water nor electricity, nothing. This Government; this caring Government, what did we do? River Estate Diego Martin; Race Course Lands, Arima; Bon Air/North, Arouca; Milton Village, Couva; Pine Settlement, Sangre Grande; Harmony Hall, Gasparillo; Cashew Gardens, Carslen Field; and Brazil Village, Arima. That is what this Government has been doing; providing those persons with the best of infrastructure.

Mr. Speaker, I want to—but of course, they are encouraging squatting. My understanding is that squatting, the illegal structures, has increased almost exponentially. That is their love for civil disobedience and encouraging lawbreaking.

Social development: They come and talk about how this Government does not care. Under social development, let me tell you what this Government has done: individual support; adult education programmes; Civilian Conservation Corps; Geriatric Adolescence Partnership Programme; and Helping You Prepare for

Employment. I am talking about family support. It continues: the Unemployment Relief Programme; public assistance grant; food debit cards; school nutrition programmes; school textbooks programme; school transportation programme; education grant; CDAPP; Senior Citizens Grant; disability grant; and subsidies on water, electricity and fuel. Do you know what? We did that with one of the lowest tax structures regimes in the hemisphere, because countries that provide that suite of social programmes have a tax structure to match it.

If you look at Iceland, Norway—[*Background music from opening of the Law Term*] Should I stop? Mr. Speaker, I do not know.

Mr. Speaker: If the music is humbugging Members, I would break for a bit. I do not get the impression it would be very continuous. That would last maybe about two or three minutes.

Hon. Members: Let us continue.

Mr. Speaker: Continue.

Hon. K. Nunez-Tesheira: Mr. Speaker, in the context of one of the lowest tax regimes, this Government is offering a suite of social programmes. [*Continuous interruption due to background music*]

Mr. Speaker: I think at this point I would have to invite—we will suspend sitting, perhaps, for about 15 minutes or thereabouts—Members to either go to the tearoom or you can stand on the balcony and observe the procession.

10:54 a.m.: *Sitting suspended.*

11:30 a.m.: *Sitting resumed.*

Hon. K. Nunez-Tesheira: Mr. Speaker, I have been informed that I have about 20 to 23 minutes, which allows me to go at a more measured pace. It is important, given the amount of work and the number of initiatives this Government has undertaken in the last seven years and the limited time, for me to give the national community a sense and sort of taste of what this Government has been doing. It is a hard job, almost impossible, but we did our best.

Given the constraints I have, I want to go back on a few points that I feel, perhaps, need reinforcing. One of them is the Land Settlement Agency. It is very easy to talk the talk, but not to walk the talk. When I speak about the Land Settlement Agency I am speaking to the fact that it is their government that passed the legislation which, by the way, spoke about containment. Their government did absolutely nothing and I gave instances of areas in which current projects are

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under way. What those projects really do is bring dignity to these persons, because they are improving the living standards of our people, consistent with this Government's Vision 2020 and pillar to nurturing a caring society. I am reminded—I was about to ask the Member for San Fernando East, the hon. Prime Minister, the year in which a number of social programmes and social development initiatives were undertaken—my memory, if it serves me right, that was 2005 when there was a slate of new programme initiatives. [*Interruption*]

Mr. Manning: 2002.

Hon. K. Nunez-Tesheira: There we are, 2003. Speaking to the infrastructure upgrade in the LSA, it is giving to these persons, our citizens, paved roads, drains, water, sewerage reticulation and electricity. I gave an indication that to date, the total expenditure on those programmes it is in the vicinity of nearly \$130 million, as at August 2009, and for this fiscal year, in the vicinity of nearly \$30 million. This is a Government that cares about its people.

Keeping to the theme, because I think our motto is: We continue to deliver because we continue to care; I think it is important that whilst we focus on infrastructural programmes and diversification initiatives, the rating agencies, the IMF, all these things, the macroeconomic indicators, show that we are doing a good job of managing the economy. It is important to speak to the man in the street and not for them to be misled that this Government is not a caring Government.

When we look at poverty, during their administration, I believe the Member for Diego Martin Central gave the figures, we cut poverty in half from a 30-something per cent to 16.7 per cent on the last occasion when this survey was done. What is very critical is that the poverty index does not include non-cash benefits. If you were to put a value to the non-cash benefits—we have done some of that looking at different household scenarios—and make certain assumptions where, at least one person in the family accesses CDAP and that the fuel subsidy of \$36 applies per household. We did some scenarios looking at a household of one, just giving a value to what the non-cash benefit would mean to the household.

The education grant: Most households have a father, mother, maybe an older person and some children at different ages. We are looking at the kinds of non-cash benefits that we enjoy. They are: free education, text books, school transportation and the nutrition programme.

The point that was made by the Minister of Education is that it is not targeted. Any child who wants a meal in the secondary and primary school can get a meal—by the way, a balanced meal.

11.35 a.m.

If you add the Food Debit Card— I had a figure of \$400, but I believe it is now \$500—and then the Senior Citizens Grant, when we tallied them up, we got a total monthly non-cash benefits to a household starting in the vicinity of \$5,000.

Now, we recognize that what we need to do is to look at the efficiency and the delivery of those services, and that is what the Minister of Social Development— consistent with this year's budget theme of “Creating Efficiency, Addressing the Challenges” and the commitment to introducing the ICT, which I spoke to would develop and improve the delivery of our services. That gives you an indication that if we were to apply the non-cash benefits and put a figure to them, including the fact that our water bills are subsidized, our electricity bills are subsidized, if you add that up and put a cash figure to that, you will find that perhaps the poverty figure would be far less than it currently says. I am confident of that. That must be understood in the context of our tax regime.

Most countries that offer that—how does a government do that? It does it by doing revenue collection through raising taxes. That is how governments do it. Those countries that do very well on the Human Development Index like the Scandinavian countries and Iceland, those countries tax regime is in the percentile of 37 per cent to 50 per cent. What is ours? We have a ceiling of 25 per cent, for those of our citizens that earn an income of \$60,000 a year and less pay zero income tax. Factor that into the equation.

Mr. Speaker, because of the limited time I had, I did not mention—in the context of the initiatives in dealing with the deficit—the issue of the Revenue Authority. That is a critical initiative, because when we looked at the medium-term framework, it is a mechanism for the Government to create more efficiency in its collection of taxes. Between Customs and Excise and Inland Revenue, they account for 95 per cent of the taxes that this Government raises and, therefore, creating efficiencies; introducing the Integrated Taxpayers System (ITPS) which is in place and working as we speak, the ASYCUDA world system in customs which was implemented—I believe this month it is going to be fully implemented—those systems together with the whole restructuring of those two entities into a Revenue Authority is going to play a significant role in dealing with our deficit moving forward.

Pension reform: We have heard about that for several years and it is well on its way. In addition, we are putting in the ICT system, and what is going to happen is that the individual public pensioner would be able to go online and see what his or her pension entitlement is on an individual basis in a secured environment.

Mr. Speaker, we have spoken before on local government reform, what it does amongst other things is create efficiency; improves the delivery of services to the people of Trinidad and Tobago; and it is consistent with our move to decentralize as we look at the patterns of settlement along the East-West Corridor.

Mr. Speaker, the vexing issue of property tax. I just want to reinforce this point, since there is this impression that this Government is uncaring. As I said and I want to reiterate it—sometimes you would read reports in the newspapers and you see the same thing as if you had not said it—that under the current lands and buildings taxes, there is no relief for persons who are in financial hardship. It is for acts of God like fire and so on. I would persevere on this occasion. There is no recognition of financial hardship.

This property tax legislation, because we are a caring Government and because we understood those facts, it is in the legislation. We go beyond the person who is actually living in the house and in that circumstance, even on the transfer and on inheritance, if the person who inherits the property finds himself in that situation, this Government is prepared either to suspend or reduce the level of tax for that person. Is that the act of a callous government? Mr. Speaker, not at all.

Mr. Speaker, because I had so much information and I was pressed for time, I was talking about education and I did not have the opportunity to speak to the former Minister of Tertiary Education, but I know when he contributed to the budget debate he mentioned the issue of accessing financing for persons who are undertaking tertiary education. He made the point that in their administration they had something called Dollar for Dollar. According to him they are very good—what was the statement the Member for Couva North made about Goebbels. He quoted from Goebbels. He said the bigger the lie the more people believe it. I think he said something to that effect. Well, I think they have taken that lesson to heart, because the way they promoted Dollar for Dollar, you would think that thousands of persons accessed it. Remember you had to have a dollar to get a dollar. If I remember what the Member was saying, he said 3,000 persons benefited. Let us look at our programme GATE—

Mr. Imbert: It is 250,000 persons.

Hon. K. Nunez-Testheira: No. I do not believe you. Mr. Speaker, the Member for Diego Martin North/East said 250,000 persons have benefited from the GATE programme. [*Desk thumping*] They can talk the talk, but they cannot walk it. The UNC boasted about a rate of turnover to tertiary education, and at that time in 2000 it was 8 per cent. Do you know what it is today under this administration? It is

over 42 per cent. [*Desk thumping*] That is the commitment of no one is to be left behind, of seamless education at work. We are doing it in a context of building systems and putting quality controls through the Accreditation Council and the National Training Agency.

I want to make one other point before I make my closing comments and that is the issue with regard to the deficit and how we are managing the deficit. I think it is important to deal with this issue. Now, we have spoken about the medium-term framework and that is critical. The medium term framework speaks to the way in which we are going to move from a deficit to a balanced budget. Now, I do not know that they had any plan like that. They went into a deficit year after year. This is according to the information we have. We have a programme and a plan. An important thing with deficit financing is how you finance the deficit and what you spend the money on in the context of sustainable growth.

I want to say to the national community that the moneys that we are going to be using in terms of the expenditure that we have beyond the revenue projected for this year are for the capital programmes. That is the engine of growth. That is our infrastructure programmes, whether it is information technology, roads, highways, water or electricity, we are creating an enabling business environment; a sound infrastructure.

Mr. Speaker, the \$7 billion set aside for capital programmes, \$3 billion is coming out of the Consolidated Fund; \$4 billion out of the Infrastructure Development Fund of which \$1,150,000,000 is being appropriated for this year's budget. Do you know where the other \$3 billion is coming from? It is from the unspent balances in the Infrastructure Development Fund. Is this a Government that wastes money? How could we have unspent balances if we were not saving well and managing the people's business well?

In addition, we are going out into the local capital market and raising \$2 billion. We know that the current situation is flush with money in our local financial markets. We are going to do it in a very structured way through the issuance of bonds. So, we are going to manage our debt profile in a structured and responsible way as we move on. Mr. Speaker, I believe that I have tried to look at how we are going to manage the deficit; what we are spending the money on; and the measures that we are going to put in place to bring us a balanced budget which I believe is going to be on or before 2012.

Mr. Speaker, someone reminded me before I came here this morning that last year what they found particularly memorable, from their point of view, was when I commented on the speech of the budget response of the Member for Siparia

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which was replete with all kinds of Shakespearian quotations, all kinds of semantics and hyperboles that they wanted to indulge in only form, no substance. They reminded me that I had said on the occasion "quote after quote after quote". I want to say that today is: "stroke after stroke after stroke", but as the hon. Member for San Fernando East and Prime Minister of this country reminded me, he said it is "vote after vote after vote". [*Desk thumping*]

We do not indulge in flights of fancy or as the Member for Siparia would want us believe or flights of fantasy. We are well grounded in what we say. I want to end my contribution by saying—as we are always responsible—that these are indeed challenging economic times.

I want to remind the national community that they should have confidence in this Government. Why do I say that? It was the decision of the PNM administration in the 1970s to monetize our natural gas, hence the Point Lisas Industrial Estate—ammonia, methanol and urea. Although they took office shortly after with Trains 1—4, it was this Prime Minister, the visionary leader, who was behind the Atlantic LNG Plant, the first in 28 years.

As I indicated before, when the manufacturing sector opposed the idea of globalization and the opening up of Trinidad and Tobago to the reality of globalization and felt that it would have been the end of the manufacturing sector, it was this Prime Minister in the previous administration who championed that cause, and today the manufacturing sector contributes significantly to our GDP.

With respect to the floating of the dollar, when I was doing my MBA, Mr. Dookeran—he did not say who did it—actually admitted that the Government's decision to float the dollar was a very visionary decision to ensure that we did not find ourselves in the unfortunate position of countries like Jamaica.

As I end my contribution this morning. I want to say to the people of Trinidad and Tobago to judge us by our track record and not on the "ol' talk"; judge us by the confidence that the international rating agencies have placed in us. This Government is a caring and responsible Government with a strategic plan to transform this country into First World status. We are confident that under—this is not an overstatement—the visionary leadership of the Prime Minister of this country and who was the Minister of Finance at the time and up until 2007, but we are confident that we will achieve our 2020 Vision objective on or before 2020. [*Desk thumping*]

For the people of Trinidad and Tobago, in arriving at that 2020 Vision objective of developed country status, key to that—we never lose sight of that—is the love that we have for the people of Trinidad and Tobago. That is why the

motto of this Government as expressed in education and housing—as I say housing, one of my colleagues reminded that I should not have said 462 houses, because it is 461. I said, "Oh, you know what it is? They took back one from the Member for Caroni East." [*Desk thumping*] This is true. This is what I was told.

Mr. Speaker, I do not want to digress from this moment. This is a Government that cares; this is a Government that is committed to the people of Trinidad and Tobago and we want the national community who is listening to us this morning to hold hands with us and to have confidence in this Government, because we believe that we have earned that confidence. So, in closing, I want to end with our motto which we believe in; we continue to deliver because we continue to care.

I beg to move. [*Desk thumping*]

Question put and agreed to.

Bill accordingly read a second time.

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

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, the House will now go into Finance Committee. At this point, I must ask all strangers to leave the Chamber. You would be informed when you are permitted to reenter. So, all strangers must now leave the Chamber at this point in time.

Bill and Estimates committed to Finance Committee.

11.50 a.m.: *House resolved itself into Finance Committee.*

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

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

House resumed.

Bill reported, with amendment, read the third time and passed.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, the sitting of the House is now suspended for lunch. We will resume at 3.00 p.m.

1.49 p.m.: *Sitting suspended.*

3.00 p.m.: *Sitting resumed.*

RELATED MOTIONS

The Minister of Finance (Hon. Karen Nunez-Tesheira): Mr. Speaker, before I move the first Motion standing in my name, I seek the leave of the House to debate along with this matter Motions Nos. 2, 3 and 4 on the Order Paper which relate to the same subject.

Agreed to.

PROVISIONAL COLLECTION OF TAXES ORDER

The Minister of Finance (Hon. Karen Nunez-Tesheira): Mr. Speaker,

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

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

And whereas the Provisional Collection of Taxes Order, 2009, made under section 3 of the Act, provided for the variation of taxes in the written laws mentioned in the said Order to the extent and in the manner set out therein, for the purpose of raising revenue to meet the expenditure specified in the Bill entitled "An Act to provide for the service of Trinidad and Tobago for the financial year ending on the 30th day of September, 2009":

And whereas it is expedient to confirm the said Order:

Be it resolved that the Provisional Collection of Taxes Order, 2009, be confirmed.

Mr. Speaker, as agreed, we would be debating the four Motions. The four Motions treat with the issue of revenue collection, a mechanism for the Government to increase its taxes. I think the focus of these increases, whether it is alcohol or tobacco and in the case of the transfer tax for used vehicles, the thinking behind it—particularly with the tobacco and the alcohol—are more looking in, consistent with this Government's pillar No. 2: "Creating a Nurturing Society". One of the things that this Government recognizes is its responsibility to

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the people of Trinidad and Tobago and to use the measures available to it to assist and facilitate persons in that regard.

The first Motion deals with the motor vehicles transfer tax. Those rates came into effect by Act No. 3 of 1994, in particular, section 19(A) of the Motor Vehicles and Road Traffic Act, Chap. 48:50. As a consequence of the effluxion of time, the tax has become disproportionate to the increased value of vehicles. That is about 15 years. The first Motion, as indicated by section 3(5) of the Provisional Collection of Taxes Act, we have 21 days within which to bring a resolution to this House with regard to the proposed variation of those taxes, and failure to do so, according to section 3(5) of the Act, if it is not confirmed, it means that Order will cease to have effect. The Order to which I speak, which is Motion No. 1, refers to the increase in the motor vehicles transfer tax which took effect on September 07, 2009 and will cease to have effect by September 28, 2009 if we did not bring a resolution to this House to confirm the Order.

Mr. Speaker, with respect to the first Motion, I am going to be brief in relation to the four Motions. The first Order is really treating with the motor vehicles transfer tax to ensure that the Order does not lapse and that we follow the procedural requirement as set out in the legislation.

The thinking behind it is that there has not been an increase in over 15 years and, therefore, when we look at the tax structure in relation to the value of cars, it does not reflect that reality. I am sure the other side is quite familiar with those kinds of taxes. I know that the Member for Couva North may have had an understandable lapse of memory when he said that they did not increase any taxes. As I indicated to them, it was that same classification of taxes that was increased under their administration and, perhaps, for the very same reason. That deals with Motion No. 1.

Mr. Speaker, Motions Nos. 2 and 3 deal with alcohol. Again, we speak to creating a nurturing society. Perhaps one would say to what extent this would increase the revenue collection for this Government. We know that the amount in the grand scheme of things may not be that large, but it is in our pillar No. 2.

We know that in Trinidad and Tobago, one of the major causes of fatalities—the mortality rate in Trinidad and Tobago has a lot to do with non-communicable diseases; another way to put it, lifestyle diseases.

In fact, the vast majority of our chronic non-communicable diseases like obesity, heart diseases, cardiac diseases and cancers—major contributors to those diseases are tobacco and alcohol.

Mr. Speaker, perhaps I should take all three together because they are all dealing with lifestyles. We are not only talking about mortality rate; we are not talking only about the question of the death rate and how it impacts on that, but we are all too familiar with the socio-economic impact of alcohol and tobacco. Mr. Speaker, anything done in excess—I am sure the Members on the other side would agree on the point that alcohol and cigarettes—I do not think that you should smoke cigarettes. So, I do not even want to go there with cigarettes. We agree—I see the Member for Caroni East is agreeing with me on the point. We recognize that it has implications for the family. I am sure that many persons here know the impact of alcohol on families. I am not even talking about suicide rates, but I am talking about the quality of family life; not only for the individual and what it does for his own mortality rate, but how it impacts on the quality of life.

This Government, in its commitment to creating a nurturing society has done a number of things, and one of them is the Tobacco Bill which was introduced into this House. It was sent to a joint select committee and I believe it lapsed and it is to be re-laid in this honourable House.

Mr. Speaker, it is not only legislation, but also education and health promotion. The Minister of Health has informed me that there is direct mailing to homes informing citizens of the abuses and dangers of alcohol and cigarettes. They are not only mailing the information, but it is on facebook and twitter, trying to reach the young people. We know that an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure. When I speak of an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure, this is why the Government in dealing with the issue of lifestyle diseases, we look at the primary care facilities. There are over 100 primary care facilities providing health care professionals, including increasing the number of doctors by 119; 450 nurses and the training programme for over 1,500 new nurses. We propose to extend the hours in the communities. This is called community outreach.

Mr. Speaker, when we debate these Motions this afternoon, specifically Motion No. 2 which deals with increasing the customs duties to the amount of 30 per cent under Motion No. 2; Motion No. 3, which deals with excise, which is domestic duty by 15 per cent; and then we have cigarettes, increasing the domestic tax; all these initiatives in Motions Nos. 2, 3 and 4 speak to the Government's commitment to doing its part in its many ways including fiscal measures.

So, whilst we acknowledge it is a tax measure, it is really part of a commitment to assisting the people of Trinidad and Tobago in a variety of ways to improve their life choices, at the end of the day, extending the mortality rate. Your life is important to us and most important the quality of life.

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Mr. Speaker, I would not say much on this. All these Motions, as in the case of the first Motion, will lapse within 21 days by September 24, 2009, if there is no resolution in this honourable House. The intention behind bringing these Orders to this honourable House is with the intent that these Motions and all of these measures—these revenue increasing measures—will take effect and not cease to have effect. We are doing that in a timely manner and consistent with our commitment to the people of Trinidad and Tobago.

Mr. Speaker, I beg to move.

Question proposed.

Mr. Speaker: Let me just remind Members that they are at liberty to debate Motions Nos. 2, 3, and 4 at the same time.

Mr. Vasant Bharath (*St. Augustine*): Mr. Speaker, thank you. I do not believe a word of it. [*Desk thumping*] In fact, these are nothing more than revenue raising measures. As my colleague, the Member for Diego Martin West, stated and I want to quote him. He said:

“De money done. 'We are now talking about raising revenue by taxation, chirrup' 'chirrup', household by household, lands and buildings taxes, cigarette and rum taxes, as revenue raising measures.”

Mr. Speaker, these are the words of the hon. Member for Diego Martin West who, by his own admission, is a very proud and long-standing Member of the PNM. It is the same sentiments that have been echoed up and down this country—of course, on this side of the parliamentary benches over the last few weeks.

Mr. Speaker, after having squandered almost \$300 billion, this Government has come to this Parliament to extract its pound of flesh from a population that is already bruised, battered and frightened.

3.15 p.m.

The \$300 billion, effectively, has done nothing to have improved the quality of life of the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago. I just want to refer to the budget for a moment—because the hon. Minister of Finance wound up today—which really was quite a faceless, visionless document, bereft of any original thought, bringing back memories of the old days, of the dark days of 1980s, when Prime Minister Chambers was leading the PNM Government.

Unfortunately, yet again—I say unfortunately, for the people of Trinidad and Tobago—this Government has once again maxed out the country's credit card

and left a debt or will be leaving debts for our children to pay. It is not the first time, as I said. I would like to crave your indulgence just to talk a bit from a historical perspective of the record of this Government, not necessarily this Government, but the PNM administration.

Mr. Imbert: Mr. Speaker, Standing Order 36(1), relevance.

Mr. Speaker: Well, the Member for Diego Martin North/East is raising a Standing Order relating to relevance, and there is some relevance in what he is raising. May I encourage you to stick to— Whatever you are saying, couch it around the terms of the orders before you.

Mr. V. Bharath: Mr. Speaker, effectively, what I will be attempting to show is that this Government, having maxed out the country's credit card, is now going to the population to further dig into their pockets to collect taxes for the financial mismanagement that they have displayed over the last seven years.

When Prime Minister Chambers took over the reign of Government in 1981, he inherited a treasury that was being depleted very rapidly, this, despite the fact that Trinidad and Tobago had just enjoyed eight years of prosperity, as a result of an unexpected boom and an unexpected increase in oil prices. In fact, the then Jamaican Prime Minister, Manley, had cause to refer to it as the moneys having passed through Trinidad and Tobago like a dose of salts.

The brutal reality was that the PNM administration then, allowed \$100 million to pass through the coffers of this country, leading effectively to bankruptcy and leading us into the arms of the International Monetary Fund. This is what the incoming Prime Minister in 1987, ANR Robinson, had to say.

Mr. Manning: What did he say?

Mr. V. Bharat: Prime Minister, you know, you were here, but I will remind you. He said:

“In 25 years we have failed to develop an economy sufficiently diversified and sufficiently resilient to absorb or even cushion the shocks caused by periodic crises on the international oil market sectors. Sectors such as agriculture, manufacturing, tourism and services of various kinds have remained relatively insignificant, therefore, potential for development almost untapped. On top of it all, we have been the luckiest recipients of the most bountiful capital bonanza imaginable, over the past 10 years, led however, by an unbelievable improvident government, we must conclude in popular language that we have blown it.”

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The words of Prime Minister ANR Robinson in 1987. [*Crosstalk*]

Dr. Moonilal: "Why yuh didn't stand up—"

Mr. Manning: Let him finish. I am sorry, finish the quotation, please.

Mr. V. Bharath: Just to finish it. He said:

"The salient facts are as follows:

All of the fiscal savings generated during the years of the oil bonanza have been exhausted. The Treasury is not just empty, there is a \$1.2 billion bill still to be paid from 1986."

Mr. Manning: Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. Member for St. Augustine, for giving way. What he may not be aware of is that the then Prime Minister went on to subscribe to the provisions of the manifesto of NAR of 1987, and argued that the approach that the PNM before had taken, in terms of mega projects, was an unsustainable approach and therefore, they would change the whole paradigm—as they put it—and they would develop new subsectors in the energy sector, viability of which was based on the domestic market. That was the full argument.

The records would show that by 1989—it took them three years to realize the error of their ways—we had not one investment in the energy sector. They tried to reverse the position by 1989, but it was too late. It took us one full year, after we got into Government in 1991, to bring Trinidad and Tobago back on the radar screens of energy companies around the world. That is the total story. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. V. Bharath: Mr. Speaker, I would have thought that Prime Minister Robinson's statement: "The Treasury is not just empty, there is a \$1.2 billion bill still to be paid", was a matter of fact. I would not have thought Prime Minister Robinson would have stood here in this Parliament and misrepresented the Treasury's coffers. Nevertheless, Prime Minister Manning was here then and I was not.

Mr. Speaker, I listened in anguish as the Minister of Finance talked about the punitive measures—that we are here to discuss—being introduced in the 2009/2010 budget, my mind flashed back to those stories of the 1980s that I just talked about, and I cringed, because I sensed a sense of a classic and frightening repeat of the dose of salts era that Prime Minister Manley had spoken about. I sense the dawn of another era of moving from prosperity to poverty and from riches to rags yet again. The horrifying truth is that Trinidad and Tobago today, is now experiencing the same thing that we went through in 1986. It is like a dose of salts, Part Two, written, starring, directed by another bungling PNM administration. [*Desk thumping*]

As soon as the Minister of Finance completed her budget presentation, I rushed down to the parliamentary library, and dug up the budget speeches of the late 1980s, to show, to look and see exactly whether this Government had learnt anything from its past experiences of how previous governments had run and how previous PNM governments had run. It was very telling, because it would appear that they have learnt absolutely nothing from the experiences of their predecessors. In the 1983 budget address, Mr. Chambers came to the Parliament and very solemnly told the nation:

“The fact is that Trinidad and Tobago is on the threshold of a very difficult period.”

The same things that the Minister of Finance has been telling us.

“Growth, buoyant revenues and a high level of activity in the domestic economy has been based on petroleum, but Mr. Speaker, an oil dependent growth process requires an ever increasing level of oil revenues to sustain its momentum. Regretfully this is not the forecast.”

What he effectively said was that the oil boom had ended and Trinidad and Tobago had effectively plunged almost immediately into dark and gloomy days. He acknowledged that the bounties that had been bestowed upon Trinidad and Tobago had not been properly utilized by the then government, because they had not divested the economy, there were no national savings. He went on to explain of course, and it came to pass, that there was going to be significant unemployment, inflationary difficulties in the economy; all of which came to pass, Mr. Prime Minister, as you would remember.

That was the theme of all of the budgets during that 1980s period which, of course, led, in 1986, to the political demise of Prime Minister Chambers. As an aside, I remember that the hon. Member for San Fernando East also fought in those elections and his seat was saved only by the goodwill of a newly elected government, that declined to have a recount. [*Crosstalk*] [*Laughter*]

Mr. Manning: Mr. Speaker, I am not allowing the distinguished Member for St. Augustine to get away with that. We won fair and square, and the records will show that an attempted skullduggery did not work, where in one instance, ballots were put in a box without being detached from the stub—that was a stroke—and eventually the thing was resolved in such a way that whoever played it they could not win; they lost and they lost. [*Laughter*]

Mr. V. Bharath: I am not sure if the NAR government ever apologized to the nation for that error, political judgment. Just continuing on. I want to just preface

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what I am going to say here, because I want to make a direct comparison to what is taking place here. In the 1984 budget presentation, Prime Minister Chambers told the nation that the foreign reserve of the country had fallen badly and that our reserves had almost vanished, and extremely hard times were upon us again.

In fact, Mr. Speaker, the then PNM Government had wiped out—and this is the important point—19.5 months of import cover. So, today when they speak of having 11 months of import cover, we are cushioned and the country is safe as far as import is concerned, in a very short space of time, 19 and a half months of import cover had been wiped out.

Mr. Imbert: Mr. Speaker—

Mr. Speaker: Let him develop his point.

Mr. Imbert: Let him develop his point? Okay.

All of this comes back to revenue raising measures and to the handling of the economy. In addition, the Government is very quick to talk about our level of savings in Trinidad and Tobago, which stands currently, I believe, at around \$18 billion or \$19 billion in the Heritage and Stabilisation Fund; in a budget that is close to \$50 billion, that represents about 35 per cent of savings to revenues.

The Prime Minister might remember that the budget in 1980 was \$5.4 billion, and the savings in what was then called the Special Funds for Long Term Development, totalled \$4.4 billion. Effectively in those days, savings to revenue were actually 81 per cent. It is now at 35 per cent and they are saying we are comfortable. Within the space of three years those savings were wiped out completely and totally. So, to suggest that 35 per cent is an adequate or sufficient amount, you need to look at that in context of how quickly PNM administrations of the past, have spent these savings.

After just a few years of Trinidad becoming what many people termed "Arabs of the Caribbean", the then Prime Minister started to impose taxes on the population, very similar to what we are doing now—and that is the point I am attempting to make—imposed purchase taxes on everything, from pet foods to polishes, from seasonings to sauces.

3.30 p.m.

They brought in the health surcharge; the price of fuel went up, driver's licences went up, everything was being taxed. You had to pay a tax if you were travelling abroad—I do not remember what it was called.

Dr. Gopeesingh: Departure tax.

Mr. V. Bharath: Departure tax. Lands and buildings taxes went up; subsidies to Caroni Limited were removed so that the price of sugar went up; even postage stamps went up. They were not immune from these increases, and a tax was also imposed on video tapes. For family enjoyment you were actually taxed as a result. Nuisance taxes galore were inflicted on the nation and a population that was now reeling and having to pay for the same level of mismanagement that we are going through now, they went through it then.

All rings a bell, Mr. Speaker. It was exactly the same scenario then as it is now, and of course, there was the same myriad of promises that we hear today, the same promises then. The Government then promised to review the Local Government Reform. Local Government Reform was a promise made in 1984, and I will just quote quickly—Prime Minister Chambers at the time said they were doing it to encourage greater citizen participation and the devolution of authority in the process of government.

Twenty-five years ago, we are still waiting. Twenty-five years ago same promises. He spoke of plans for tourism, he spoke of plans to improve the public utilities and he spoke of the diversification of Caroni. He offered the same promises with regard to the perennial problem of diversifying the economy and he spoke about the same pledge to diversifying the economy. These same promises!

The point of it all is, we, as a very small country, bestowed very richly with a mineral resource, had a golden opportunity to show the world what we could do; how we could chart our own destiny and how we could motivate others to be like us. But in his, the words of Mr. Robinson in his '87 budget, "We blew it". But you know, sometimes lightning does strike twice and it did for Trinidad and Tobago. A very few short years ago we were very fortunate again that we were—bestowed, or not bestowed; we always had it—able to benefit from the increase in energy prices yet again, about five to six years ago. But, unfortunately one of the cruelest and harshest acts of fate, the economic bounty, once again, fell into the laps of another slash and burn PNM Government. [*Interruption*]

On the basis of what was then referred to as "spiritual and moral values", after one of their very own had the temerity to admit that "all ah we tief"—You remember that? In fact, only very recently one of his counterparts was bestowed a national honour for national development.

Mr. Manning: [*Inaudible*]

Mr. V. Bharath: No, I am not suggesting that for a moment, Prime Minister. But I would not be surprised if it is only a matter of time before the former

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Minister of Education and former deputy chairman—I believe—of the PNM—the same gentleman—is also bestowed with a similar PNM badge of honour. But we wait and see; after all, that is quintessential PNM leadership style.

Hon. Member: Oh yes.

Dr. Moonilal: The "disorder of Trinidad and Tobago".

Mr. V. Bharath: Mr. Speaker, what we have is a situation where the Government has claimed responsibility for all of the good times, but they now want to deny any responsibility whatsoever for the bad times we find ourselves in.

This is a Government that has spent in the last seven years—more than every single Government from 1956 to 2001 put together—more than \$300 billion. It is more money than every single Government from 1956 to 2001 put together. Over \$300 billion! This is a staggering amount, and unfortunately, the price of that is going to be paid, not by the incompetent Ministers who have put us in this mess, but would be paid by honest, law-abiding citizens; families and businesses up and down this country. [*Desk thumping*]

This is exactly and precisely what these taxes are meant to do. [*Interruption*] That is exactly the purpose of it, to tax individuals and businesses for PNM's reckless fiscal mismanagement of the economy and for its naked corruption over the last seven years. The people of Trinidad and Tobago and our children are going to have to pay for it and we have seen the start of it now.

The budget that was delivered last week was also delivered against the backdrop of a number of social problems taking place in Trinidad and Tobago and the deteriorating standards of living of a large part of the country. We have blown \$300 billion and we are about to impose further taxes on the population. But let us look briefly at some of the aspects of life in modern Trinidad and Tobago, a country where we have a group of bureaucrats—I would say—in the hierarchy of the PNM who insist we are heading towards a 2020 development of this country and to developed-nation status. [*Interruption*]

Mr. Speaker, I do not believe that anyone has a problem with paying additional taxes if he or she gets the goods and services applicable to it. [*Desk thumping*] I do not think anyone has a problem with that. But it is very difficult for an individual or a citizen of this country—law-abiding citizen—to dig deeper into his or her pockets to pay additional taxes—whether it be for alcohol, cigarettes or to transfer a motor vehicle; any of these punitive taxes or property taxes, of course now, which is a major issue—when they see the kind of

expenditure that is taking place—which in their opinion is major squandermania—and when they see the wanton waste that is taking place. When they listened to the contribution of the Member for Diego Martin West last week they must have been horrified, they must have been shocked, because we on this side have been telling the population the same thing for the last seven years. Now one of their own has unearthed and has come out and actually talked about it.

A respected international agency, very recently, did a study and reported that over 200,000 of our citizens in this land of plenty were living on the equivalent of TT \$14 a day. *[Interruption]* That means a number of our brothers and sisters are unable to put a proper meal on their table at the end of the day. Forget other services like health care and anything else, they are unable to even put food on their tables and this is why a population eventually rises up, because there comes a point in time when they are unable to take any more. We are very fortunate in Trinidad and Tobago that we have a relatively passive population.

Dr. Moonilal: They only jump up for Carnival.

Mr. V. Bharath: We have a relatively passive population, but I believe there is a point in time now where people are totally and absolutely fed up of what is taking place, because nothing is filtering down for the average man on the street.

When a government comes to the Parliament to pass legislation to tax the citizens of this country, but on the other hand they spend \$1 billion or more on a hemispheric conference that the population cannot see any tangible benefits for—the Prime Minister may see it and he may perceive that it is a long-term benefit, but the population has not—and when the population hears that having spent \$1 billion and seeing the outcry as a result of having spent that money, the Government attempts to embark on spending another \$500 million on another conference later on this year, they become very angry and they become very disenchanted. You will recall—

Mr. Imbert: Mr. Speaker, Standing Order 36(1). I do not mind the Member getting a little flexibility, but we are talking about alcohol and tobacco taxes here.

Mr. Speaker: Well, again, the Leader of Government Business has a point. You must relate all of what you are saying to the imposition of the taxes as set out in the Orders.

Mr. V. Bharath: Mr. Speaker, I would have thought that was very obvious. *[Interruption]* It is very obvious! *[Crosstalk]* We are talking about taxes. We are talking about raising taxes. *[Crosstalk]*

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Mr. Speaker: Order!

Mr. V. Bharath: We are talking about raising taxes and that is what I am talking about, the payment of taxes; why people are angry because of the taxes that they are having to pay when they do not get the services that they deserve and when moneys are being funnelled elsewhere or in their perception it is being funnelled elsewhere. That is what we are talking about here today. Maybe the Member for Diego Martin North/East would like me to stick to puncheon rum, or Old Oak, or the different brands available; or du Maurier and Benson & Hedges.

Hon. Member: "Babash."

Mr. V. Bharath: Mr. Speaker, the point is, I will mention du Maurier ever so often. All right? [*Laughter*]

So when a population sees that a government has spent \$200 million on two cruise ships for a fortnight to host guests to drink Old Oak and smoke du Maurier, [*Laughter and crosstalk*] they become very angry. Particularly when you have a situation where school children and school teachers have to sell "toolum", pepper sauce and "sugarcake" to be able to pay light bills in Trinidad and Tobago, it makes them very angry.

Mr. Manning: [*Inaudible*]

Mr. V. Bharath: Yes, you did not read that story, Mr. Prime Minister? [*Interruption*] Well, you will tell us when you speak.

Again, the Samaroo family from my colleague's constituency in Oropouche East, how are they going to feel about paying these taxes when last night they had to sleep—probably—on a wet floor yet again, after this Government has spent \$19 million on a 45-minute extravaganza for the same function held a few months ago? How is that Samaroo family going to feel? How will the parents of the toddler who was denied an operation abroad feel about paying these taxes on cigarettes and alcohol? How are they going to feel when they have read that the Prime Minister has spent \$3.2 million on buying drapes and curtains for his house? Not just a normal house, a palace costing \$300 million with moat and all, where I suppose he will be using to entertain and serve alcohol and cigarettes.

Mr. S. Panday: Smoke that, smoke that. [*Laughter*]

Mr. V. Bharath: I do not know if many people in Trinidad know what a moat is, but I have these visions of the Prime Minister on the turret on the top, suitably armoured, beckoning down to SAUTT, "Pull up the drawbridge, pull up the drawbridge". [*Laughter*] Probably expecting a rebellion from the citizens. [*Laughter and crosstalk*]

Mr. Manning: Mr. Speaker, that is why I have extended an invitation to hon. Members opposite, so they could come and see for themselves instead of continuing to rely on hearsay. But the fact that they have chosen not to accept the invitations suggests that they are quite comfortable spreading misinformation in the national community. They are quite comfortable doing that, but just for the record, I wish it to be known once again that the Prime Minister's Residence and Diplomatic Centre was constructed at a cost of \$148 million. Okay? [*Crosstalk*]

3.45 p.m.

Mr. V. Bharath: Mr. Speaker, I do not want to be too frivolous, because these are serious issues that concern and confront the population of Trinidad and Tobago and the ordinary man in the street on a daily basis. How does the population feel having again, to dig into their pockets? In fact, because of the additional cost having to buy less cigarettes and less alcohol for their little comforts in life, when the Government proceeds to spend \$700 million on the scandalous Tarouba Stadium, which the Minister by his own admission in Parliament stood up here and said, he was not able to tell us what the final cost was going to be, and when it was going to finish, how does the ordinary citizen feel when he hears this? Does he not begrudge the Government to have to pay any additional taxes?

The property owners who are being now hit with this property tax that I am sure will have to come to this Parliament for ratification—which is equivalent in a number of cases to almost a second mortgage to a lot of people—how do they feel to have to pay this tax, when you have a situation, where as Dr. Rowley talked about last week, a company in Trinidad and Tobago, a few days old was granted a contract for \$368 million to put up a building in Port of Spain, which they had no expertise for? How does the ordinary man feel about those things?

Mr. Speaker, a further \$11 million is being spent on the Prime Minister's residence, according to reports. How do the people of St. Augustine, my constituency, feel to know that the infrastructure in certain parts of St. Augustine is so poor that you would not believe that you are living in Trinidad and Tobago when you go to see it. I want to mention two of them: the Blackman Ravine, for example. I mention that specifically because the Minister of Finance mentioned that work had been progressing on the Blackman Ravine, and the Minister of Works and Transport will know about this. The Blackman Ravine has needed attention for over 35 years. Finally, the Government got around to doing some work on it last year, and within a few short months work on the Blackman Ravine was stopped, infant since December last year.

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When we had the floods a couple of weeks ago—*[Interruption]*

Mr. Imbert: Mr. Speaker, again I ask, what is the relevance of that to alcohol and tobacco taxes?

Mr. Speaker: No, I get the distinct impression that the Member was about to say that the increase in taxes that we are about to impose, should be used to—*[Interruption]* But you need to get to there quickly.

Mr. V. Bharath: Mr. Speaker, that is exactly what I have been saying throughout my—*[Interruption]*

Mr. S. Panday: That is exactly what he is saying, Mr. Speaker. *[Laughter]*

Mr. V. Bharath: The floods that took place, that destroyed many homes, destroyed agricultural produce, destroyed property, was even worse than before the Blackman Ravine had work done on it. Worse! The problem is that work has stopped since December of last year, there is a dispute between NIDCO and the contractor, but the people of St. Augustine are the ones who will suffer and I asked the question today in the committee stage, as to whether or not there was any recourse to the Ministry. It was very clear that there was none. So what has happened, is that you have people of the constituency who would be suffering and are now being asked to pay more for their du Maurier; when they are going into the rum shop, *[Desk thumping]* Carib gone up to \$9. Poor people cannot even afford that.

Dr. Gopeesingh: And Stag, the man's beer, gone up to \$9.

Mr. V. Bharath: Mr. Speaker, let me show you just one more. I have a photograph—hon. Prime Minister, would you look at this because it is very important. I think it is important. This is a picture—

Mr. Speaker: Is bottles I am seeing there?

Mr. V. Bharath: Carib bottles floating in the drain. Cigarettes packs and Carib bottles. This is a picture of a drain in Orange Grove Road. This drain has been like this for 23 years. I have been bounced from pillar to post, from the regional corporation to the Minister of Local Government, who admitted that her hands were tied effectively. All over. To RuDeCott, I went to see the CEO. I have been round the houses five or six times. I got sent from this department, to that department and I am talking about visiting personally. These are the people who you are asking to pay these additional taxes. These are the people who, when they see the extravagance taking place all around them and they are unable to get a simple thing like a drain cleaned, it is not a good reflection on us as politicians in Trinidad and Tobago.

So all I am suggesting is that people do not mind paying taxes if they believe that the quality of their lives has been improved in some way and that their communities would be improved, and that possibly even for the poorer members of the society, that we are building a future for Trinidad and Tobago that we can all be proud of.

Mr. Speaker, what I was attempting to show there is that every government has a responsibility to determine certain priorities. The priorities of a government, any government, cannot be to build these mega structures to the detriment of the ordinary man in the street, because ultimately they are the eventual arbiters as to whether we stay here or whether we go there and whether they stay there or whether they come here. These are the facts of life.

You know, Mr. Speaker, this issue of raising taxes is a very fundamental issue to most people in most countries of the world. Sometimes people perceive it to be an attack on them personally. People guard their moneys very, very seriously and very carefully. Very jealously, they guard their money, particularly those of course, who are on fixed incomes; particularly those whose options may be limited, they guard their finances very jealously. Therefore, it is for us as politicians, to ensure that they believe that their moneys are being well spent when they part with them.

There is something I want to put to rest that the Minister of Finance talked about earlier—and it comes back again to managing the economy effectively—when she talked about the regular deficits that the UNC government had gotten itself into over a period of years. I just want to quote because I was able to run down to the library quickly after she said it and get this from the IMF 2001 Article IV Consultation—Staff Report, and this is what the IMF in 2001 had to say:

“Since the mid-1990s Trinidad and Tobago's economic performance has been amongst the strongest in Latin America and the Caribbean. Growth has accelerated, inflation has declined, and the balance of payments strengthened. GDP per capita rose by about 4 per cent a year, and there has been progress in most social indicators. Confidence in the economy is high, and the country has benefited from an investment grade rating for its foreign debt since 1999...

Much of the above-mentioned achievements have been due to sound policies—in particular, generally balanced budgets, exchange rates stability, and effective liquidity management.”

When you balance your budgets and you run proper, responsible and mature fiscal programmes, you do not then need to go back to the population to borrow money, which is what this is, extracting more money from the population. So when the

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Minister talks about UNC running budget deficits over those years, either she got her facts wrong or she is effectively suggesting that the IMF is not telling the truth. But, that was a quote from, as I said, the IMF Staff Report of 2001. I do not need to go into the achievements of UNC, that is well known, but the point is that it is perceived by a large majority of people in Trinidad and Tobago, that after seven years, this Government has effectively wasted the windfall of another boom, this time the gas boom.

Mr. Speaker, there can be no doubt that we are facing significant challenges in Trinidad and Tobago. The international situation also is a relatively bleak one, by comparison to what it was like a couple of years ago. The international economy is in severe recession, although as has been said, there are some green shoots of recovery sprouting out in the USA. The local economy will contract this year for the first time in 17 years. International trade is forecast to decrease for the first time since World War II. The International Monetary Fund in its latest grim forecast has said that the international economic crisis could be far worse than they originally thought and far more protracted than they originally thought. By the Minister's own admission, the economies of the United States, Canada, Eurozone are projected to decline over the next two to three years. How then is Trinidad and Tobago going to experience a growth rate of 2 per cent in the next year?

Dr. Gopeesingh: Very good point.

Mr. V. Bharath: How are they going to experience a growth rate of 4 per cent in 2011; and how are we going to experience a growth rate of 5 to 6 per cent in 2011? It is pie in the sky, Mr. Speaker. These are numbers and figures that have just been pulled from all over the place. And I am coming back to why it is we had to increase taxes in Trinidad and Tobago. That is the argument I am making. This is the same Minister who came to this Parliament—we will all remember—and said that the international financial crisis will not affect Trinidad and Tobago. For months they were saying the same thing. It was the same Minister who came to this Parliament, subsequently, and had to revise—

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. [*Dr. R. Moonilal*]

Question put and agreed to.

Mr. V. Bharath: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This is the same Minister who came to this Parliament, not once but twice, and had to downgrade the forecast for energy prices late last year and early this year, and this is the same Minister of Finance which came to

this Parliament in January of this year and stated that the deficit that this country was going to suffer by the end of this year was going to be \$1.8 billion.

Mr. Speaker, this is the same Minister of Finance, who last week walked into this Parliament and very casually said: "Oh, by the way, our budget deficit is now going to be \$8.4 billion." When did she find this out? When did it move from \$1.4 billion to \$8.4 billion? I know the Member for Diego Martin North/East is about to jump up again. But the point is, had we managed those funds appropriately, we would not have to raise taxes in this country. [*Desk thumping*] So this Government spent an additional \$6.6 billion in eight months and not a single word to the population. January went past, February, March, April, all the way through to August, not a single word to the population about that fact that they had spent an additional \$6.6 billion. All the time planning, "You know what, we are going to keep it from the people and when the time comes, we will raise taxes on them." That is what it is, that they would raise taxes on cigarette, alcohol and motor vehicles, and property taxes, which I am sure we will discuss, in due course.

4.00 p.m.

Mr. Speaker, could it be that the Minister of Finance did not know that we had overspent by \$6.6 billion? If she did not know, then, of course, that was rank incompetence. If she did know and hid it from the population, then, effectively, she has defrauded the people of Trinidad and Tobago, because she should have said something. I come back to what I said earlier, we are a very passive people. Where else in the world could this have been done to a population and it would have been acceptable?

Hon. Member: Nowhere.

Mr. V. Bharath: We have a situation where whatever this Government says, nobody really believes them. This Minister and this Government just cannot be trusted with the nation's purse. In fact, in reality, as most economists are saying and most people know, economists and non-economists, "de money done; de money done", and the only place to go and get it is from those people out there. That is what has happened. That is where we are at.

All this "tra la la" about caring about people's health and lifestyles, is absolute rubbish. [*Laughter*] This is a Government that should have introduced the breathalyzer many years ago, if they were so concerned about people's health and welfare, nothing has happened. So Trinidad and Tobago, again, is now bankrupt; we are now mortgaging our children's future to pay for this Government's financial indiscretion. Trinidad and Tobago is in recession, that is why we have to

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raise taxes. Very similar to what happened in the 1980s, raising taxes; taxing people for Government's own financial misdemeanors and financial indiscretions.

All the data show that we are in recession. The only people who do not know that we are in recession are those across there: The Minister of Finance and her colleagues. [*Desk thumping*] Everybody knows. All the indicators are there; manufacturing down by 10 per cent; retail sales down by 7 per cent; house prices down by 7 per cent; new motor vehicle sales down by 40 per cent. Instead of responding to this financial crisis in a mature and responsible way, and facing up to their responsibilities, the Government decides to tax the population to continue their wild spending sprees.

While they continue to spend as freely as they do, they send up our hardcore debt. I heard the Minister today say about deficit financing, "Nothing wrong with deficit financing; you would think it is the end of the world." She does not understand that deficit financing could effectively become hard core debt for a country, and it rolls from year to year until it becomes part of the debt of a country.

Mr. Imbert: Mr. Speaker, I am struggling. I am looking at the Orders, there are four of them. I really do not see the relevance.

Mr. Speaker: We are getting on, and I think you are coming back to the taxes in order to.

Dr. Moonilal: Yes.

Mr. V. Bharath: I fail to understand how the goodly Minister of Works and Transport—well, I guess that is why he is the Minister of Works and Transport and not the Minister of Finance, he does not clearly understand the links of how the economy works. All this spiraling debt, and all this taxing on individuals and organizations, is because of their squandermania and financial indiscipline. That is what it is. We are piling up debt on a society, where we ought not to have been doing it.

I just want to talk about this issue of debt, because it is very important. The higher your debt goes, the more taxes you are going to have to impose on your population in the future, because there is a cost to debt. There is an interest cost to debt. This country is currently paying \$4 billion worth of interest on the debt we have. Who pays for that? It is the people of Trinidad and Tobago. What happens, at the end of the day, is that is \$4 billion which cannot be used to provide goods and services. So people who live near the Blackman Ravine or the Orange Grove Road are told, "We do not have the money." Do you know why we do not have the money? Because it is going into paying debt; \$4 billion worth of debt.

It is very important when you are looking at raising taxes that you understand the implications of raising the taxes; debt is one of those things. I want to hit something squarely on the head, because the Minister constantly talks about our debt to the gross domestic product (GDP) ratio, which is very important. She always says that it is very low, that it is 38 per cent. The fact is, what the Government does not tell people in this country is simply this: That in addition to our domestic debt and our external debt, we have something in our books called "contingent liabilities". We also have government guarantees. More than that, we have open market operations from the Central Bank. When you add all those together, that is an additional \$40 billion worth of debt, \$21 million of open market operations and \$19 billion worth of contingent liabilities, something that the Government never ever tells the population.

Mrs. Nunez-Tesheira: Member, could I just correct you on that? The public sector debt, debt to GDP, is the public sector debt and includes central government and contingency liability, which comes up for 2009 at 31.3 per cent; so it includes the contingency liability.

Mr. V. Bharath: Open market operations come about because the Central Bank has to issue bonds and Treasury bills to soak up the excess liquidity that is put into the economy by this Government's wild spending. [*Desk thumping*] We are creating debt because of their spending, and we are taxing the population on a pack of cigarettes and a bottle of rum. It comes back to their wild spending.

Mrs. Nunez-Tesheira: Why you are pointing to the Members for Couva North and Siparia? [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. V. Bharath: Our debt in Trinidad and Tobago is not 38 per cent, as the Minister says. Our debt is closer to 50 per cent; it is \$70 billion; that is our debt in Trinidad and Tobago. That is what we are piling up for future generations. To be able to pay for all this, they come back to the pockets of the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago.

The other issue that impacts on the pockets of the people of Trinidad and Tobago, together with the taxes on alcohol and cigarettes and tobacco that the Government is attempting to impose, is the issue of inflation. This Government would have us believe that they have been in control of the situation with inflation. They would have us believe that the figure has come down from 15.4 per cent to 5.9 per cent, because of what they have done. Nothing could be further from the truth. The point I am going to make is that had they been in control of inflation, they would not have to be in a position to go and tax people. All our consumption in Trinidad and Tobago is basically imported. We import \$4 billion worth of food. Our manufacturing sector almost imports all its raw material. Very recently, the

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Minister of Legal Affairs stood up and said that everything was under control. You remember that we had inflation of 15.4 per cent recently, because of the price of international food. Cereals, grains and rice had gone up astronomically and, as a result, our inflation went up. The Government was talking about all the things they were doing in Trinidad and Tobago to reduce inflation. Very recently, the price of food on the international market went down and, as a result, our food prices went down; although there was a lag, but prices went down.

That was not because of the Government. They had no influence over the price of commodities like cereals, grains and so on, on the international market.

Mr. Imbert: Mr. Speaker, I really cannot see how this is tied to alcohol and tobacco taxes.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, ever so often you have got to come back, but instead of rum and cigarettes, you can try cigars and champagne. [*Desk thumping*] [*Laughter*]

Mr. V. Bharath: Thank you; I will be guided by you. I am sure that is much more relevant for those on the other side. [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Imbert: On your side.

Mrs. Nunez-Tesheira: Does Johnny Walker Blue ring a bell?

Hon. Member: What are you talking about? Johnny Walker Blue, what is that?

Mr. V. Bharath: We have a situation where, again, we are not in control of anything in this country. We are not in control of food prices. Let me give you quickly a listing of some of the food prices I picked up over the weekend, maybe the Minister might be interested in finding out. I did a little survey in the Curepe, Tunapuna and St. Augustine areas. Cabbage has gone up by 25 per cent, from \$4 to \$5; cucumber from \$4 to \$5, by 25 per cent; christophene by 50 per cent. The point here is that several products—[*Interruption*]

Hon. Member: Where did you do that survey?

Mr. V. Bharath: I did the survey myself in the Curepe and St. Augustine areas, in the public markets, across the board. You have a situation where these are the things that affect the common man.

When this Government stands and tells them that they have been responsible for bringing down inflation. The common man in the street does not go and buy Moet and Chandon; he does not buy Coeval cigars; what he buys is cauliflower that has gone up 33 per cent. [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Imbert: How you know about that?

Mr. V. Bharath: The point is this, this is what hurts the common man, what he buys on a daily basis. When you attempt to take more money out of his pocket, for the little comforts he has in life, he becomes angry. [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Speaker, this is an economy that is in absolute and total free fall. The Government has absolutely no control over its revenue base; it has no control over its spending habits and it has no control over its inflation targets. At the end of the day, because of their total lack of control, they take it out on the population by taxing them. That is the simplest thing to do.

The Minister of Finance said that an economy was not run by itself. Let me tell you, Mr. Speaker, this economy is on an autopilot, [*Desk thumping*] heading for a crash landing, and the life jackets are reserved only for those in the first-class cabin, the PNM friends and family.

Dr. Moonilal: He would put on a book bag and jump. [*Laughter*]

Mr. V. Bharath: There are two sources of Government's revenue generally, for all intents and purposes. That is taxation of individuals and companies, which is what is happening here, and, of course, there are royalties that come from the energy sector.

Generally speaking, when there is a shortfall from one, which there is in the energy sector, the Government has several options. They could, first of all, cut down on their existing expenditure, which they have chosen not to do; they could borrow, which is not very wise, particularly if you are borrowing for consumption, which is what they have done. So they have effectively ignored all the basic economic rationale. Or if revenues have fallen in their main areas of incomes or main areas that they would normally get it from, which is oil, gas, methanol and urea, they could now look to the other areas from which to get revenue, and there is only one other area to get that, taxation of individuals and companies.

That is exactly what they are doing here. That is exactly what the 2010 budget is all about; that is exactly where we are headed in Trinidad and Tobago, increased taxes. This is just the start of it. The tax on alcohol, motor vehicles and tobacco products are all aimed at the small man in Trinidad and Tobago, because the Government has run out of money.

4.15p.m.

We saw recently where the price of electricity has gone up. That is also effectively another tax on the household.

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Mr. Speaker, we on this side believe that these taxes are callous and heartless and the people who are the hardest hit are the most vulnerable in the society; those on fixed incomes; those on Senior Citizens Grant are the people who would be affected. The property taxes are also very punitive.

The Minister is talking about they are going to do this for the vulnerable and determine who cannot afford. If an old age pensioner falls in front of them they will step over them and walk on the next side. [*Desk thumping*]

They cannot decipher between a criminal and an old age pensioner or a vulnerable person. I have seen the wanton discrimination in my office all the time. I am not talking about racial discrimination, but the wanton discrimination against poor people in this country because they are illiterate.

Do you know how many people's cases I had to refer directly, thankfully to the Member for Diego Martin Central and he has been able to help me. But how many people have access directly to the Minister? Yes, he has been very helpful, but I should not have to do that. I should not have to pick up the telephone and call a Minister; the system should work sufficiently.

So who is going to determine who is vulnerable or not? Is the Minister of Finance going to be standing outside to determine who is vulnerable? Is she going to go to every house to decide who is going to be exempt from the tax or not? Of course not. So the majority of vulnerable, old people in this country, on fixed incomes; "Crapaud smoke dey pipe."

Mr. Imbert: I want to thank the Member for St. Augustine, a true gentleman—unlike some of the other Members on the other side—for giving way.

Is the Member saying—I took notes—that the taxes on alcohol and tobacco are going to hit people on fixed incomes the hardest, especially pensioners? Are you advocating the consumption of alcohol and tobacco smoking by pensioners? Is that what you are advocating?

Mr. V. Bharath: I am advocating that this is a free country and they can do whatever they please with their money. Do not take it away from them; let them use it for whatever they please to use it for. And whilst I am talking about that, Mr. Speaker, because again, this is very pertinent to the vulnerable—

Mr. Imbert: Mr. Speaker, I thank the Member for giving way, he is a true gentleman. Are you saying we should take taxes off alcohol and tobacco so that pensioners could drink and smoke themselves into an early grave?

Mr. S. Panday: He did not say that.

Mr. V. Bharath: I believe you need a hearing aid. I never said any such thing. But whilst I am on this issue of pensioners, I just want to make —and this is probably the first thing I am going to say that is off the point this afternoon, Mr. Speaker.

I want to beseech this Government, and I am speaking on behalf of the people who are most vulnerable in our society. I want to beg if I have to, to review its policy with regard to the Senior Citizens Grant in Trinidad and Tobago. These are people who are on fixed incomes and this tax is going to upset them, of course.

There is a situation in Trinidad and Tobago where there is a linking of NIS and Senior Citizens Grant and, therefore, if you have a certain amount of money that you get from NIS, you are only entitled to "x" amount. I am asking the Government to relook this policy so that senior citizens do not suffer.

Mr. Imbert: So they can drink and smoke—

Mr. V. Bharath: No, no, so they can do with their money what they wish. They have needs that are different to our needs sometimes and I am asking on their behalf that the NIS be delinked from this particular—

Dr. Browne: Thank you, Member, for giving way. May I just ask whether or not you are aware that the UNC government had the identical policy when it was in office?

Mr. V. Bharath: As far as I am aware we had what was called an old age pension which was a right, it was not a discretion. You have made it a discretion and I am saying that old age pension should be a right to people who have attained a certain age. [*Desk thumping*]

Dr. Browne: You just asked about hearing aid, it is a very simple question. With regard to the use of NIS retirement benefits and other NIS benefits toward the calculation of Senior Citizens Grant or Old Age Pension qualifications and amounts, are you aware that the UNC had the same policy?

Mr. V. Bharath: No, I am not aware.

Mr. Speaker, there are so many instances where this Government could have channelled the resources of this country to far more productive use so that they would not have to be coming to the population today to eke out a couple million dollars for tobacco taxes, a couple million dollars for alcohol taxes and a couple million dollars for motor vehicles transfer taxes.

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There are so many areas; regardless of what the Minister says, we know this Government has embarked on this project called the Rapid Rail. A transportation study was done in Trinidad and Tobago and—

Mr. Imbert: Mr. Speaker, that is absolutely irrelevant.

Mr. Speaker: I am giving the Member for St. Augustine a very wide berth because of some miscommunication between the Leader of Government Business—
[*Interruption*] Well, I was not party to it, so concentrate on the Orders before you.

Mr. V. Bharath: As I said, Mr. Speaker, there are so many areas where this Government could have prevented, areas where they could have put into productive use moneys that come into Government's coffers but they have chosen to spend elsewhere. There were many other areas, Rapid Rail, water taxis, many other areas but they have chosen not to do so simply because of their disrespect for the people of this country.

Mr. Speaker, we have a situation in Trinidad where we have seen over the last seven years a sickening waste of public funds in a country where, as I said, from the UN Report it is claimed that over 200,000 persons live in absolute poverty; less than US \$2.00 a day.

We have also seen a lot of financial resources of this country being frittered away by agents of the State. People have not been prosecuted, as far as we are aware. We have seen, as has been declared here, people have actually skipped the country and gone with moneys that could have gone into reducing taxes, let alone increasing taxes of people.

Mr. Speaker, there is so much widespread corruption in Trinidad and Tobago that could have reduced the financial burden on the citizenry had they utilized those moneys appropriately. So much so, Mr. Speaker, their snouts are so deep in the trough that you can hardly see their curly tails. Throughout, Mr. Speaker, every aspect of life in Trinidad and Tobago, you see wanton waste, corruption and mismanagement and this Government comes here "brass faced" and asks this Parliament and this population to accept a taxation on its people.

Regrettably, this is not something that I can support. What this country needs, and so sorely lacks, is an injection of confidence; a confidence that will get our local manufacturers manufacturing again, investing again; a confidence that will get people back into long-term, sustainable, productive work; a confidence that will halt capital flight out of Trinidad and Tobago; a confidence that will encourage our brightest minds to stay in Trinidad and Tobago; a confidence that

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will encourage and inspire those who live abroad to return to Trinidad and Tobago; a confidence that will get foreign investors looking again at Trinidad and Tobago as a destination in which they can invest, none of which this Government has done in the last seven years to inspire such confidence.

In fact, Mr. Speaker, it has been quite the opposite. And, therefore, this imposition of these taxes on alcohol, tobacco, transfers of motor vehicles are really insignificant in the whole scheme of things in terms of Government revenue; insignificant in terms of Government's revenue, but quite significant in terms of the pockets of the people who are going to be targeted.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Minister of Works and Transport (Hon. Colm Imbert): Mr. Speaker, as agreed by this House, we are debating four Orders at this time and since the last speaker seems to be completely oblivious to that fact, I would let the House know of the four Orders that we should have been debating.

The first Order that we are debating today is the Provisional Collection of Taxes Order, 2009. This Order seeks to amend the transfer tax for used motor vehicles by amending the Fifth Schedule of the Motor Vehicles and Road Traffic Act to prescribe different levels of tax for the transfer of ownership for motor vehicles ranging from used motor cycles to used motor vehicles of different ages, and the Collection of Taxes Order indicates that this measure will come into effect on October 10, 2009. That is one of the matters that we are debating today.

Mr. Speaker, the Provisional Collection of Taxes Order also increases the taxes under the Miscellaneous Taxes Act in the Sixth Schedule by increasing the tax on cigars, cigarettes and smoking tobacco and this clause came into effect on September 08, 2009. So that is Order No. 1.

PROCEDURAL MOTION

The Minister of Works and Transport (Hon. Colm Imbert): Mr. Speaker, there are three other Orders and just let me stop for one second and because we had a late lunch, I beg to move that in accordance with Standing Order No. 90(1) that we waive Standing Order No. 10(2) so that we will not take the tea break at 4.30 p.m. I would suggest that we take it at 5.00 p.m. but I leave that up to your discretion.

Mr. Speaker: Do you want to take it at the end of your first 45 minutes?

Hon. C. Imbert: Sure, but I may not go that long.

4.30 p.m.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, in accordance with Standing Order 90— Sorry?

Mr. Sharma: I prefer we have tea than to listen to him.

Mr. Speaker: I can put it to the vote, you know. We just had lunch. So in accordance with Standing Order 90(1) we are moving that Standing Order 10(2) be suspended and that tea will be taken at 5.00 p.m. instead of 4.30 p.m., or if the Minister were to finish his contribution before that, at the end of his contribution. Do I have agreement?

Agreed to.

PROVISIONAL COLLECTION OF TAXES ORDER

Hon. C. Imbert: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. During your statement, I heard the Member for Oropouche East say that he would prefer to go to the tea room and have a drink, in the context of the measures that we are debating at this point in time. But it is a fact, we did have a late lunch. We did not come back here until 3 o'clock and, therefore, it is a bit absurd to suggest that having finished lunch at 3.00 p.m., we should break for tea at 4.30 p.m. In fact, it is not very healthy to be eating at such regular intervals.

Let me move now to the second, third and fourth orders that we are about today. The third one is the Excise Duty Order for Alcoholic Beverages, 2009. That seeks to increase the excise duty on alcoholic beverages, such as malt, beer, stout—

Hon. Member: Malt?

Hon. C. Imbert: Malt beverages like Malta, and so on, beer, stout, rum, rum punch, gin, whiskey, vodka, liqueur and cordials, grape spirits, brandy, sparkling wine, other wine and so on. That is the second order.

The third order seeks to increase the excise duty complementing the increase in tax on tobacco and cigars. Some of these things I am not familiar with, but I am sure the hon. Member for Caroni East, being a man in the UNC caucus, is very familiar with these things: cheroots and cigarillos. I have no idea what a cheroot or a cigarillo is but I am sure the Member for Caroni East is very familiar with a cheroot or a cigarillo; also cigarettes, smoking tobacco, and so on.

Dr. Gopeesingh: I do not smoke.

Hon. C. Imbert: You do not?

Mr. B. Panday: Cigars included?

Hon. C. Imbert: Yes, cigars, cheroots and cigarillos. So that is the Excise Duty Order and that took effect from September 07, 2009, as did the other order, excise duty on alcoholic beverages.

The final order is the Customs (Import Duty), (Caribbean Common Market (Amdt.) Order, which, again, is increasing the import duty, Caribbean Common Market Import Duty, that is, on malt, beverages, beer, stout, all of the things I just read out, and also cigarettes, including tobacco, cheroots and cigarillos, cigars and smoking tobacco. So we are debating four orders.

While I did indicate to hon. Members opposite that I would have no objection if during their contributions on these four Orders there was a little flexibility and I did agree that I would not object if they allowed themselves some leeway, I think the Members opposite have interpreted the words flexibility and leeway in a rather expansive way; took a rather liberal interpretation of the meaning, flexibility and leeway. But as it was, the Member for St. Augustine still managed to make most of the points that I am sure he wished to make.

But the point is, there are Standing Orders. You know you can only take the Standing Orders to a certain point. You are supposed to try your best to link the debate to the matters under discussion. I know that the Member for St. Augustine is an inexperienced Member and, therefore, I forgive his excesses, but some of the other Members on the other side who are more experienced than he is, should have coached him, such as the Member for Cumuto/Manzanilla, who I know would have been able to link alcohol and tobacco taxes to the raising of revenue and to budgetary expenditure and link it in a proper manner.

Mr. S. Panday: Like fixing Marie Road in Cumuto.

Hon. C. Imbert: Exactly. So that the fact of the matter is that we have rules in this Parliament and while I have no objection to Members opposite giving themselves some flexibility and leeway in terms of bringing budgetary matters into this debate on these Motions, one must conform to the norms and parliamentary traditions. Okay? Follow? So I do not want to hear anymore about renegeing on agreements, and so on. I mean, come on. You are an experienced Member, Member for Princes Town North; you could have counselled the Member for St. Augustine and showed him how to link the matters that he wanted to speak about, with the raising of taxation.

Hon. Member: Which he did.

Hon. C. Imbert: You tried? Yes. The Member is telling me that he tried. So there is no need for Members opposite to get hot under the collar; there is no need to fuss about matters like this. There is no need for us to get vex and blow steam over little misunderstandings like this. A little leeway and a little flexibility is not the same as *carte blanche*—[*Interruption*] Fine. It is not the same as a *carte blanche* agreement that you could just "ramajay" about everything under the sun and bring all kinds of things; rapid rail and all kinds of things, into a debate on alcohol taxes. I mean, how does one connect the two? I would love to see.

But anyway, the other thing that disturbed me considerably was that in his vain attempt, in his failed attempt to link alcohol and tobacco taxes to the Estimates of Expenditure, to the rapid rail, the water taxi, and so on, the Member got ahead of himself and expounded a policy in this Parliament today which I hope is not the policy of the Members opposite, where he said that we should allow people to do whatever they want and that we should remove all taxes from alcohol and tobacco, especially for pensioners and elderly people so that they could smoke and drink as much as they want.

Mr. S. Panday: He did not say that.

Hon. C. Imbert: That is what he said.

Dr. Moonilal: "Yuh hear wrong. Yuh hear wrong".

Mr. Speaker: Order!

Hon. C. Imbert: Mr. Speaker, I took notes. The Member for St. Augustine said the taxes on alcohol and on tobacco are going to hit poor people the hardest, especially pensioners and people on fixed incomes. That is what he said, and then he went on to say we must remove these taxes. I heard him. He said take the tax off alcohol; take the tax off tobacco so that elderly people could smoke and drink as much as they want. That is what he said.

Hon. Member: No!

Hon. C. Imbert: Irresponsibility of the highest!

Dr. Gopeesingh: You are wrong. You are misquoting him.

Hon. C. Imbert: That is what he said. [*Interruption*]

Mr. Speaker: Order! Order!

Hon. C. Imbert: You know, I got up and I signalled to him. That is why I interrupted him. I signalled to him that he was going down a dangerous road, but he would not listen.

But, you know, what pains me the most is that the Member for Caroni Central, the Member for Naparima, they do not subscribe to the consumption of alcohol at all, not even in moderation. These two gentlemen, the hon. Members for Caroni Central and Naparima, do not agree with the consumption of alcohol by anyone at any time, yet they would listen to the Member for St. Augustine, their own Member, promoting a situation where you could allow old people to drink themselves into the grave and to smoke themselves into the grave, and stay there and say nothing.

That is why that group over there, you are leaderless, you are rudderless, you are fragmented, you have no consistency; there is no uniformity; you are just demoralized; you are disoriented—disoriented and demoralized. There is no unity on that side. That is why their contributions to the debate just fell flat, because they are totally demoralized and disorganized. It is unacceptable for a Member of this House.

The Member for Caroni Central, when he was Minister of Health, went to the World Health Assembly and was part of the family of nations that signed the convention on tobacco on the restriction and prohibition of the use of tobacco. It was that hon. Member for Caroni Central that did that and I followed through when I was Minister of Health, to ensure that that convention was brought into this country, ending up with it being prepared for ratification by this honourable House.

When the Member for Caroni Central was advocating the restriction of tobacco, the banning of smoking in public places, he had my unqualified support. When the Member for Caroni Central was the Minister of Health and he wanted to ban smoking in public places and he wanted to restrict the use of tobacco, he had my unqualified support; the unqualified support of this Government. Yet the Member for St. Augustine is promoting the use of alcohol and the use of tobacco. In fact, I would say promoting the abuse of alcohol and the abuse of tobacco. [*Interruption*]

Mr. Speaker: Order!

Hon. C. Imbert: Because if it is a policy of the UNC that we should remove taxation on alcohol and tobacco so that old people could smoke and drink as they please, then, clearly, you are advocating unhealthy lifestyles.

Dr. Moonilal: What is your policy?

Hon. C. Imbert: Clearly, that is what you are all about. That is what they are all about.

I think I need to read into this House a little summary of the adverse health effects of alcohol consumption, because the taxes on alcohol and the taxes on tobacco are designed to be a disincentive. These are not revenue-raising measures—

Mr. Peters: And the one on housing.

Hon. C. Imbert: Mr. Speaker, you see, it is the lack of thoroughness, the lack of research that pains me. The hon. Member for Mayaro is an experienced Member. In the four Orders that we are debating here today, show me where property tax is listed inside of here. It is not. I made the point, the Provisional Collection of Taxes Order deals with motor vehicles; the Excise Duty Orders deal with alcohol and tobacco; there is no reference whatsoever to property taxes in these four Orders. But, you see, they do not do their work. They do not do their homework, that is why they could come and talk this kind of dotishness, about take the tax off alcohol; let old people drink themselves to death; drink themselves into oblivion; let the poor pensioner, let him drink whatever he wants; let him get lung cancer. That is what your party is promoting.

I think it is necessary, since we are introducing or increasing these taxes in order to demotivate or to provide a disincentive to people to consume alcohol and tobacco, I think it is necessary to explain why. It is well known that alcohol consumption is not only a health hazard, but it can also affect social relations, family life. There are so many families that have been ruined because one or both of the parents are alcoholics. Those are facts. That is why I am just shocked that the UNC could be promoting the consumption of alcohol and the abuse of tobacco.

They talk about revenue and I heard the Member for St. Augustine speak about revenue and I heard him say that because we ran a budget deficit in the last fiscal year and because we are going to run a budget deficit in fiscal 2010, it is for that reason—because we have not managed the country's finances properly; because we have been profligate, it is for that reason—we have to raise these taxes. Again, it demonstrates to me that the Members opposite do not do their homework; they do not do any research and I say again, they are demoralized; they are disorganized; they are a shadow of what one would expect an Opposition to be.

4.45 p.m.

In the budget speech of the hon. Minister of Finance, the Minister indicated the total revenue yield from each one of these taxes. For example, the revenue yield on the new taxes on motor vehicle transfers is \$10 million. The revenue yield on the new fees for drivers and so on is \$35 million. It is in black and white. You do not have to be a rocket scientist. In the section of the speech that deals with fiscal measures, the revenue yield on taxes and duties on tobacco is \$30,000, and the revenue yield on alcohol taxes, \$50 million.

I know they are not good at maths on that side. They are not good at English; they are not good at maths. Here is the Member for Caroni Central who went to Geneva and promoted the convention against tobacco. *[Interruption]* He stands by it and the Member for St. Augustine is promoting alcohol and tobacco abuse. *[Interruption]* You were not there. You are deaf; you were not listening.

The total revenue take from these taxes is \$125 million. In a \$44 billion budget, the total revenue yield from the taxes on alcohol and tobacco is \$125 million. At least I know that the Member for St. Augustine has some rudimentary familiarity in mathematics. Do you want to work out how much \$125 million is of \$44 billion? I can tell you that \$125 million is 2 per cent, so \$125 million is 0.2 per cent. I went too fast? Do you want me to go over? Chirrip, chirrip, Mr. Speaker. I know that the Member is ashamed because the alcohol and tobacco taxes are less than 2 per cent, probably 0.15 per cent when you work it out. And you would have us believe that we are raising taxes on alcohol and tobacco yielding 0.15 per cent of the total budget in order to deal with the fiscal deficit of \$7 billion. Clearly, these taxes are not designed to plug any hole in the fiscal deficit. They are not designed to run the country. We are against the abuse of alcohol and tobacco. That is what it is all about.

There are a number of diseases and conditions that are wholly attributable to alcohol and tobacco. I am really ashamed of the Member for Caroni Central.

Mr. Peters: Since the money you will collect from alcohol and tobacco is so insignificant, can you guarantee this House that you will invest that money in education on the abuse of alcohol and tobacco?

Hon. C. Imbert: I am shocked. What do you think we use the money for? It goes into the Consolidated Fund, is appropriated and sent to the Ministry of Social Development. It is used for NADAPP; it is used to give subventions to the various non-governmental organizations involved in the prevention of alcohol and tobacco abuse. What do you think the money is used for?

The diseases associated with alcohol consumption include various alcoholic psychoses. I am beginning to wonder how many of the Members opposite may be suffering from alcohol psychosis. I am just wondering, I am not saying they are; alcohol dependence syndrome—I am just wondering—as well as some diseases affecting the nerves, such as alcoholic polyneuropathy; the heart, alcoholic cardiomyopathy; the stomach, alcoholic gastritis; and the liver, alcoholic liver cirrhosis.

Again, the Member for Caroni East is a distinguished medical practitioner. All joke aside, the Member knows about cirrhosis of the liver. You know about alcoholic cardiomyopathy? You know about alcoholic polyneuropathy. You know

about alcoholic gastritis and you know that these diseases are wholly attributable to alcohol. Why not counsel the Member for St. Augustine, who is promoting the consumption of alcohol and tobacco?

Alcohol can also cause a number of cancers. Lip, tongue, throat, oesophagus and liver cancer increase proportionately with the amount of alcohol consumed. I am told that, according to recent research, even moderate alcoholic consumption can cause breast cancer. I am told there is a link between alcohol consumption and stomach, prostate and colon cancer, et cetera.

The thing that disturbs me most with alcohol, Mr. Speaker, is the link between alcohol and cardiovascular disease. I really feel sorry for him. The Member for Couva South is currently, I am told, not very well at all. If I believe what is in the newspapers, he has cardiovascular problems. I am not saying that there is any link between his problems and alcohol at all, but I am saying that when one thinks of the pernicious effects of cardiovascular disease, someone could be apparently in perfect health one day and the next day they suffer a stroke or some other cardiovascular ailment. They could be severely affected or they could die. There is a definite link between alcohol consumption and cardiovascular disease.

Dr. Gopeesingh: Do not get personal!

Hon. C. Imbert: I am not getting personal. I am told that alcohol consumption can contribute to high blood pressure, abnormal heart rhythms and heart failure.

The hon. Members opposite are making a joke about a very serious matter. I would not have spent this amount of time on this matter if I had not heard the Member for St. Augustine say that we should remove the taxes from alcohol so that pensioners on fixed incomes would be allowed to drink at will and smoke at will. That is what he said and I would not have been dealing with this issue in this depth if he—

Mr. Bharath: Mr. Speaker, Standing Order 33(4).

Mr. Speaker: Go ahead! He wants to clarify something.

Mr. Bharath: The hon. Member for Diego Martin North/East is misleading the House. I never said any such thing.

Mr. Speaker: Standing Order 33(4) is a clarification. You can clarify by saying he is misinterpreting what you said.

Mr. Bharath: At no time was I encouraging people to drink more alcohol; nor did I say that the taxes should be removed completely. I never said that at all. I said that they should be left as they are. They should not be increased.

Hon. C. Imbert: Mr. Speaker, the hon. Member is a stranger to the truth. We were all here. The video has recorded what happened. The Member must not do these things. There is a video record of what he said. He said to remove the taxes so that people would have the choice to drink as much as they want, especially older people. It has been recorded.

Mr. Bharath: Absolute hogwash! Twaddle!

Hon. C. Imbert: As I said, one of the reasons we are raising the tax on alcohol is that we do not want people to abuse alcohol; to consume alcohol in excessive quantities.

Mr. Maharaj SC: Ban it!

Hon. C. Imbert: We have not reached there yet. We are not living in a country where alcohol is banned, a totalitarian state. Certainly it is the view of this Government that we should discourage the abuse of alcohol and tobacco.

We all know the social effects of alcohol consumption. We all know that consuming alcohol in an inappropriate environment, at an inappropriate time, can lead to vehicular accidents and accidents with heavy machinery and so on. It is widely known—and there are many studies on this—that many school children are unable to concentrate on their studies because of alcohol abuse. It is well known that many careers and reputations have been ruined because of the abuse and over consumption of alcohol. It is also well known that it is a precursor substance.

They say tobacco smoking leads to marijuana smoking. It is a gateway substance. Tobacco smoking leads to marijuana smoking and as people experiment more, they go to psychotropic substances such as cocaine.

I hear the Member for Caroni East laughing and giggling. You do not have to be such a pernicious oppositionist. You know what I am saying is true. You have seen it for yourself in hospitals. You have seen the pernicious effects of tobacco and alcohol use.

It is well known that the use of alcohol as a precursor substance leads in some instances to illicit and illegal activities. It is well known that when people are drunk they engage in criminal activities, they engage in violent crime and they become disorderly. The Member for Caroni East is well aware of this fact. That is why I am really surprised that the medical practitioners on that side will be promoting the consumption of alcohol. It is not a joke.

Mr. Speaker, there are stories. For example, in North America, there are psychological studies done on native Americans who live on reservations in the

United States. A very large percentage of the men who live on reservations are chronically affected by alcohol abuse and alcoholism and are unable to get a proper education and to become professionals. They are unable to progress and they spend most of their time on the reservations drinking whiskey. These are serious matters.

Alcohol consumption has serious adverse social consequences. It is not something that we should be flippant about. It is not a joke, Member for St. Augustine. I really take offence, whatever reason you have, to your coming in this House and saying that we should allow elderly people to drink as much as they want. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Speaker, I will continue on the effects of tobacco after the break.

Mr. Speaker: Unfortunately, we have reached that hour when it is time for some tea, so we will have tea. The sitting of the House is suspended for tea and we will resume at 5.30 p.m.

Let me indicate to Members that there is no need for this debate on these Orders to get out of hand as it is seeming to be. I am sure that after the tea we will all be calm and sober.

5.00 p.m.: *Sitting suspended.*

5.30 p.m.: *Sitting resumed.*

[MADAM DEPUTY SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Hon. C. Imbert: Madam Deputy Speaker, before the break, I was completing that aspect of my contribution which dealt with the adverse effects of alcohol consumption. I notice that I have created quite a stir on the Opposition Benches. I would like hon. Members opposite to know that I was simply speaking about the issue and nothing that I was saying was directed at any person. I just want to make that clear.

With respect to tobacco, as the hon. Member for Caroni Central would be well aware and the hon. Member for Caroni East would be well aware, as the daily intake of nicotine increases, smokers become increasingly and physically dependent on nicotine and they experience withdrawal symptoms between cigarettes. As people smoke more and more and their daily intake of nicotine increases, they become so dependent on it that they experience withdrawal symptoms between cigarettes. That is why you would see some people have to leave public buildings and go outside. Sometimes you see people in corridors outside public buildings or on the streets; not just in Trinidad and Tobago but North America. You see people smoking on the sidewalks because they cannot smoke inside the public buildings, but they are so dependent on nicotine and

tobacco, they just cannot help it. They experience, as I have said, withdrawal symptoms and they crave tobacco in order to relieve the effects of nicotine withdrawal, the symptoms of which include restlessness, anxiety, irritability, hunger, lack of concentration and loss of energy. It is a serious thing.

Madam Deputy Speaker, scientific evidence has linked tobacco use or abuse with the development of more than 25 diseases such as lung cancer, pulmonary diseases, vascular diseases, and various throat and mouth cancers. In fact, I found out something not too long ago when someone that I knew died from bladder cancer, that tobacco use is one of the primary causes, believe it or not, of bladder cancer. I suspect this has something to do with the function of the bladder as an organ that processes bodily fluids. I expect that the tobacco is absorbed into the lungs and into the bloodstream and finds its way into the bladder. I know several people whose bladder became cancerous and they have actually died from bladder cancer; all from tobacco smoke.

The use of tobacco also has an effect on a person's lifetime; how long they would live. The benefits of quitting smoking are well defined in the literature, although the health of a chronic smoker, I am told, never returns to the pre-smoking state, but they can avoid lots of lifestyle problems if they quit smoking early.

Chewing tobacco has been associated with pre-cancerous lesions and oral cancers. Again, the intensity and length of use play an important role in determining what the adverse health effects of chewing tobacco would be. It is found that people who chew tobacco are more likely to develop oral cancers than people who actually smoke tobacco. [*Interruption*]

Mr. Peters: Baseball players.

Hon. C. Imbert: Baseball players; that is a real life example of it. Tobacco used in pipes and cigars is also stronger and coarser than the tobacco used in cigarettes, which makes it more difficult to inhale. Again, the use of pipes and cigars tends to be associated with oral diseases.

The social consequences of tobacco use are obvious; it affects one's ability to perform one's role as a family member, parent, student, worker, and on so. You have the unintended consequence of second-hand smoke. You have fires caused by tobacco products and you also have diversion of tremendous national resources through the care for persons affected by tobacco.

All of the studies I saw when I was in the Ministry of Health, demonstrated to me that the money spent on prevention, any money, of tobacco use or alcohol use was a fraction of what it cost our health care system to treat persons who abuse alcohol

and tobacco. These taxes are intended to demotivate smokers and drinkers. They are intended to create a disincentive to persons who may wish to smoke and drink in excess. As I have said earlier on, nothing that I said or nothing that I intended to say was intended to be personal in any way. I am sorry if Members opposite took it that way, but it was not the intention. I was simply talking about the issue.

Before I close, with respect to transfer taxes, the latest figures I have is that there are approximately 500,000 used motor vehicles on the nation's roads. As the Minister of Finance pointed out, the taxes really bore little comparison to the cost of motor vehicles. The cost of motor vehicles has escalated over the years. The Minister of Finance simply thought it was an appropriate time to bring motor vehicle transfer taxes in line with the current realities, in terms of the price of motor cars.

During the break I did the actual calculations of these taxes, in terms of the actual percentage of the national budget. I had estimated it to be somewhere around 0.2 per cent, 0.3 per cent or 0.15 per cent. I was simply doing a guesstimate. I did the actual calculations and these taxes are just over 0.2 per cent; about 0.25 per cent or 0.26 per cent of the national budget. It is really a very small sum, in terms of the total revenue of the Government and, therefore, they could not possibly be associated with the budget deficit.

It should also be noted that the Government has not raised income tax, the Government has not raised corporation tax or any of these taxes and it is not our intention to do so at this point in time. In fact, this Government is committed to a general reduction in these taxes, as the economy allows. That is our policy. We have stated it on many occasions. You have heard the Prime Minister in his capacity as Minister of Finance say that it is the Government's intention, as the economy allows, to have a general gradual decrease in corporation taxes and personal income taxes. I also want to make that very clear. With these increases in targeted taxes, alcohol—*[Interruption]*

Mr. Peters: “We had plenty money de odder day.”

Hon. C. Imbert: It is the Government's intention, as the economy—*[Interruption]*

Madam Deputy 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. C. Imbert: Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker. As I said, these taxes are targeted taxes for health reasons. I want to make it crystal clear that this Government has made it abundantly clear that as the economy improves, it is our desire, as long as we are in a position to do so, to have a gradual—[*Interruption*] we did reduce income tax to 25 per cent; we did. Member for Mayaro, were you here? Tax used to be much higher than that. It used to be 35 per cent. We also increased the personal allowance, it is now \$60,000. If you earn \$5,000 a month or less, you pay no tax. Where were you, were you in another country? Were you in the armed forces in the United States of America when we were reducing personal income taxes and increasing the personal allowance? [*Interruption*]

Mr. Peters: I was not a Member.

Hon. C. Imbert: You were. I know you were not; I am just teasing you. The fact of the matter is, we have demonstrated our commitment to an overall reduction in personal income tax and corporation tax. We have not just spoken about it. Our actions will demonstrate the significant reductions in these taxes over the last seven years. I am putting that in the context of these taxes, to make the point that these are targeted taxes.

Before I close, it would be remiss of me—no matter how mistaken hon. Members are opposite, no matter how they feel personally about anything that I have said—to say that I cannot stand idly by, when a Member of this House, no matter why he says it or how he thought it came out, or whether it was his intention for it to come out like that. [*Interruption*] Let us give the hon. Member for St. Augustine the benefit of the doubt, that he did not realize what he was saying and that he did not realize that the cumulative effect of his contribution was to say that we should allow people to drink and smoke as much as they want, especially pensioners.

5.45 p.m.

Maybe he did not understand what he was saying, but that was the cumulative effect of what he said. It would be remiss of me to stand idly by and allow a Member of this House to put a policy like that—however misguided it was or however he did not understand what he was doing—on the record of this House. We reject that. I personally cannot condone the abuse of alcohol and tobacco. It does not matter who is vex on the other side—you can get as vex as you want—this is not something this honourable House should condone.

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

Dr. Roodal Moonilal (*Oropouche East*): Madam Deputy Speaker, thank you very much. I rise to make a contribution on the matters before us, and there are several matters dealing with the Orders as they relate to the excise duties on alcoholic beverages, tobacco and the transfer of motor vehicles. This policy perspective was outlined by the Minister earlier today in the proceedings, and it also formed part of the budget presentation a few days ago. So, I would root my discussion in the measures in the budget relating to the Orders before us, and I would approach this issue on three lines: the philosophical basis upon which such measures are premised; the policy approach to the problems as enunciated by both the Minister of Finance and the Member for Diego Martin North/East who spoke of the problems, and indicated what is the policy response; and the practical effects of these policies in the real world as we move into 2010. Those are the three areas I want to look at.

When we are dealing with matters of taxation and so on, we often ask ourselves: Why would we increase taxes and duties on a particular product or service? What do we expect from it, whether or not we can realize our expectations? So, we must have a sense of reality in imposing such taxes on the population.

This issue rooted in the budget is also located within the entire policy of the budget and the approach of the Government. The Government by bringing these Orders and seeking to increase taxation is really also responding to a changing economic environment; both locally and internationally. I suspect they have in mind changing the social landscape and bringing about social change by some of these taxation measures.

It is no secret that this country faces economic hard times; it is no secret that this country will now be operating on a deficit; it is no secret that the energy prices are no longer as they were before since revenues have fallen and will continue to fall, and the Government's budget attempts to deal with some of these issues.

Regrettably, during the budget debate which was truncated somewhat a few days ago—we did not have the privilege of listening to the Member for Tunapuna, the Minister of Education; the Member for Port of Spain South, our sister, the Minister of Community Development, Culture and Gender Affairs; the Minister of National Security; the very distinguished Member for Laventille East/Morvant, Minister of State in the Ministry of National Security; the Member for Arouca/Maloney; the Member for La Horquetta/Talparo; the Member for Laventille West; the Member for San Fernando West and, of course, we did not have the pleasure of listening to the distinguished Member for Arima. [*Desk thumping*] The Government chose wilfully and deliberately to rob the Parliament

and the country of an opportunity to pronounce on their policies. They deliberately denied this country, with a measure of contempt, the right to hear from Ministers, including senior Cabinet Ministers, to pronounce on their policies; to indicate their programmes; and to reflect on their achievements.

We are here this afternoon not hearing from our friends opposite, many of whom I must say that it is only during a budget debate they are powered up and they come out to make a speech, and they give us the benefit of very good insightful contributions. I wanted to put that loss on record. We did have the benefit of listening to the Member for Diego Martin Central—I have looked at his contribution on social development. I think that is important in the context of the argument raised by the Member for Diego Martin North/East.

The Member for Diego Martin North/East came this afternoon and stated in a nutshell that the measures before us are not crafted to promote economic policy and revenue and so on—it is not an economic perspective, they are not concerned with revenue collection—but what they are concerned with is social policy. The duties on alcohol and tobacco have a social policy dimension, but not an economic dimension. Now, the Member for Diego Martin North/East our very good friend—

Mr. Imbert: I want to thank the Member for giving way. The fact is that if you go to the budget speech itself delivered by the hon. Minister of Finance, the section on increasing taxes on cigarettes, tobacco and alcohol is headlined: “Promoting and Ensuring Healthy Lifestyles”. It goes on to give as the rationale for the increase in these taxes, the promotion of healthy lifestyles. So, the policy initiative that I elaborated upon today was clearly enunciated by the Minister in her budget presentation.

Dr. R. Moonilal: Madam Deputy Speaker, I was coming to the budget speech itself. I would come back to that. The Member highlighted it earlier than I wanted to. We have had the situation where today we are being told, according to the Member for Diego Martin North/East, that it was rooted in the budget. The policy was there in the budget and he was really elaborating on a measure in the budget. Anyway, we are told that this is a deterrent and it is part of a social policy framework that the Government is now elaborating on in terms of taxation and increasing duties on alcohol and cigarettes.

It is very instructive that the Member for Diego Martin Central who spoke in the budget debate, one of the very few and privileged Cabinet Ministers to be allowed the good fortune of speaking as opposed to others, did not elaborate on the impact of this policy in his own statement. [*Desk thumping*] He did not

elaborate in detail the impact of this policy in his own statement. Today, the Member for Diego Martin North/East did that, and that is fine. I want to come to it. If it is so then it is so. I am not arguing about what you all are saying.

We are being told today that this is really a deterrent and not a revenue raising measure. In the budget presentation—I want to go back where the Minister pointed out that this measure is expected to contribute an additional \$50 million to Government's revenue. When you go to "Alcohol and Spirits" it says:

“...the proposed manufactured rum, beer and other alcoholic products...this measure is expected to contribute an additional \$50 million to Government's revenue.”

They indicated to the national population how much money we could expect. Today, they are saying we could expect that, but that is not really what we want. That is by the way. That is one point.

Secondly, in the aftermath of the Minister of Finance presenting her budget statement—I want to stay on this issue—the Member for Lopinot/Bon Air West responded in the House. He began by saying that he joined the chorus of those praising the Minister. Now, that is a chorus of one. In the national community, the economists, the professionals, the accountant—I saw a headline today, "Budget under pressure"—had a critical appraisal of this budget. The words "critical appraisal" are very kind. In all honesty, I only remember the Employers' Consultative Association—I do not know who is in that—but, in all fairness, they had commended the budget. So, it was a chorus of one. The Member spoke after the distinguished Member of the Opposition, who brought a comprehensive package of proposals from the UNC. [*Desk thumping*] The Member said it was an almost flawless budget. What was the flaw? The national population wiped the floor with the budget. [*Desk thumping*] That is a fact.

Madam Deputy Speaker, what was also instructive, unless I missed it—I, myself, do not monitor news by the minute—the manufacturers of alcohol and tobacco did not protest. I saw no protest, upheaval or critical remarks from the manufacturers of the products whose taxes went up. You would expect that if they increase the price of something the manufacturers would "bawl". They would say that it cannot work, you would put us out of business and people are going to lose jobs and so on. There are two issues with that and they are very clear. That 15 per cent will go to the consumer, so the consumer will pay the extra as they have already done. I think the price of beer moved from \$8 to \$9.

In all fairness, I must confess that I am not an economist. It is not my area. I share the similarity with the Minister of Finance in that regard, because neither of us are economists. I remember in *EC 101* at the University of the West Indies—

there is a big long classroom where I teach—I have the pleasure of doing that—doing EC 101. We learnt of the elasticity of demand. We learnt that cigarettes, tobacco, alcohol and so on were inelastic. Madam Deputy Speaker, there is a reason why manufacturers did not complain. Their sales will not go down, they will go up. [*Desk thumping*] They have touched alcohol in two budgets before this and sales did not go down, they went up. Carib will make more money. They are going to sell more. They do not expect that there is going to be a decrease.

Mr. Ross: In which book did you get that?

Dr. R. Moonilal: Richard Lipsey, *Introduction to Economics*; EC 101. You do not know about that. You have to stay with the travel advisories and so on. Let us deal with Richard Lipsey, *Introduction to Economics*.

Today, my friend from Diego Martin North/East, a couple nights ago he was a lawyer; today he is a doctor telling us about the diseases of alcohol. The only thing that he is not is the Minister of Works and Transport. [*Desk thumping*] I mean, we got a good discourse today on the diseases related to alcohol, but coming back to elementary economics, these products do not decrease in sales by an addition to the cost, because persons who are affording would either consume the same amount or they would increase for other factors as well.

I challenge anyone to look at the production of the companies who sell alcohol and so on and see where it went down, because of increases in taxing and so on. These taxes do not impact that way. We could get scientific data and so on to support it. So, that measure, if it is intended to be a deterrent, will fail. I put that on the table.

6.00 p.m.

Madam Deputy Speaker, this is not a deterrent. I want to come to another issue at this moment. I want to take the opportunity as well to congratulate the Member for St. Augustine on a fantastic discourse made earlier, on these measures and on the budget in general. [*Desk thumping*] The Member for St. Augustine was making a valid point concerning the elasticity of demand, prices and choices, but someone in the House—I call no names—saw a branch to swing on and they jumped on this branch, and they went from branch to branch to branch, because they saw an opening when the Member said that people must have choices as well. That is what the Member said.

He said this thing will not drop sales or so, but people must have choices. Somebody saw an opening and went full steam ahead, 100 miles an hour, they went like a rapid rail into that one statement, and then made this utterly,

nonsensical, ridiculous and scandalous assertion, that the Member for St. Augustine and by extension the Opposition, would claim or say or suggest as a policy, that old people should drink and smoke how much they want. That is ridiculous, it is rubbish and I distance the UNC, the Member for St. Augustine and the Opposition from that nonsense. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Imbert: That is what he said.

Dr. R. Moonilal: That is what you want?

Mr. Imbert: That is what he said.

Dr. R. Moonilal: That is what you want for the elderly pensioners, to be drinking and smoking all their money out? We condemn that approach. When the Member for St. Augustine spoke about this price and choice, somebody jump on a branch; they had no speech before, and they suddenly say, "I got a speech; ah ha, I got a speech; ah catch ah speech". It was like the swine flu; they catch it and they gone with it, and would like to paint that picture, and paint the Member for St. Augustine in that corner. I want to tell them that it would not work and it cannot work, so I suggest they look for another branch.

Madam Deputy Speaker, having clarified that, I want to come back to the matters of these taxation orders before us. I made the point about the economic principle. We are being told today it is not revenue raising, but somehow they find the revenue they would raise; they calculate that, but it is not meant to raise that revenue.

Let me go one time to this matter of the Motor Vehicles and Road Traffic Act. I will come to this in a minute because there are a couple other matters I want to deal with. I want to just quickly refer to the Member for Diego Martin North/East. The Member for Diego Martin North/East put on his medical cap and told us about the evil effects of alcohol, the dangers, the disease, the cancer, the consumption is so bad, how horrible school children would be in alcohol related problems; it is a gateway leading to all sorts of things.

Madam Deputy Speaker, regrettably he was correct. It is alcohol and tobacco, and particularly alcohol, we know of, leading to disease. You see, when the Government comes to the House they must come with clean hands. [*Desk thumping*] Because you are in Government; you have a responsibility, in this "janaam"—thank you, Member for Fyzabad. The Government must come with a policy and say, this is our policy, we come with clean hands, we are not hypocrites.

I heard that term earlier today in the presentation of the Member for D'Abadie/O'Meara, accusing the Opposition of being hypocrites, and so on. The

Member for Diego Martin North/East speaking at length about the vice of alcohol consumption. Let us be honest because the people out there are bright and intelligent people. Apart from a few people in this room here, who because of religious beliefs and so on, nearly everybody in this room this weekend or before would go and take a few drinks.

Hon. Members: No, no, no! [*Crosstalk*]

Dr. R. Moonilal: Let us move on. At a Cabinet retreat in Toco, half the Cabinet was drunk and they were singing up in Toco. [*Desk thumping*] "Wha yuh telling meh about?" I have the pictures here.

Mr. Imbert: Madam Deputy Speaker, Standing Order 36(5). I am a Member of the Cabinet and in fact, I think you were there. [*Crosstalk*]

Dr. R. Moonilal: I know who sang! I know what song they sang! I know. I have it here.

Madam Deputy Speaker: I am on my feet, please. Could you all please sit. Could you please sit. Hon. Member for Oropouche East, you are going very well so far. Please withdraw that statement, especially I myself was present at the event. You are going very good, do not let them get you carried away.

Dr. R. Moonilal: Madam Deputy Speaker, thank you for the vote of confidence. I withdraw the statement. [*Desk thumping*] Let me move on. [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Abdul-Hamid: "Doh come with da rum talk, all yuh have plenty stories. Doh come with da rum talk ah tall."

Dr. R. Moonilal: Upstairs TTT, the bar opposite? What? Before you change your name you used to drink? Before he become Muslim. Let me get quickly on to this matter. I would not say anything about Cabinet and so on. I withdraw that with apology. I do not want to say that. [*Crosstalk*]

The Government needs to stop the hypocrisy really, when it comes to this issue. There are two examples I would give. I have in my hand a letter from the National Lotteries Control Board (NLCB), dated August 18, 2009. [*Interruption*] I move away from that already; there are hon. gentlemen and ladies opposite. I just wanted to draw to the attention of Members, they had a function in June 2009. There was the deputy director there, who was confirmed as director, she was acting before. The NLCB, an agency of the State, had a function. According to data from the NLCB, you know how much this function cost the taxpayers, just because somebody was confirmed from acting director to director?

Now, there was a time in our history a colleague is promoted—nothing is wrong with that—you take the colleague for lunch, you buy a little gift or flowers; you say congratulations, you are our colleague, we are happy you are promoted. Absolutely nothing is wrong with that, it is good for motivation. NLCB had a function, on this confirmation of the director. It cost the taxpayers \$34,837.20, to have a party to celebrate that.

Hear the one, and I will come to it quickly: bar services, \$7,798.55. What is bar services?

Mr. S. Panday: Rum!

Dr. R. Moonilal: Rum, in any manifestation, is bar services. NLCB is spending taxpayers' money to buy rum, and today, they are calling on citizens to reduce alcohol consumption, when they take taxpayers money and buy rum. Would the Minister or Prime Minister or anyone indicate to this nation whether they are prepared to ban all alcoholic beverages and the consumption of those beverages at State and Government functions? [*Desk thumping*] That is where you begin. Before you ask the average citizen out there to cut down on how they drink and stop having alcohol, say, as a Government, we have taken a decision. There is precedence.

Former President, Excellency Noor Mohammed Hassanali, when he served as President of this country, he served no alcohol at the President's House. Today, I assume they are making up for all that was not served there. When President Hassanali served as President, and you went there, you got some juice, sweet drink and so on. There was no problem, people adjusted to that because you knew that was how it was. That was President Hassanali, a very distinguished former President here in this country.

The Government today, if they speak so loudly with such passion, about deterrent, prevention, social policy, the danger and every particular disease, take that bold step of saying, "No alcohol at Government functions". [*Desk thumping*] But they cannot; they will not do that. How much of taxpayers' money did this Government spend to serve alcoholic beverages at the Summit of the Americas? How much? Millions of dollars.

When a Government seeks to speak with moral authority you need to back it up with deeds, not words. Moral authority cannot be backed up with words, but deeds. Indicate that and speak to NLCB, whoever these people may be, that when they are "feting", look, you do not need to spend this kind of money. At a time when you are increasing taxes on products, vehicles—I am coming to vehicles in a few moments—you are not.

The point I am making is this hypocrisy. It is well known. It is a matter for the record. I do not want to dwell too much on it. A former high commissioner of this country, when he served in Canada, was pulled off the highway by the Canadian Mounted Police. In the media we read the former ambassador was a bit intoxicated, and because of diplomatic immunity, the Canadian authorities had a problem with him. He is a distinguished man of course. [*Interruption*] No, no, the UNC did not come with that self-righteousness today. We did not bring the self-righteousness to the table. [*Crosstalk*]

So, I am just coming back to the social policy of deterrent. I want to get back to this deterrent matter. Deterrent will not work; it will not work the taxation in this way, on these products. You will get a little money, as people say, "chirrup chirrup", whatever that means, but it will not work; it cannot. This will not impact upon the abuse of alcohol, which is a critical problem in the national community.

In fact, I am so happy to hear the Member for Diego Martin North/East speak in the manner he did, because for four years I have been trying with all State agencies, to establish in my constituency a drug prevention and rehabilitation centre to deal with the abuse of alcohol, which is prevalent in some areas in our constituencies. We have been trying with Petrotrin, with ministries and so, to get a drug prevention centre, so that we can try to help young people in particular, who are hooked on these substances.

The way to deal with this is to introduce programmes and promote centres that provide information, counselling, literature, help to persons who are addicted or who are abusing. That is the way if you want to make a dent with the problem. It is not an issue that taxation and by your confession, it will not raise significant revenue, but it will not deter either. You have to deter by programmes, preventing persons in the communities, throughout Trinidad and Tobago. I challenge anybody to tell me where is a drug prevention rehabilitation centre south of San Fernando and in the area of Barrackpore, Penal, Debe and some of these areas, where they have a history of consumption. That is the policy approach. It is not by this measure.

Dr. Browne: Serenity Place.

Dr. R. Moonilal: Serenity Place? Where is that? The Member for Diego Martin North/East indicated that the Government is about protecting persons from this drug. This is a Government that cannot protect you from murder. You cannot protect one from murder. Five people murdered. You cannot protect me from bandits. This morning I learnt that a former Member of this House, very pleasant

lady, served with us in the last Parliament, was held up by bandits this morning at her home. I was so concerned that nothing had happened to her. Seven armed bandits held her up, a former Member of this Chamber.

6.15 p.m.

You have to start protecting citizens from bandits and murderers and go to the bottle later—that is where citizens need protection and that is why we were so annoyed when the Minister of National Security chose not to attend in this House to outline his new initiatives to deal with crime.

Madam Deputy Speaker, the Member for Diego Martin North/East also moved on and spoke about the issue of the increase in cars, and this Member—very curious—said, look, it is time the Ministry looked at this and increased this tax, it was not increased for 15 years and it is time it is increased. But Monday night he told us that there were three bids for the Ministry of Legal Affairs building. The first one who brought in the lowest bid they said, "You cannot get that because you are doing something else"; the second one they said, "You cannot get that because we have something else in mind for you"; and the third one was a company formed two weeks before, they said, "come, you doing nothing, you could do it". That is the approach.

We heard this from the Minister of Works and Transport and if that is the approach then we can understand the matter before us, where in the vehicular taxes they come and say the logic of that is that we take a look and realize that it "ain't" raise a long time now so we raise it. That cannot be. It cannot be. You do not make policy like that. That is policy by "vaps". Well, look around and see what else you could increase.

I want to relate this to a measure, a related issue in the budget. Unless I am mistaken it was last year in the budget that the Minister proposed and effected the increase in the price of gas, petroleum, fuel, what was it?

Dr. Gopeesingh: Premium.

Dr. R. Moonilal: Premium gasoline and super. The Minister said that this was so and that we will have less traffic and get cars off the road by increasing the price of premium gas. This year the Minister did not tell us how many cars went off the road. How many cars you know removed themselves because of the increase in gas? As we predicted, persons quickly went to super and many changed to diesel and you still have this problem of traffic on the road. Again, I want to tell you that the market for cars is multiplying rapidly in this country. Every time you blink in some corner, in a trace,

somebody is coming in with containers and you see cars all over, and you go now and \$18,000 you buy a car. The number of cars on the road increased.

We heard in the budget the Minister said that overpass there—how much you spent to open that? Four hundred thousand dollars? *[Interruption]* Oh yeah, \$400,000 to open phase one, when the whole thing finish you might have to go to the Heritage and Stabilisation Fund to get money to open that. Four hundred thousand dollars and people came in helicopter and so on, I understand.

Mr. S. Panday: Drinks like water.

Dr. R. Moonilal: Alcohol as well "eh". That was a good one.

Dr. Gopeesingh: In the hot sun.

Dr. R. Moonilal: In the hot sun. They were boozing while they were opening that, but anyway—

Madam Deputy Speaker, we are dealing with this vehicle matter. The result of this matter—and in the budget the Minister said, "the measure is expected to contribute an additional \$10 million to Government's revenue and will take effect from October 01, 2009".

Madam Deputy Speaker, the effect of this is that by increasing these duties again, the vehicle owner—and in some cases, taxis, transport vehicles and so on—will switch that and transfer it to the consumer, so expect the cost of transportation to go up. Again, the poor people, the underprivileged, the working people and people on fixed income who have to use the maxi-taxi, hired car, private cars in some cases—you do not get hired taxis so you use what we call PH—the cost of that will go up as a result of this measure, so these taxes are harassment taxes calculated to pick the pockets of citizens of Trinidad and Tobago. *[Desk thumping]*

That is what they do. These taxes are calculated to pick the pockets, and you know when you pick pockets it is not a vault you are going in; it is a little you are taking out and taking out. The Minister gave us nice data today; he said that all of these taxes put together, .2 per cent of the revenue—

Dr. Gopeesingh: He said .15.

Dr. R. Moonilal: He increased just now to .2 per cent.

Madam Deputy Speaker, we suspect this is an ongoing matter, from here they will increase the tax in other areas. One Member said during the budget there may be a bicycle tax, a dog tax, a tax on poultry and a tax on anything. This is the first

phase, but next year—[*Interruption*] Prime Minister, I know you do not "fraid" dog, particularly, not Rottweiler I understand. [*Laughter*] Of any kind I understand. I know you do not "fraid" Rottweiler, but we will move on. [*Interruption*]

This vehicular tax will serve to increase the cost of transport, so in one move they are increasing the taxes on consumption of articles, consumption of tobacco and alcohol and in the next breath motor vehicle taxes. You know when you talk to people in the country what they tell you? In the aftermath of the budget I had the opportunity to visit a few areas in my constituency and chat with the people about the budget. People tell you, look, I have no problem in paying the increase on these items. I have no problem. But if I pay these increases, I must get water and I must get security. People are saying they will pay for these things but they must get water.

In a budget debate when you expect to hear some proposals to deal with security, we heard none. Absolutely none! We expected to hear about water and when can we expect water. The Minister of Public Utilities came to the House and announced with fanfare—now the Member for Port of Spain North/St. Ann's West, the Member for Diego Martin West and people all over are complaining and protesting; people in Laventille are complaining about water. "Twiggy" said they are drinking from a canal. The Minister of Public Utilities stood in the House and announced with fanfare, he said, "Rest assured we have a governance manual prepared from WASA". That is the achievement. Where in Laventille are these people who are protesting for water? Show them the governance manual. Tell them that is what you have and tell them to drink the governance manual, and you would not have enough police to get out of there.

There is a crisis in this country as it relates to the provision of water and security. There is a crisis as it relates to health and to education, and that will not be solved by picking the pockets of citizens via these measures. It will not be solved by picking the pockets! When they take this money where is it going? There is no assurance, because if you add up these things quickly—you add up 40, 50, 110 and 3,140; with that \$140 million—there is no assurance that is going into programmes for any social development. It will go to UTT and all their high-flyers. It will go to UDeCott. That is where it will go. That is where the taxpayers' money will go and it will be abused.

I was hoping that the Minister of Labour and Small and Micro Enterprise Development would have made a statement in this House as to how taxpayers' money that comes from these taxes would be spent. How it would be spent in promoting health, and I want to stay on that issue. The Member for Diego Martin North/East spoke at length about health; health of workers and health of people,

but the Minister of Labour and Small and Micro Enterprise Development told us precious little as it related to health and safety and the health of workers. When they were concerned all evening and enunciating this proposal on health, the Minister of Labour and Small and Micro Enterprise Development told us precious little. But he, in all fairness to him, may not know much, beyond what he told us, so we must be fair to him, because he did not tell us that UTT is now grabbing Cipriani College of Labour and Cooperative Studies.

The Cabinet has agreed to the integration of the Cipriani College of Labour and Cooperative Studies into the University of Trinidad and Tobago. In a letter from Prof. Ken Julien, he has written to Dr. Williams asking for documents and plans of the college. He wants a full brief. Now, UTT has no Act of Parliament governing it, but they are now going to snap up the Cipriani College of Labour and Cooperative Studies that has an Act of Parliament governing it. That is the point! [*Desk thumping*] Look at what is happening here. In this country there is an Act of Parliament, Cipriani College of Labour and Cooperative Studies cannot take instructions from UTT, you have to amend and repeal the Act.

Mr. Manning: So what.

Dr. R. Moonilal: You have to repeal the Act.

Mr. Manning: So what!

Dr. R. Moonilal: Well, repeal the Act first and then you go grabbing everybody, building, furniture and so on. [*Interruption*]

I want to put on record that using taxpayers' money like this is a waste—a colossal waste. This is why at every material point you will have to go and take money from cigarette, from alcohol, from motor vehicles and so on, because you are squandering more and more. The Cipriani College of Labour and Cooperative Studies is a college of labour established under an Act of Parliament. They teach courses in human development, labour studies and so on. They have their building and they are doing well.

The Accreditation Council has commended them on their operations. Why are you interfering with them and putting them under an institution that has no law and has no union for their members either?

Dr. Gopeesingh: No accountability.

Dr. R. Moonilal: And no accountability. Cipriani College of Labour and Cooperative Studies came before the Public Accounts Committee to account, to tell us about their expenditure, revenue and so on. UTT does not come here. They

are grabbing up all the real estate, all the institutions. I want to tell the Government, leave Cipriani College of Labour and Cooperative Studies alone. Leave it alone! [*Desk thumping*]

Dr. Eric Williams put it there, leave it alone. Leave what Dr. Eric Williams put. Leave it there. [*Interruption*] It is a colleague for labour studies. It is fundamentally different and a college for management and business. The Prime Minister in his early incarnation in the '70s would have known well about the importance of labour education, workers' rights and related matters.

Mr. Manning: That would not change.

Dr. R. Moonilal: Why are you tampering with it? Why do you want to grab it and go? For money?

Mr. Manning: For effective management.

Dr. R. Moonilal: Well, then you saying that the college is not efficient. That is what you are saying.

Mr. Manning: We are rationalizing the change.

Dr. R. Moonilal: If I am hearing the Prime Minister right, it is an attempt to rationalize tertiary education in Trinidad and Tobago. Rationalize it by bringing an Act or a Bill to rationalize UTT.

Mr. Manning: We will do that.

Dr. R. Moonilal: When? We have been promised—and I want to ask the Prime Minister—I know it does not hurt you to stand and ask questions when persons are speaking. You are at no pain to disturb—tell us when will you bring a Bill to the Parliament to incorporate and provide a legal framework for the University of Trinidad and Tobago? [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Manning: Madam Deputy Speaker, I could not give a definitive date, but what I could say is that matter is being worked out right now. [*Laughter*]

Dr. R. Moonilal: Madam Deputy Speaker, we are told that the matter is being worked out and we have to take the Prime Minister's word for it. He is a very honourable man. We must take his word on these matters because he has promised us so much over the years and we must take his word on these matters. So we are told that we will get that Bill in the Parliament at some material time.

Hon. Member: In due course.

Dr. R. Moonilal: Yes, in due course we are being told. [*Interruption*]

I do not want to ask when, because he told us in due course. [*Interruption*] Okay, no problem, I want to move away from that. I want to move away from that now.

Madam Deputy Speaker, we want to deal with these taxes that they are increasing here, this is what we are about this afternoon. You are saying that all of these are deterrents for social policies synchronized with your social policy approach, when are you going to introduce the breathalyzer on the roads of Trinidad and Tobago to prevent drunk people driving? When? Tell us when? You know what is a shame—and I want to come back to the orders of increasing the price and the tax on alcohol and tobacco.

There was a time when in Trinidad we felt that Guyana was this backward country, not doing well, an outland somewhere. Today Guyana announced in June 2009 that they had implemented the breathalyzer on the roads and on the highways of Guyana. [*Desk thumping*] They did that and we are still waiting in Trinidad and Tobago with resources, technology and human capital. We are waiting. Guyana has the speed guns on the road. When you travel fast they can catch you speeding. They have solar powered traffic light and now breathalyzer. Are we now saying that Guyana reached 2020 before Trinidad? We may have to migrate to Guyana or Tobago.

6.30 p.m.

Mr. Imbert: When? When?

Dr. R. Moonilal: In due course. [*Laughter*] In due course. In due course. So, I am saying, Madam Deputy Speaker, at times over the past years, countries that we felt were so backward and not doing well and certainly do not have resources, have moved light years ahead in dealing with these prevention, and people driving under the influence of alcohol and so on, and Trinidad and Tobago's capital, money, resources, brilliant people as we can see from opposite me here—brilliant—we cannot introduce a breathalyser on the roads of Trinidad and Tobago, we cannot introduce the speed gun. We are waiting for CCTV. There was a crash on the Mosquito Creek road a couple weeks ago, where a gentleman crashed a truck into a panel van and five persons died. That is a stretch well known and the southern people called it the Mosquito Creek and so on.

Madam Deputy 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. P. Manning*]

Question put and agreed to.

Dr. R. Moonilal: Thank you. Thank you so much. One must be suspicious of the "Greek bearing gifts", but I am not suspicious of the Member for San Fernando East bearing gifts.

Madam Deputy Speaker, I am coming back to this issue. We are dealing with driving on the highways, consumption of alcohol and so on. CCTV, the most basic of technologies today. In fact, in some places CCTV is outmoded technology. It is a last generation technology. We, with the money and the resources could not put a system in place in selected areas in Trinidad and Tobago, where we know, where we have the data, where we know how dangerous people drive, accidents will take place, people will die—Mosquito Creek. Under the influence of alcohol.

Mr. Imbert: Smoke. Smoking.

Dr. R. Moonilal: No, the van may be smoking in the back, but under the influence of alcohol. Mosquito Creek, Gasparillo, Claxton Bay, when you come off by Grand Bazaar. The points of death, those points are known. Under the flyover coming into Beetham. You know, you could actually find 10 places and map them to accidents and fatalities and say look, "Government, we are going to put TV camera in, let us look at these places so we can get the data in the event of a crash. We can use the data to see what happened on the road and deal with it." I must give way to my very—I would not say honourable, but my friend from Diego Martin North/East.

Mr. Imbert: Madam Deputy Speaker, I thank the hon. Member for Oropouche East for giving way.

Mr. Manning: Yes, statesmanship.

Mr. Imbert: Those are very excellent suggestions you are making about installation of CCTV cameras at selected accident prone areas, but I want to let you know that the Government has already awarded a contract to a company which is already in the process of installing CCTV cameras, specifically for that purpose at traffic prone locations along the Churchill Roosevelt Highway. We are already doing, but I take your point that we need to extend this project to the Uriah Bulter, and also other traffic prone areas. That is an excellent suggestion. [*Desk thumping*]

Dr. R. Moonilal: Thank you very much. Madam Deputy Speaker, I am extremely worried when the Member for Diego Martin North/East pronounced that my recommendations are excellent. It worries me. I suspect he may be under the influence.

Mr. Imbert: Nah, nah, nah, nah!

Dr. R. Moonilal: But he is not, I am sure. When he congratulated me, I suspect that he—I owe the Prime Minister as well. Madam Deputy Speaker, let me come back quickly. They want to take me away from the point.

Mr. Imbert: No.

Dr. R. Moonilal: But I am saying 10 areas and the Minister agreed with me. Minister, could you also stand and tell the House when this will come into effect. Date—not the exact date—month and year.

Mr. Imbert: The contract is with a group called the IBI Group in joint venture with a local company. The contract period is approximately nine months. They started about a month ago. It is August, so I would expect that by April or May, the camera will be fully operational on the Churchill Roosevelt Highway. So to give you a broad estimate, I would say within the fiscal year.

Dr. R. Moonilal: So that is within 2010. So we are fine?

Mr. Imbert: Fiscal 2010.

Dr. R. Moonilal: So in fiscal 2010, by September or so next year, we can expect to see—*[Interruption]*

Mr. Imbert: Yes.

Dr. R. Moonilal:—a picture of the highway and so on. But again, I want to appeal that the Government consider as well the Mosquito Creek area. That is an area where people drive like crazy and—*[Interruption]*

Mr. Imbert: It is a good point.

Dr. R. Moonilal: I want to say this point because sometimes when the Government thinks about these issues, they do not consider some of the areas in south where we are from and so on—*[Interruption]*

Mr. Manning: So where I am from?

Dr. R. Moonilal: No, you are a Port of Spain Prime Minister, having Dom Perignon at the mansion, pulling up the gate. Anyway—Madam Deputy Speaker, it is parliamentary banter. It is parliamentary banter. My point is to consider the other areas because historically, the PNM does not consider our areas.

Mr. Imbert: That is not true.

Dr. R. Moonilal: Well, I took note. I took note that when they were going around opening colleges all over the place, Harris Promenade College, Woodford

Square College, Arima Promenade College, but there was no college in Penal or Debe. So even when you make fictitious achievement, you still do not put any there. [*Mr. Manning stood up*] No, no no, sit down, sit down. Let me move on—[*Interruption*]

Mr. Manning: There was no college in Siparia.

Dr. R. Moonilal: Madam Deputy Speaker, I am happy to hear the Government pronounce on this matter. I am happy to hear the CCTV will be operational. I am extremely happy to hear that.

Madam Deputy Speaker, I would also like to hear when the breathalyser would come into effect on the roads, to deal with the issue of the—and when will it be operational? What month and what year? That is what we would like to hear from the Government today, as we debate this matter. Because as I indicated before, these taxes and the introduction of these taxes as a nuisance to hard-working citizens of Trinidad and Tobago, they will not reduce the consumption of alcohol or tobacco, they will have a negative effect on the vehicular sector—motor cars—because they will lead to an increase in transport, an increase in the cost of repair as well, an increase for all the services related to that industry, and these taxes will not go to fund programmes and projects for the upliftment of people, social development projects in particular, because these could well go into the pockets of persons. They may well go into people's pocket. When you tax like this—there is this concept in America I think, of tax and spend. They will tax and spend and go into your pockets as wages. And on that issue, I just wanted for clarification to clarify on a matter.

When the matter was raised in the House of the Prime Minister's wages, the Prime Minister jumped up from the chair there and said that—when the Member for Siparia said it was a package of \$67,000—it is not true. It is less. We have the document before us now, and there is a package here from the Eighty-Ninth Report of the Salaries Review Commission. I am quoting from the Salaries Review Commission, page 189, and my friend from Caroni East is very good at Arithmetic. Forty-eight thousand dollars salary, plus duty allowance of \$7,500—how much is that?

Dr. Gopeesingh: Fifty-five thousand, five hundred dollars (\$55,500).

Mrs. Persad-Bissessar: Keep going.

Dr. R. Moonilal: Fifty-five. Let us go. A transport allowance of \$5,550. How much we reach? [*Crosstalk*] Free house and car, telephone services, entertainment allowance, housing allowance, and you have a package of more than \$67,000.

Mr. Manning: Sit down. Sit down. Sit down.

Dr. R. Moonilal: That is more—*[Interruption]*

Mr. Manning: No, no, no. You are not getting away with that.

Dr. R. Moonilal: And he was protesting.

Mr. Manning: No, I am sorry. Madam Deputy Speaker, you cannot be living in an official house and still get a housing allowance. The Prime Minister cannot, you understand, and therefore—I think the Member knows that, so that you should discount it—and I can show you my pay slip if you want. The figure is wrong and you know that. In addition to which, the Prime Minister gets no entertainment allowance.

Mrs. Persad-Bissessar: It is \$61,000.

Mr. Imbert: It is not \$67,000.

Mr. Manning: Okay! Therefore, it is not part of my salary. I do not get any entertainment allowance. What is that? The Member is a purveyor of misinformation as is customary.

Dr. R. Moonilal: Madam Deputy Speaker, I will not carry on, on this matter because I think the record is very clear, the Salaries Review Commission is very clear on this matter and I will not argue on cost of transport, the cost of housing and the issues like that. I will not comment on that. I am not at any point suggesting that the Prime Minister does not deserve what he is entitled to. I am not at all suggesting that. The Prime Minister is clear on what he is accepting and so on.

Madam Deputy Speaker, I wanted to get back to the Orders, and to indicate that the Government owes the Opposition and the country, a full explanation on the impact of the increase in gasoline last year, 2008/2009. The impact of that. They owe an explanation as to the use of these moneys collected from these Orders and whether or not it will go in specific programmes to prevent alcohol and tobacco abuse.

Now when the Government—they have a nice catch line here and I want to put this into perspective. The Government says, "Look, you see these money, they go into the Consolidated Fund." So it goes back into the Government and they can use. So should we not take the \$80 million and place that specifically for prevention programmes? For programmes related to helping young people on substance abuse, who are abusing substances, who have been caught in this trap. Should we not take the money and specifically allocate it to that purpose, rather than just throwing it in the Consolidated Fund and saying, well, it is in the fund. That is the point I am making, because all of us on this side of the House are concerned with this issue of the health effects and

social effects of the abuse of these products, the abuse of the tobacco and alcohol, and so on. All of us are concerned with that, but what we want the Government to do, is to give us specific suggestions and policies as they relate to affected groups and targeted groups.

Madam Deputy Speaker, a couple years ago, when I was involved in the All Trinidad Sugar Union along with Caroni (1975) Limited, the All Trinidad Sugar Union under the distinguished leadership of the Member for Couva North, instituted a programme called HEAL—H-E-A-L—which was the establishment of a drug prevention and a rehabilitation centre and a house where persons who are affected by this problem can go for rehabilitation and so on.

Mr. Swaratsingh: I use to counsel there.

Dr. R. Moonilal: In fact, the Member for St. Joseph is now indicating that he did attend on that house and provided some—[*Interruption*] No, no, no, as to provide service. No, not a client. He attended there to provide services to assist some of the young men—it was a home for men—who faced those problems, and the Member for St. Joseph I understand, did a good job there. That is where the money should go, the money from these matters.

Mr. Manning: Where it should go?

Dr. R. Moonilal: It should go to promote drug prevention and rehabilitation centres, homes in some cases. You need the homes.

Mr. Manning: [*Inaudible*]

Dr. R. Moonilal: You are disagreeing with this?

Mr. Manning: The principle.

Dr. R. Moonilal: You are disagreeing with the principle? And what is your principle? Please.

Mr. Manning: Madam Deputy Speaker, fundamentally, all revenues of the State go into the Consolidated Fund, and by way of appropriation through Parliament, a decision is made as what goes where from the Consolidated Fund.

6.45 p.m.

What the hon. Member is suggesting is that as you gain revenues from one particular source, you allocate that for a particular purpose. If you extend such a principle, then you understand the complications you bring into the budgetary process. We fundamentally disagree with that approach.

Dr. R. Moonilal: Let me put it another way so the Prime Minister may agree. Clearly, when you budget your departments, ministries and so forth, you will have expenditure on items. You will have expenditure on HYPE and on all sorts of things; you actually identify how much you would provide and the estimates. Why could you not simply put into that structure a figure, an amount of money, for the promotion of those homes and centres; put it into your structure so you do not have this problem of not knowing how much money would be spent to help homes and to help programmes? The money has to go back into the fund, then target it to particular projects to deal with alcohol abuse.

Mr. Prime Minister, as you are here—you were not around earlier, when I asked Government Members, but they were shy to respond in your absence; they were a bit shy and hesitant—is the Government prepared, given the very strong moral claim made by the Member for Diego Martin North/East today on health, promoting a healthy lifestyle and preventing the abuse of alcohol, to take this step and say that there would be no alcohol served at Government or State functions, as a real and symbolic approach to telling the population that you are serious with this issue?

Mr. Manning: Madam Deputy Speaker, speaking for myself, I no longer utilize alcohol, and I am enjoying this happy position for about three years now, or just over that, but to take the position that we will outlaw alcoholic beverages at official State functions, really, is circumscribing the free will with which all men are endowed.

In fact, that is an issue that came up some years ago, in different circumstance, when a particular person was President of Trinidad and Tobago. I do not want to go into the details of it. My own preference, in a matter like that, is not to, as it were, legislate against people's free will, but to ask people to be more responsible, especially those who go to Government functions.

Dr. R. Moonilal: Prime Minister, could I ask you then a simple question, a rhetorical question of course: Are you not legislating against people's free will by introducing these orders that increase the price of the products? You are legislating against free will. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Manning: They could buy it if they want. [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Imbert: No, buy if you want.

Mrs. Nunez-Tesheira: You just argued that would not stop the problem.

Dr. R. Moonilal: And you said that at Government functions you do not want to impose your will on persons. I am very happy to hear that you yourself have now left that part of your life.

Mr. Manning: I invite you to do the same.

Dr. R. Moonilal: That part of your life that would have enjoyed Richie's. [Laughter]

Mr. Manning: Richie's is dancing, not alcohol.

Dr. R. Moonilal: Madam Deputy Speaker, I am happy that the Prime Minister said that he left that behind. I would never have suspected that, but I am very happy to hear it. [Laughter]

In this matter, these Orders before us are public policy and they are imposing public policy as a deterrent, so there is a policy contradiction in what you are saying.

Mr. Imbert: It is not a prohibition.

Dr. R. Moonilal: It is a deterrent; that is what they are saying. I said earlier that it would not deter. It cannot deter.

Mr. Manning: Then we raise it again.

Dr. R. Moonilal: If I heard the Prime Minister right, then he said that we would raise it again, but you could raise, and raise, and raise. You could raise the dead, it will not.

There was a concept I pronounced on earlier: the elasticity of demand. These products are inelastic; persons would pay and buy. In fact, in the aftermath of the budget statement, I do not know if you took note, there was an interview with people in Port of Spain. They went into what we call the "watering holes". They interviewed a gentleman who said, "De Minister raise de price, but that not stopping me."

Mr. Imbert: He is an alcoholic.

Dr. R. Moonilal: I do not know if it is parliamentary to say that. [Crosstalk] I do not want to say that. He said that he would continue, notwithstanding the Minister's provision. So how do you come to terms with that? What do you do, raise it by 100 per cent?

Mr. Imbert: That is not the norm.

Dr. R. Moonilal: A tax? But that is not the norm; nobody is protesting that, they would go and they would spend.

The Prime Minister, a distinguished economist who has served as Minister of Finance here—[Interruption] we will talk about that later; I am just submitting that this would have no effect as a deterrent. That is all I am saying; I am not saying anything more, I am not saying anything less.

The Government needs to revise this policy approach. This is a matter of taxation, as they admitted, so too is the property tax. Is that a deterrent as well? Is property tax a deterrent, so persons would not build or buy or people would not own? Is that a deterrent, the property tax, which will hit homeowners? As an issue of taxation, which I am on, that property tax would serve as a disincentive, on the one hand, while the budget is meant, at least from what they pronounced, to be an incentive to homeowners and business. There is a policy contradiction there as well, as it relates to that property tax. *[Interruption]* My distinguished friend from Tunapuna has made a correction. Could I give way for you to do that? I know you did not speak in the budget, so anything I could do for you to contribute—*[Laughter]*

Miss Le Gendre: Hon. Member for Oropouche, I was just suggesting that is an economic contradiction. If someone wants to purchase a house, a tax at the value of the taxes proposed is not going to prevent them. As you are aware, these taxes are based on the annual taxable value of a house. That has always been the basis. If you are honest you would accept the fact that the taxes you pay on your house are next to nothing. This is a welcome update. *[Crosstalk]*

Mr. S. Panday: You are rude; she is rude. She is a Minister of Education?

Dr. R. Moonilal: My friend from Tunapuna, I am happy and I hope I heard you right. You are saying that the taxation on the property would not be a disincentive, but the taxation on alcohol would be a disincentive?

Miss Le Gendre: I did not say that.

Dr. R. Moonilal: But that is the argument of the Government. Am I hearing right? *[Desk thumping]* The Member for Tunapuna is saying to us that the taxation on property would not be a disincentive, but the taxation on alcohol and tobacco would be a disincentive. *[Crosstalk]* Ma'am, you will have an opportunity to speak.

Coming back to the matters before us, I want to indicate to the Government as well to take care, as they move ahead with this taxation framework, to be true to their oath of office, to ensure that citizens are not placed in an unfair position, where they are under a burden in terms of what they have to pay and they do not get the goods and services. I thought my friend from St. Augustine really hit the nail on the head when he spoke on that issue.

I want to say as well, as we increase taxes on products and vehicles, we are having more unemployment. So this thing is going to hurt more and more people.

One issue I would raise alone, before I close on the issue of unemployment, is the case where persons at the Trinidad and Tobago Revenue Authority, which

would replace the Customs and Excise and the Inland Revenue, will be on the headline. I have a letter from the Ministry of Finance. The letter is dated March 11, 2009; it is addressed to Mrs. Jennifer Baptiste-Primus, President of the Public Services Association; March 11, 2009. The letter is from the Permanent Secretary (PS), Ministry of Finance.

"Dear Mrs. Baptiste-Primus"—[*Interruption*]

Dr. Browne: Madam Deputy Speaker, on a point of order.

Dr. R. Moonilal: I am speaking about the impact on these unemployed persons, because of taxes. I am speaking about the impact of taxes on the public. [*Crosstalk*]

There is a comic book called "Connect the Dots", I will get one for you. Children play with it.

Let me move on:

"I wish to confirm that on Thursday March 5 2009, since you were unavailable to meet with the Minister of Finance, Honourable Karen Nunez-Tesheira, the Minister advised you, in my presence, by telephone that after consideration of all feasible options for the staffing of the Trinidad and Tobago Revenue Authority (TTRA), Cabinet had taken a decision that morning as follows:

That a Voluntary Separation of Employment be offered to all employees of the Customs and Excise Division and the Inland Revenue Division of the Ministry of Finance, with no guarantee of employment with the TTRA. "— with no guarantee of employment—

In this regard, Cabinet noted that all employees of the Customs and Excise Division and the Inland Revenue Division were free to apply, in open competition, for employment with the TTRA."

Mr. Speaker, 2,200 gone and Cabinet has stated in writing—and there is something almost like a conspiracy here, since you were unavailable to meet the Minister; the Minister told you on the phone in my presence that people are not guaranteed their jobs. This is by the Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Finance.

Mr. S. Panday: "Same ting with local government."

Dr. R. Moonilal: This is where we would be in the next year; unemployment, persons on the headline faced with higher taxation, faced with measures by the Government.

So this unemployed person wants to buy a car. Let us talk about the vehicles now. Who wants to buy the car? The cost of that transaction has increased. Persons are unemployed under this burden, and the Revenue Authority would say, "We are not hiring anyone; it is open competition; you all apply." There is a saying, I cannot say that one here, that "everybody stand on their own feet"; "everybody see for themselves." That is the message of the Government to the Customs and Excise and the Inland Revenue, where persons have given service for over 25 years, public service to the people of Trinidad and Tobago. They have given service; they are honourable, hard-working people; they are now on the breadline. *[Interruption]*

Mr. Imbert: Madam Deputy Speaker, 36(1); "yuh going too far off point."

Madam Deputy Speaker: Now, I am aware of the fact that the hon. Member for Oropouche East basically has not been irrelevant, but you are coming to an end. I have given you a bit of leeway, so please, end your contribution by linking.

Dr. R. Moonilal: Thank you so much for understanding the direction of my contribution.

I will not stay on that; I have finished with the matter of the TTRA. I think the point was well made. I want to get back to the Order before us and to put in context the philosophical issues that I raised at the very beginning of my contribution, that the Government needs to come with clean hands, so to speak; indicate the concrete measures they are taking for deterrents; accept that this revenue is a harassment tax, that it raises no significant amount of money, in the first place, and it would not be a deterrent. It is a nuisance, to use a term that the very distinguished Member for Diego Martin Central indicated.

I was so happy that he indicated to the House as well, and he confessed to the national community, that 20 per cent of those "smart man cards" were corrupted away, that involved \$23 million of taxpayers' money, of the country's money, were corrupted away under the Ministry of Social Development.

Mr. Imbert: By the UNC.

Dr. R. Moonilal: To this day the Member for Diego Martin Central cannot tell us who was responsible, which department, who is being investigated. In his mind, \$23 million come, \$23 million gone. The Member for Diego Martin West stated that; that was the point he made. So the "smart man card", under the Member for Diego Martin Central—he could tell us more, in his own time. I am sure he would tell us more.

In terms of the policy, I have outlined the contradictions as it relates to all these matters. In terms of practical implementation, it is almost hopeless that they would implement this as a deterrent. You could expect that without the introduction of other measures, that our youth would be exposed to more social ills and there would be precious little forthcoming from the Government to deal with some of these matters.

Madam Deputy Speaker, I thank you for your understanding.

7.00 p.m.

The Minister of State in the Ministry of Social Development (Hon. Alicia Hospedales): Madam Deputy Speaker, it is a great pleasure for me to contribute to this debate on the Excise Duty (Alcoholic Beverages) Order, 2009, the Excise Duty (Tobacco Products) Order, 2009 and the Customs (Import Duty) (Caribbean Common Market) Order, 2009 and the Motor Vehicle Transfer Tax Order, 2009.

Madam Deputy Speaker, it was quite irresponsible of the Member for St. Augustine to proclaim that these are just revenue raising measures. If the hon. Member had said that he did not know, or he needed more information to make a more intelligent contribution, I would have been satisfied with that. Madam Deputy Speaker, I also wonder if the Member for Oropouche East is tabula rasa about the detrimental effects of using tobacco and alcohol, even knowledgeable about deterring theories and strategies.

He raised a point in the House today that the NLCB used thousands of dollars for alcohol for an event that they had, and he said to stay away from the Cipriani Labour College, but I want to point out to him a significant event that occurred at the Cipriani Labour College under their watch.

In the Public Accounts Committee (PAC) recently it was discovered—and let me just point out that this particular committee is chaired by the hon. Member for Oropouche East. It was pointed out that during the period 1996—2001 when the accounts of Cipriani Labour College were examined, they found that the accounts reflected huge amounts, thousands of dollars which were reputedly credited for scotch whiskey. [*Desk thumping*] Credited, Madam Deputy Speaker; it was not even bought but it was credited. [*Laughter*]

So when the Member for Oropouche East said that, I reflected on my work as a therapist in a drug rehabilitation facility and one of the things that we say there is admittance is the first step to recovery, even recovery from false lies. [*Desk thumping*] He needs therapy.

Madam Deputy Speaker, I would also like to point out to the Member for Oropouche East because he mentioned that Government ministries should have a policy with regard to using non-alcoholic beverages. I would like to inform him that the Ministry of Social Development under the guidance of the Member for Diego Martin Central and myself made a decision last year, together with all the executive members that for our functions we would have no alcohol and last year for the first time at our Christmas party we had no alcoholic beverages and everybody had a good time with no alcohol.

Dr. Gopeesingh: You had a "Dutch Party".

Hon. A. Hospedales: Madam Deputy Speaker, it would have been good if the Member for Oropouche East and the Member for St. Augustine had asked: Why increase the taxes for alcohol, cigarettes and tobacco? Or if they had gone into exploring some of the significant detrimental effects that occur as a result of using these particular drugs.

Madam Deputy Speaker, in conducting research for this particular debate, I came upon a major revelation with respect to the annual domestic consumption of alcohol for Trinidad and Tobago. And for the information of the Members on the other side, I am sure they probably do not even know what the annual domestic consumption of alcohol for Trinidad and Tobago is.

For the period January to November 2007, the annual domestic consumption was 12,913,652 litres of alcohol. That is the amount of alcohol that was consumed by people in Trinidad and Tobago; more than the population itself, double, triple, quadruple times more than the population. Approximately 10 litres per capita. This information was provided by the Central Statistical Office, so the Members on the opposite side can check it out.

Madam Deputy Speaker, added to this, Trinidad is ranked 98 in the world on the list of countries that had the highest alcohol consumption measured in litres of pure alcohol per capita in any given year according to the World Health Organization. That is a lot of alcohol; more alcohol than water.

Further, Madam Deputy Speaker, this country has been rated as one of the countries with the highest number of Alcoholics Anonymous groups per capita in the world and this is a strong indicator that alcohol use and abuse is a major problem in Trinidad and Tobago.

For the information of the Member for St. Augustine, we on this side are not in denial as he claims that we are, but rather we strengthen our efficiency and

work diligently to address the challenges associated with alcohol and other forms of drug use and abuse.

Madam Deputy Speaker, I would just like to point out again that the World Health Organization indicated that the hospital admission figures for cirrhosis death rates have revealed for many years a high prevalence rate of alcoholism in Trinidad and Tobago.

Cirrhosis of the liver is recognized as one of the 10 leading causes of death of individuals in this country as indicated by the Pan American Health Organization. Do you all not think it is necessary that we increase the taxes for alcohol beverages? It is necessary. [*Desk thumping*]

When one looks at the kinds of problems or the detrimental effects of alcohol use, it is necessary at this point in time to be a deterrent measure for the people of this country. It is really not about revenue collection. Yes, some revenue will be raised but when we look at the effects of this drug and the kinds of diseases caused, as well as the burden that it creates on the health system, it far outweighs the revenue that could be actually raised. So I really do not know what the Member for St. Augustine was talking about; that we should not raise the taxes and leave them as they are to have a lot of drunk senior citizens falling all over the place on the streets of Trinidad and Tobago and getting knocked down as a result because they are intoxicated and not aware of themselves.

Madam Deputy Speaker, a survey carried out in the Casualty Department of the Port of Spain General Hospital in the 1980s revealed that 68 per cent of the alcohol victims seen had high blood alcohol levels that were above the 0.05 per cent of the legal limit. If this was then, far less if that survey is conducted today, these percentages would be far more than what would have been found then.

Madam Deputy Speaker, the pervasive acceptance of drinking alcohol in this country has caused a myriad of problems for the individuals, families, societies and this society as a whole because of the numerous problems it brings.

When we think about families who have been affected, we think about the main breadwinner before he goes home to give the money to support his family going into the rum shop and spending all the money incurring probably 5 per cent of his income to his household. It has significant impact, he causes major financial strain for his family as well as the possibility of his family living in poverty, and so many other problems rippling as a result; child abuse, domestic violence, all these things occur as a result of this person's frequent use or excessive use of alcohol.

So, Madam Deputy Speaker, the Member for St. Augustine asked how would the people who use alcohol feel when they have to pay the increased taxes. I think the families of those persons will probably be elated and relieved at the fact that these taxes have been raised because they are the ones who are severely affected and feel the pain, they are the ones who are traumatized because of the excessive use of alcohol by their loved ones.

To increase the taxes on alcohol will also indeed act as a disincentive. The Member for St. Augustine said, leave it and let the senior citizens choose to drink as much as they want. But is that really a demonstration of care? If we were to say that we are not going to raise the taxes, are we really demonstrating care to these individuals in the society who need our help and who need us to put measures in place to help them so they would themselves not be attracted to the particular drug that they use?

Madam Deputy Speaker, a study by Miss Marilyn Procope on the Global School-based Student Health Survey, 2007 surveyed students from forms one to four from 32 schools throughout Trinidad and Tobago and this study revealed the prevalence of alcohol use amongst students. It is prevalent among the adults and most time they say: "Do as I say, but not as I do". But we have often heard it said what the monkey see the monkey will do. So you find that the children of the parents who use alcohol, they themselves are prone to use it.

Madam Deputy Speaker, overall 42.5 per cent of these secondary schools in the study use alcohol; male students, 47.9 per cent were significantly more likely than the female to have had two or more drinks on the days they drink alcohol during the last 30 days. In addition, 17.3 per cent of the students usually had access to the purchase of alcohol.

7.15 p.m.

Additionally, statistics about the consumption and the use of alcohol in Trinidad and Tobago reveal that 66 per cent of the highway deaths were due to alcohol use; 63 per cent are fire deaths; 60 per cent are motorcycle deaths; 50 per cent pedestrian accidents; 50 per cent drowning victims, have all been due to alcohol consumption.

The Members on the opposite side will say to us, do not raise the taxes; let them continue to die; let them continue to self-destruct; let them continue to slowly commit suicide. Do not raise the taxes. Is that a demonstration of care? Shame on them! Yes, shame on them.

The short-term effects of a large amount of alcohol use are—we had heard a range of them from the Member for Diego Martin North/East but I will still just reemphasize some of those: slurred speech, disturbed sleep; nausea; vomiting; impaired vision and coordination, which many researchers attribute to the cause of accidents; increase in the incidence of a variety of aggressive acts, such as domestic violence; child abuse; severe anxiety; tremors; hallucinations and convulsions. All of these things occur.

As a result, the long-term effects include: permanent damage to vital organs such as the brain and liver; in addition, mothers who drink alcohol during pregnancy may give birth to infants with foetal alcoholic syndrome. All of these things occur and these Members on the opposite side will say to us, do not do anything. We have to intervene [*Desk thumping*] and measures that we are taking will, indeed, bring about the results. The Member for Oropouche East said that these measures will fail. We are telling you they will succeed; they will prosper; they will succeed. So we will see the results as we implement this measure. You will see.

As I said earlier, major societal problems emanate when people use alcohol excessively. A study conducted by Maharaj and Ali in 2004 revealed that there was a strong correlation between alcohol use, unemployment and crime. Having an understanding of this, when someone is using alcohol, that person loses the desire to work; loses the desire to even socialize or interact with other persons. All that person becomes preoccupied with is drinking, and drinking excessively. So it does have an impact on unemployment. After a while the person would lose his or her job as a result and, as indicated by my colleagues, the level of productivity drops and, additionally, the person then, without a job, becomes prone to committing minor offences and in some instances, severe ones in order to support his or her habits.

It is for this reason that additional measures have been taken to increase the penalties and fees for motor vehicle offences. Members on the opposite side may argue that the use of cigarette and tobacco is harmless and they cannot see why taxes on these should be increased. The use of tobacco by persons of this country has become a major concern for this Government. It is another major issue that we are faced with.

According to statistics provided by the Pan American Health Organization in 2005, this country accounted for 21 per cent of the region's smokers, the highest in the Caribbean. A recent interview in the *Newsday* with Witco's managing director, Jean Pierre Du Coudray, revealed that the company recorded a turnover of \$710 million in 2007; a 12.6 per cent growth from 2006, which was due to improved sales performance on the domestic market. Operating profits increased by

\$20.5 million to \$215.7 million in 2007 and its after tax profit increased by 9.2 per cent to \$157 million. This was posted in the *Newsday Business Day*, January 15, 2009.

One would think that smoking cigarettes is harmless, but for the information of those who may not know the dangers of taking a few puffs, it is very, very, dangerous. There are many dangers in taking a few puffs. Tobacco smoke contains about 4,000 different chemicals. It contains nicotine, a powerful addictive drug found in cigarettes, which increases the heart rate and blood pressure and affects mood and behaviour. Nicotine is also an insecticide. [*Interruption*] Yes. There are more amazing findings, you know. I will let you all know.

Many of the substances in tar are known to cause cancer. It can also damage the lungs. Then we have carbon monoxide—that is found in tobacco smoke—a gas that takes the place of oxygen in the blood, making the lungs less efficient and stops the cells and tissues from getting the oxygen they need to work properly, thus making the smoker more prone to disease.

Research done by the Cancer Society of Trinidad and Tobago has revealed that there are some more chemicals that are found in tobacco smoke, which includes acetone, a nail polish remover, acetic acid or vinegar, arsenic or rat poison, butane, cigarette lighter fluid, methanol, rocket and car fuel. All of these things are found in tobacco or cigarette smoke, you know; also methane, a gas created by decomposing rubbish. And the list goes on and on. But they are all harmful drugs and they cause severe diseases in the individual who uses those drugs. The use of cigarettes causes heart disease, the leading cause of death in this country, according to the cancer society.

I would like to note that tobacco causes various types of cancer: kidney, lung, pancreatic, stomach, bladder, cervix, the oral cavity, larynx, pharynx, and cancer in the oesophagus. Reports from the cancer society again reveal that the mortality rates due to cancer have more than doubled for the period 1990 to 2003. That is the most recent research that they have, but if they were to conduct research today they would find that maybe the possibility exists that that number would have increased over time because of the number of persons that have been using cigarettes over the period.

Cigarette use doubles a person's risk for stroke and respiratory disease and can cause complications during pregnancy. This Government does not only acknowledge the dangers of smoking cigarettes but also the major risk that occurs in secondhand smoke. As a result, a "No Smoking" policy in all government buildings was developed. [*Desk thumping*]

So this policy is presently being implemented; a “No Smoking” policy in all government buildings, because we recognize the dangers of secondhand smoke. Secondhand smoke, according to research, contains 250 toxic chemicals, including more than 50 that can cause cancer. Inhaling secondhand smoke increases the risk of heart disease for non-smokers by 25 to 30 per cent and their lung cancer risk by 20 to 30 per cent. Secondhand smoke can also cause respiratory diseases in children and Sudden Infant Death Syndrome.

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Smoking cigarettes is so prevalent that even children in secondary schools believe that it is the norm. A study conducted by the National Alcohol and Drug Abuse Prevention Programme (NADAPP) among 3,909 secondary school students from 56 secondary schools in Trinidad and Tobago, revealed that more than one quarter of all students reported having tried cigarettes. A mean age of the first cigarette use overall was 11.9 years and the medium age was 12. Not many students felt that smoking cigarette was something that was very harmful, and current use prevalence was 7.2 per cent for males and 4.2 per cent for females. Most of these children reported smoking cigarettes at home.

The health of this country is the wealth of this country. [*Desk thumping*] And as a government, we, therefore, remain committed to the promotion of healthy lifestyles and will continue to inform the members of this population of the dangers associated with excessive use of alcohol and spirits, tobacco and cigarettes.

Our proposal to increase the excise or import duty on tobacco products of common market origin and the tobacco tax on extra-regional products by 15 per cent; to increase the excise duty on alcohol and spirit products of common market origin by 15 per cent and import duties on alcoholic products from extra-regional sources by 30 per cent, is a measure that is supported by me. [*Desk thumping*] This will result in an increase in revenue of \$30 million and \$50 million respectively. But, again, it is not about how much revenue we earn, but it is really about ensuring that these measures—

Hon. Member: How many lives we save.

Hon. A. Hospedales: Right. It is really about how many lives we save and really ensuring that these measures become a disincentive to the persons who use alcohol and cigarettes excessively.

We believe that the strategies utilized by the Ministry of Health paired with this measure, will bring about significant behaviour change in the population over

time. We would eventually see the decrease in the consumption of both these harmful products. Additionally, we see the burden on the health system as a result of the effects of tobacco and alcohol, we see that this would be significantly reduced, because we would have more healthy people in Trinidad and Tobago. As I said before, the health of the people of this nation is the wealth of this nation. Our nation will achieve the goal where all our citizens would be empowered to lead long, healthy lives and will have adequate access to efficient health care delivery systems.

Mr. Speaker, the Member for St. Augustine spoke about the various tax increases in the past. One thing I would like to say is that, can the tax on alcohol and cigarettes really be compared to the millions of dollars of subsidies for the health sector, housing, education, on food, free books for school children, free lunches, free breakfasts, a wide array of grants that are provided through the Ministry of Social Development; loans and grants under the Poverty Eradication Programme? Could it really be sufficient to the revenue that is earned through this tax incentive? Could it really be sufficient to build community centres; to build ECC centres? Could it really be sufficient to bring on our rapid rail and more water taxis? It really cannot. It is just earning a bit of money that, yes, would be reinvested into our programmes, our services that we have presently implemented.

I would really like to ask the Members on the opposite side: What do you all really want? Should we raise revenue through these tax increases or cut back on all the subsidized projects and programmes that we are providing?

7.30 p.m.

These projects are a major benefit to the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago. It is also said that this is a callous tax, but I would like to ask the Member for St. Augustine and even the Member for Oropouche East and the Members on the other side: Do you really care about the welfare of the people of this society? We know the answer. We care about their health, their well-being and their lives. We care about them living healthy lives and longer lives. We care about them living longer.

Just before I end, I would like to say, in relation to the vehicle transfer tax as identified by the Minister of Finance, there have been no increases in the past 15 years and the increase at this time is highly justified and well supported. I therefore do not hesitate to give support to the Excise Duty (Alcoholic Beverages) Order, 2009, the Excise Duty (Tobacco Products) Order, 2009, the Customs (Import Duty) (Caribbean Common Market) (Amdt.) Order, 2009 and the Motor Vehicle Transfer Tax, 2009.

I thank you.

Mr. Ramesh Lawrence Maharaj SC (Tabaquite): Mr. Speaker, thank you very much for giving me the opportunity to participate in this debate. Before I begin my contribution, may I seek your leave to put on record that I meant no discourtesy to this Parliament for not being present when the budget was presented.

As you know, I wear another cap, that of lawyer. Before the date of the budget debate was fixed, I had planned a meeting in London with lawyers on two matters which affect thousands of people in Trinidad and Tobago—the Caroni (1975) Limited matter and the aluminium smelter matter—which are due to be heard in the Court of Appeal in a short time.

I do not know why I have to be punished with a measure like this on my birthday. [*Desk thumping*] I must have done something wrong in life, but it is very good to be in this company, especially listening to all the exposures from both sides expressed and implied. I was supposed to come here on Tuesday night because I spoke to the Leader of Government Business and I was under the impression that the debate would have been finished on Wednesday or Thursday. Obviously, there was some arrangement that caused the debate not to be totally concluded, but not for the Opposition and we were not here yesterday.

I know that I cannot present a budget under these measures and that I am constrained in that, but my position here today is that I have great objection. This is a serious matter. I have great objections, on principle, for the people of this country having a tax imposed upon them or increased when it is shown that the economy has been mismanaged in boom time, when there were boom-time revenues, and now that the economy is in trouble, the people are now being asked to pay the taxes.

There are countries which operated differently and, instead of imposing additional taxation at this time, they have reduced taxes. I think, in principle, one of the matters which are not exhaustively relevant, but which to some extent is relevant, is that a person who has to pay these taxes on malt beverages and beer is entitled to say—my constituents would ask me: How could you go to the Parliament, MP, and these taxes are being imposed and you have a situation in which the Government is responsible, but the same policy is being continued, the mismanagement of the economy? It is in that context that I want to be able, as part of my contribution, in a very narrow stand, to show to some extent how this has happened.

The other question that arises if I am paying taxes is that you are asking the constituents of Tabaquite and the entire country to pay taxes. I am paying taxes, whatever they are, which are going into the Consolidated Fund. The Cabinet can use this money to pay UDeCott. The Cabinet can use this money for lawyers

retained by UDeCott. So the constituent is entitled to say: Why should I have to pay these taxes when there is so much waste, mismanagement and official corruption? These are relevant questions that the Government must satisfy the country about. It is not simple.

I congratulate the Member for Diego Martin North/East because he took a non-issue and realized that there would be a lot of "jamming", if I may use that expression, for coming to this Parliament to ask for increased taxes when the Government has been mispending the people's moneys and have a lopsided policy. What did he do? He decided to say that the Opposition is supporting alcohol consumption. This is creating emotionalism.

Next, this is really not a revenue measure; it is a health measure, a measure to deter people from drinking. I have read this; it is English language, and the Motion says:

“...for the purpose of raising revenue to meet the expenditure specified in any such Bill, by Order, provide for the imposition of a tax or the variation of an existing tax and from the date of the publication of the Order...”

It goes on to another whereas.

Mr. Imbert: Mr. Speaker, I know the Member is demonstrating his versatility and is showing us how one can be flexible and have a little leeway in linking measures to other matters. I will forgive the Member. He was not here for the budget address. The Minister of Finance said, and it is printed in the budget speech, that these measures are to promote healthy lifestyles. Of course, you would raise revenue. How else? It is a tax. It is for the promotion of healthy lifestyles.

Mr. R. L. Maharaj SC: It is just like a property tax. The fact is I read the budget, saw its presentation and I know. But as the hon. Member for Oropouche East pointed out, in the next line, what did she say? This is to raise revenue. In the third "Whereas", "for the purpose of raising revenue to meet the expenditure".

I received the documents late last night, *The Review of the Economy, 2009* and, on page 31, under "Revenue", it has these measures. So there can be no doubt that is a revenue measure. Whatever the purpose, it is a revenue measure. The reason we are here today is for the Parliament to approve this revenue measure and for the authority to be given to impose the tax. A tax is a special power that a government has because a person has the right to enjoy his property, which includes money and his money cannot be taken away from him except by due process of law. If it is a tax, it can be taken away compulsorily.

You must show that the tax is for a public purpose and that it is in the public interest. Therefore, we as debaters are entitled, whatever the purpose of the tax or the measure, the fact is that it is a revenue measure. You must show, even in these revenue measures, that you are managing the economy properly and, if you want people to pay tax, you do not have a situation in which you are wasting.

Do you know what we have here? I say at the outset that I do not dispute the evils of alcohol and tobacco. I do not think there could be any dispute. As a matter of fact, everything that has been said by the Member for Arouca/Maloney, I totally agree with as to the ill effects of alcohol.

As a Member of Parliament, when I travel through the country and see, at 11 o'clock on a Sunday morning, families in bars and inns, I realize that we are in total trouble. Therefore, a war against alcohol addiction and the evils of alcohol, I am prepared to support. However, let us be practical. This is not going to prevent anyone from buying alcohol. These increases are minimal; these are mild increases.

History has shown that the more you put the rate up, the more people consume it. This is not going to prevent anybody from buying alcohol. This will not prevent alcohol in the schools. The problem here is the bona fides of the Government. Why is it trying to dress up the situation to make it look like a war on alcohol and a war against smoking addiction? Why are they trying to dress it up? The reason is that they want money. The Treasury will run low. There will be further increases in this. There will be further taxation in Trinidad and Tobago.

We sat in this House in September last year when there was the crash in America and we told the Government to stop spending. The Minister of Works and Transport, the Member for Diego Martin North/East, got up and said that they were continuing. The Minister of Finance said yes, they were continuing, and they continued to spend. What happens now? They cannot spend as much, but they want to give the impression that they can. So they came with the same kind of budget, same kind of policy, but recognizing some constraints.

Mr. Speaker, there is a note here that the Prime Minister said that all you need for a good Minister of Finance is a person with common sense and a level head.

Mr. Imbert: When he said that?

Mr. R. L. Maharaj SC: He said that when the hon. Minister of Finance was appointed. He also said that about a Minister of National Security and we have a lot of crime. I like the Minister of Finance. She is a good lawyer. She is a good politician and a good debater, but I mean no discourtesy to her when I say something went wrong with the policy.

7.45 p.m.

Let us look, for example, at Chile. The President of Chile, Mr. Michelle Bachelet. *[Interruption]*

Mr. Imbert: It is a woman.

Mr. R. L. Maharaj SC: Ms. Micelle Bachelet, thank you, employed a Chilean professor, Prof. Andrés Velasco. *[Interruption]*

Mr. Imbert: Man or woman?

Mr. R. L. Maharaj SC: Whether it is a man or woman, the fact of the matter is the individual, this person was an economics professor from Harvard University and the Minister of Finance. What did that Minister of Finance do, as so many other Ministers of Finance? The Minister decided that during the time of the boom there were high prices for copper—*[Interruption]*

PROCEDURAL MOTION

The Minister of Works and Transport (Hon. Colm Imbert): I am sorry to stop the Member in full flight. Mr. Speaker, in accordance with Standing Order 10, I beg to move that this House continue to sit until the conclusion of the business at hand.

Question put and agreed to.

PROVISIONAL COLLECTION OF TAXES ORDER

Mr. R. L. Maharaj SC: There were high prices for copper and Chile had a lot of money, boom days, but they did not go ahead and spend and build palace and have big conferences and build big buildings; they saved. As a matter of fact, they saved as much as possible. Today, with low copper prices, Chile has reduced taxes, not increased taxes.

This Government, because of its mismanagement, that is the point I am trying to make, in the boom days, just about one or two years ago, the revenues have now gone down and they have to increase taxes. Because of its mismanagement, who are the people paying for the mismanagement? *[Interruption]*

Mr. Imbert: Nobody.

Mr. R. L. Maharaj SC: It is the taxpayers; it does not matter what it is for.

According to that logic—I read the contribution of the previous Minister, the Member of Parliament for Diego Martin West. He gave evidence of \$100 million

fraud. These two contracts alone, at the point of tender, were \$100 million more than tenders on the table. This was not challenged. What was said in response was to justify the bid-rigging. You have a situation in which this Parliament is being told that the Government is closing its eyes to \$100 million, but coming here to raise, according to the Member of Parliament for Diego Martin East, \$100-and-something million to go in the Consolidated Fund. *[Interruption]*

Mr. Imbert: Again, Member for Tabaquite, you were not here. The fact of the matter is—*[Interruption]*

Mr. Peters: He was watching it on the Internet.

Mr. Imbert: I am just saying he was not here. *[Interruption]* Okay. The fact of the matter is that particular contract that you have referred to, as I have said during my contribution when you were not here—

Mr. R. L. Maharaj SC: I have it.

Mr. Imbert: As I said during my contribution, that was not a traditional design and tender contract, it was a design/build contract. The fact is that the contractor that put in the low bid proposed a very rudimentary unfinished structure and the contractor that put in the winning bid, proposed a high-rise, complicated, sophisticated structure. It is not apples and apples. One proposal was a rudimentary low-rise. You can compare it, perhaps, to a junior secondary school and the other was like the Waterfront Complex. That is the difference between the two, so you cannot use price as your only indicator.

Mr. R. L. Maharaj SC: Mr. Speaker, I am not talking about price. I have Dr. Rowley's contribution and I have the Member for Diego Martin North/East contribution. I am talking about a glaring case where an auditor who was decided upon not to be an auditor went, and because of his input, there is \$100 million difference. *[Interruption]*

Mr. Imbert: No, no.

Mr. R. L. Maharaj SC: That is not the only one. I do not want to—how could the taxpayer be asked to do this, to fund this thing, when glaringly, if you want this measure, decide that the entire board of UDeCott must step down now. Mr. Calder Hart has to step down. You cannot have these allegations and the evidence and you are going to ask the taxpayer to fund a measure for the money to go into the Consolidated Fund for you to take it to pay UDeCott. On principle, that cannot be supported.

Before I go into some of the matters I talked about, there is a book entitled *In Sickness and in Power*. This book is written by David Owen, a former Foreign Minister of the United Kingdom.

“This book is a unique study of illness in heads of government between the year 1901 and 2007. It considers how illness and therapy, both physical and mental, affect the process of government and decision-making, leading to acts of folly in the sense of stupidity or rashness.”

What this Government is doing is a culmination of stupidity, rashness and madness. A government cannot come here and ask you to approve taxing measures, when they cannot justify how the state economy is being run and how moneys are being misspent in state enterprises. In principle, it is wrong.

As a matter of fact, if we go back in history taxation is a matter that can be the cause of a revolution. It caused the birth of the United States of America. In America, the slogan was: "No taxation without representation". [*Interruption*]

Mrs. Nunez-Tesheira: That is not relevant.

Mr. R. L. Maharaj SC: Not relevant? That is the arrogance. The Minister of Finance says it is not relevant. That is the arrogance, which this book talks about. It is relevant because you cannot tax people without showing that you are properly representing them. You cannot tax people. That is what happened in America. The people in America decided they were paying taxes, but they were not being properly represented and they severed ties and formed a new nation. [*Interruption*]

Mr. Imbert: Mr. Speaker, I cannot stand here and allow this interpretation of history to pass. That was the Boston Tea Party. They did not have a Government of the people and for the people. That is why it was taxation without representation.

Mrs. Nunez-Tesheira: That is why I was saying it was not relevant.

Mr. Imbert: It was not a democratic country at the time. Come on.

Mr. R. L. Maharaj SC: Mr. Speaker, would I continuously have the hon. Member for Diego Martin East interrupting me? He could have his complexion of history, but I could also have my complexion of history.

I want to read a little about governance. In the preface of this book, at xviii it quoted a historian called Barbara Todman saying:

“We are less aware that power breeds folly; that the power to command frequently causes failure to think; that the responsibility of power often fades

as its exercise augments. The overall responsibility of power is to govern as reasonably as possible in the interest of the state and its citizens. A duty in that process is to keep well-informed, to heed information, to keep mind and judgment open and to resist the insidious spell of wooden-headedness. If the mind is open enough to perceive that a given policy is harming rather than serving self-interest, and self-confident enough to acknowledge it, and wise enough to reverse it, that is a summit in the art of government.”

This Government has been told time and again that in managing the economy, we must recognize that your policy is a one-horse driven economy. That is to say, it is a petroleum-based economy; you must diversify it. This Government has continued not diversifying the economy and one of the reasons that we have found ourselves in this position is because there are, I would use the expression, wooden-headedness, in that they are not reversing their policy. Mr. Speaker, that is why I would say, in my respectful view, that the Government is really guilty.

I think unfortunately, like the hon. Prime Minister has the disease which this book talks about, hubris syndrome, in that the arrogance, not prepared to change and prepared to go along the same route. As a matter of fact, the hubris syndrome is at xxvi:

“The behavioural symptoms which might trigger the diagnosis of hubris syndrome typically grow in strength the longer a head of government remains in office.”

It talks about the arrogance, predisposition, et cetera.

“The hubris syndrome is different in that it should not be seen as a personality syndrome but as something which manifests itself in any leader but only when in power—and usually only after they have wielded it for some time...In that sense it is an illness of the office as much as of the person.”

In "sickness and in power", that is exactly what is happening here.

If we are going to impose taxation, one of the things people want to know is that the taxation is to make them happy, to solve their problems and to keep them safe and secure. The Government is asking the Parliament to approve the taxes, in a situation in which my constituents, for example, are going to pay this tax because the Government has the majority. How could it be justified? Their roads are in a bad condition and their drainage is in a bad condition. The Government cannot stop the flooding. The Government cannot even stop crime.

As I was reading the Daily Telegraph yesterday, it is very significant—*[Interruption]* You did not have Parliament yesterday. I was on my way to come to the Parliament when the hon. Member for Diego Martin North/East frustrated that event.

The story states that the President of France decided to put the pursuit of happiness above economic growth. Nicholas Sarkozy has stated that he proposed that the country's economic progress should be measured in happiness, rather than cold statistics. The French President, yesterday announced a revolutionary plan to make joy and well-being the key indicators of growth, rather than traditional yardsticks such as the country's gross domestic product. That is my point; you cannot come and tell us you want to raise these measures, unless you can show that you are going to make people happy.

I just want to spend a few minutes to show that if the economy was managed with the boom time resources, we would not have to pay this tax. These people would not have had to pay this tax.

8:00 p.m.

Mr. Imbert: How do you know that?

Mr. R. L. Maharaj SC: Mr. Speaker, our economy, during the first half of 2008, the energy sector alone provided over 50 per cent of GDP and more than 90 per cent of our foreign exchange. That is a fact. Today, and according to some thoughts, there is a loud clamour that we should try to diversify the economy, but let us see what happened with this Government. They are trying to give the impression that this thing came on suddenly and this taxation has become necessary.

So, we know that the Trinidad and Tobago economy depends on oil and gas and global demand for it. We saw the price of oil at US \$147 per barrel and gas at US \$4 per mmbtu, dropped to below US \$40 and US \$3, catching you on the other side flatfooted.

The global recession did not come like a thief in the night, because up to budget September 2008, we knew that there was trouble to come. As a matter of fact, those of us who have ears to hear and eyes to see would have noticed the goings-on in the international community. They would have already seen in September 2008 that oil prices had dropped from a high of US \$147 in July to US \$90 a barrel, a drop of 36 per cent.

Also, as early as September 05, 2008, the UN Conference on Trade and Development issued a report which stated that the global economy is tottering on the brink of a recession. The downturn is due to the financial crisis in the United States of America, to the bursting of the housing bubble, soaring commodity prices, increasing monetary policies in a number of countries and stock market uncertainties. Yet, our Minister of Finance, presented a budget one year ago targeted to a price of US \$70 a barrel and gas at US \$4, ignoring the signs of the

economic storm that was about to engulf the world. Later we heard the Prime Minister's call to tighten your belts; we will fight the recession.

Mr. Imbert: Mr. Speaker, Standing Order 36(1). I think the Member is really straying.

Mr. Speaker: I am giving the Member a little leeway.

Mr. R. L. Maharaj SC: As our economy sank to a decrease in GDP, the Government and the Central Bank was strident in their denial that we were in a recession. As a matter of fact, they started to say there was a decay or decline of 1 per cent in the last quarter of 2008, and a further decline of 3 per cent in the first quarter of 2009. We do not know what has happened in the second quarter, because the figures have not yet been published.

Mr. Speaker, if you look at the global situation, as the oil prices climbed to US \$147, the global economy was reacting on the supply of oil—it was booming—and, therefore, everybody knew at that time that the increased prices had to be looked at and the alternative source of energy which was being used at that time which is ethanol. The Government was oblivious to all of this. As a matter of fact, their income was high; spending was high; liquidity was high; inflation was high; and they were building unproductive high monuments in Port of Spain; planning glitzy get togethers for our international friends; and our Prime Minister was the cock of the war. So, we had all this spending like hell, if I may use that expression, and money flowing but the knockout punch came with the collapse of international financial systems. We know what was the cause; the greed of persons worldwide and Wall Street were involved. The Minister of Finance had to come twice to this House to adjust that budget—

Mrs. Nunez-Tesheira: I did not come to the House to do it.

Mr. R. L. Maharaj SC: What happened is that there was a situation in fiscal year 2007/2008 where the Government's income from the energy sector was \$25 billion. It fell to \$12 billion in the year 2008/2009. Given the budget before us today, it is expected to be \$9 billion with a deficit of \$7.7 billion for a total budgeted figure of \$45 billion. So, we have a budget with that deficit. What the Government is doing to fund that deficit is saying that it wants people to pay; we want to tax them, but they are doing it under the guise that they are going to reduce alcohol addiction and cigarette addiction.

Mr. Speaker, why I say that we are going to have much more taxation? We have been told that our economy was so expertly managed that at the present

time there are savings of \$18 billion in the Heritage and Stabilisation Fund; \$1.7 billion in the Green Fund; \$4.5 billion in the Unemployment Levy Fund and \$5.2 billion in the Infrastructure Development Fund, totalling \$11.4 billion.

Mr. Imbert: Mr. Speaker, Standing Order 36(1). [*Interruption*]

Mr. Speaker: I am happy that he is being relevant. [*Interruption*]

Mr. R. L. Maharaj SC: Mr. Speaker, this is what we saved in the good days. So, the money in this fund cannot be used as a reason to say—at the end of the day, when things get worse, and they are going to become worse, because that money is going to go. If I am correct, I think that is only 11 months supply. So, where will the Government get the money? The budget is along the same lines of previous years, billions of dollars. This is only a drop in the bucket for the time being. People are going to be asked to pay more and more taxes and, therefore, our position today is that we should not have to pay taxes. The Government should be reducing taxes. If the Government had listened and was not suffering from this disease of hubris syndrome, they would have caused the economy to be so managed that we would have had no taxes to pay. [*Desk thumping*] The Government is responsible. They are going to take the weakest in the society and make them pay this money. This has nothing to do with alcohol prevention.

If they were serious about a policy for alcohol prevention, they would have instituted measures immediately to have the breathalyser test. [*Desk thumping*] Every day people are dying on the road. The last speaker, the hon. Member for Arouca/Maloney, talked about cigarettes causing cancer and deaths, but people are dying every day.

When I was Attorney General, we had a Breathalyser Bill and it was amended. Nine years have passed and there has been no breathalyser. If you really want to have a war on alcohol, you need to implement the breathalyser measures so that people would be prosecuted and they would be prevented from driving drunk on the roads.

Mr. Imbert: What about in their homes?

Mr. R. L. Maharaj sc: Mr. Speaker, if you really want to have a war against alcohol, I would have thought that the Government would have come with a measure to deal with licensing laws for alcohol. How is it that under this present law for alcohol there are all these rum shops, bars and clubs? The Government has allowed this to happen. If you drive around Port of Spain there are many bars. Look at Woodbrook Avenue!

Mr. Imbert: I thank the Member for giving way. I am really quite astonished. I was a Member of this House on that side, and I was the one who protested vigorously when the UNC government brought a measure to this House to allow the sale of alcohol on Sundays. That was your Government. You were the Attorney General at the time. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. R. L. Maharaj SC: What does that have to do with it? This Government is saying that this is a measure to fight the war against alcohol addiction. So, the Government must say why it has not reformed the law to fight alcohol addiction. Is this your policy to fight alcohol addiction? Well, then this is just like your crime policy. This cannot be a policy to fight crime. You will have to implement the breathalyser law; you will have to actually reform the licensing laws; the Ministry of Social Development would have to go on a proactive fight against alcoholism; and they will have to go in the constituency of Tabaquite and other constituencies with a mobile unit and do proactive work. I did not see anything like that. Tabaquite does not have any social programme unit. It is the most forsaken constituency in the entire country. Representations have not produced any result.

Dr. Browne: They have a bad MP.

Mr. R. L. Maharaj SC: Mr. Speaker, I am not seeing any Government war against alcohol and the uses of alcohol. In the same way, I am not seeing any war against crime and the effects of criminal activity in Trinidad and Tobago.

Mr. Speaker, just for a brief moment—they are talking about diversifying the economy and the Government feels that this is one of the ways. Now, Lloyd Best had been talking about this for years. Let us just look at the budget and see what they did with agriculture.

Mr. Imbert: Mr. Speaker, I must protest.

Mr. Speaker: The hon. Member did not say one word. It is a preempted strike.

Mr. R. L. Maharaj SC: Mr. Speaker, one of the premises of my contribution was that the economy is one horse driven. They are recognizing that it should not be one horse driven; and they are recognizing that if it was not one horse driven, probably we would not have this tax. I merely want to spend one minute on this matter.

Mr. Speaker, according to Public Sector Investment Programme document on page 49, during the last financial year, it was reported that 4.2 kilometres of access roads were completed at a cost of \$7 million and an additional 500 kilometres of access roads are still to be developed, which at the growing rate will cost \$833 million. According to that figure, and as to how many kilometres of

road were done, it would take 119 years if they continue to develop them at the rate of 4.2 kilometres per annum.

Mr. Speaker, the total budget of Trinidad and Tobago for this year is \$44.36 billion. The Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Marine Resources was allocated \$635.4 million for recurrent expenditure; \$84 million for the development programme and an additional \$21 million from the Infrastructure Development Fund. When we do the mathematics, how are we going to have agricultural access roads, drainage, et cetera?

Mr. Imbert: Mr. Speaker, I must protest, the minute is up.

Mr. Speaker: I think the hon. Member has recognized that.

8.15 p.m.

Mr. R. L. Maharaj SC: I want to ask the Member for Diego Martin North/East, for him not to answer it silently: How would the taxpayer of Tabaquite justify paying taxes, when the money is not being used to fix the agricultural access roads?

Mr. Imbert: I thank the Member for asking me and giving way. I made the point that these alcohol and tobacco taxes are not for the purpose of raising revenue for extraneous matters. They are to be used to give allocations to the Ministry of Social Development, for their substance abuse reduction programmes, subventions to NGOs, for all of these state apparatus associated with the reduction of substance abuse. I said that.

Mr. R. L. Maharaj SC: Mr. Speaker, the hon. Minister was not present when the Prime Minister was here and the Prime Minister gave something different. Unless you want to challenge the Prime Minister, the Prime Minister could not have given an undertaking that the moneys from the Consolidated Fund would be used for any of the rehabilitation programmes. As a matter of fact he said that it would go into the Consolidated Fund. So, whatever the position is, there is nothing which prevents the Government from using these moneys.

Therefore, when my constituents ask me why is it that I would have to pay this money, when the money is going into the Consolidated Fund and UDeCott and would not fix my agricultural access roads—

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

Motion made, That the hon. Member's speaking time be extended by 30 minutes. [Mr. W. Peters]

Question put and agreed to.

Mr. R. L. Maharaj SC: Mr. Speaker, it seems I got more support from that side than this side. [*Desk thumping*] [*Crosstalk*] I would not take 30 minutes. There is one aspect that is very critical and I think it is a question which not only my constituents—

Mr. Speaker: Order!

Mr. R. L. Maharaj SC:—would ask, but constituents in the constituencies of the Government Members and of other Opposition Members. I followed this debate on the budget, but the Minister of National Security was completely absent. We have had a debate on this matter, which originated to a greater extent from measures being implemented by the policy in the budget. We have a problem in that you are asking people to pay tax, but you have a major problem in the country, every day the problem of crime. The paying of tax is for people to be happy, safe and secure.

In another avenue, for this forum, I intend to go at length into this issue of crime and some other matters. I do not think it is morally correct—yes, they have the majority, yes they can do it—for the Government to come to this Parliament and ask people to pay taxes in a situation in which the crime is so bad that you had five people being murdered the other day, three people being murdered two or three days ago. There is no avenue of any hope, there is no response from the Government and you are coming here to tax people and telling them that you want to save people's lives by curtailing alcohol and curtailing spending.

It makes the Government look hypocritical. It is a serious matter which undermines the credibility of the Government. It is a relevant issue, and therefore, even up to this time, some time, the national community should be told, somehow or the other, what their taxes are being used for. This tax, is it going to make the situation better for crime? Are people going to be safer? The Prime Minister said that the Government can use this from the Consolidated Fund in any matter.

We have a situation in which the arrogance of this Government; the wooden-headedness of the Government, and therefore, it is folly in my respectful view, for the Government to come to this House and ask for support in a measure like this, without justifying that the measure can produce happiness, comfort, and security.

Mr. Speaker, in closing I want to say something and I do not want it to be taken as a joke. I consider this matter a very serious matter. I cannot allow the problems of my constituents and the country to go in the way they have been going and the response which the Government has been giving. The Government has not been practising the values of democracy, really accounting to the Parliament, and something has to happen; something dramatic will happen, all constitutional and lawful, otherwise the Parliament will become irrelevant, in a

sense, because the people's problems, the whole basis of Parliament, is for the Government to account, to show that it is governing in the interest of the people and for the Opposition to provide a strong opposition to the Government.

What I can say the Government is doing and this measure, this attitude of the Government, and this hubris syndrome it is displaying, it seems as if the hubris syndrome in the Prime Minister has been contagious, it has affected some of the Ministers, and it has contaminated them. It seems that it is so powerful that the best Ministry of Health that they have or the best medicine, would not be able to prevent it. This hubris syndrome in the Government is going to continue. They have not shown any way in which they are going to act in the interest of the people.

I want to tell them here today that I saw this in 1994. I saw an arrogant government; I saw an Opposition, but a very arrogant government. The Prime Minister decided that he was going to call the election. The Prime Minister thinks that with this budget and with a fragmented Opposition, he can call a general election, but I want him to know that what he is doing will mobilize the national community, and they are going to be removed. So, this is the last budget that the Minister of Finance would have presented.

I want to bid her farewell; this is the last budget the Minister of Finance would have presented. I want them to understand that this hubris syndrome in the Prime Minister, even Cuba cannot cure it. I want the hon. Member for Diego Martin North/East to know that he must never feel too secure. You could take the experience from all of us.

Mr. Imbert: Mr. Speaker, since we are making jokes and clearly the Member for Tabaquite is joking—and I thank him for giving way—I just want to let him know in December of this year, I will reach the maximum time for full parliamentary pension.

Mr. R. L. Maharaj SC: Mr. Speaker, I did not mean to tell the Member for Diego Martin North/East that he would no longer be a candidate for the People's National Movement. As a matter of fact, he and Dr. Rowley are on the same footing. So, I did not want to tell him that, but he probably got an indication of what is to come.

Mr. Speaker, in closing, I want to say that a budget is a serious measure, taxation is a serious measure, and I hope that the Government would at least try to meet the Opposition halfway; try to come up with some proposal that even the moneys which are generated from this taxation, would go into a special fund and be used for rehabilitation, and the prevention of alcohol addiction and smoking addiction.

Thank you very much.

The Minister of Social Development (Hon. Dr. Amery Browne): Thank you, Mr. Speaker, for the opportunity. I rise to make a very brief intervention. I feel forced, compelled and duty bound to briefly enter this debate upon hearing the contributions of the Member for St. Augustine and the Member for Oropouche East. I would characterize both of those contributions as abysmal, cataclysmic, depressing, in the degree of ignorance that they demonstrate, with regard to the social policy of the Government of Trinidad and Tobago.

There was a very disingenuous effort to cast these taxes as the only prevention measure being held or advanced by the Government at this time. I would like to set the record straight in this honourable House and give some information or illumination to these two Members in particular. I will not trouble the Member for Tabaquite, I know he has troubles of his own, and I noted that he took the opportunity to bid farewell to the hon. Minister of Finance, maybe he is already on the diving board, the springboard or the exit ramp. He is known to be a prophet in his own right, so it was very polite of him to bid us farewell before fate catches up with him. I would not get into that, I know you are involved in your own Shakespearian wrestling match.

So, back to some enlightenment and illumination for the unfortunate Member for Oropouche East and the hon. Member for St. Augustine. I really feel compelled, because they made much ado of these taxes and it ended up in a bit of a conundrum in advancing that the Government of Trinidad and Tobago is relying on taxation to prevent alcohol abuse or reduce alcohol abuse. It even went to some rhetorical questions from the Member for Oropouche East, asking for the information, so he should be very grateful for this particular measure or response.

I would divide the Government's approach to alcohol prevention in two ways. One is direct intervention via a number of agencies, particularly spearheaded by the National Alcohol and Drug Abuse Prevention Programme (NADAPP) under the Ministry of Social Development, and also indirect interventions, very strong ones, via strategic support to non-governmental organizations and community groups across Trinidad and Tobago, including constituencies served by hon. Members opposite and including constituencies south of San Fernando.

Mr. Speaker, if you are kind enough to permit me, I would give a few examples for the enlightenment of the Member for Oropouche East, both from his professional capacity—well, I heard some revelations earlier that might lead to him seeking the encouragement of these agencies should he choose to do so.

Mr. Imbert: Treatment.

Hon. Dr. A. Browne: No, I would not say treatment, but advice. One of the very powerful groups that has done interventions and is fully supported by the Government of Trinidad and Tobago via subventions, one-off grants and other forms of support, is Rebirth House, which has programming in Carenage, Chaguaramas, Port of Spain and St. Ann's. Rebirth House is regionally renowned for its efforts in alcohol and drug abuse prevention. They are not relying on taxation, but they are doing interventions with affected communities. Another example, for your enlightenment, is New Life Ministries. So, there are the church-based groups and the community-based groups, doing work all across the country, and if you are not aware of any intervention in Oropouche East, I am afraid that might be due to a lack of interface with your constituents because they are benefiting from this programming.

There are a number of other groups. There was mention of HEAL, maybe not recognition that HEAL continues, is alive and well and is supported by both state and non-state entities up to this day. It does not matter who started it. The fact is that these groups are alive and well, and receiving state resources, whether coming directly from the taxes or whether going to the Consolidated Fund and then coming through various ministries and providing support, the support is there, the initiatives are there.

8.30 p.m.

In these cases you cannot force persons to come forward and accept treatment or rehabilitation. Very often some persons hit rock bottom, other persons have traumatic experiences or otherwise and that might lead them to seek support and that is why having families or colleagues who are willing to share these issues—

Another example is Serenity Place. You asked about Cochrane Village, south of San Fernando. Do you know where Cochrane Village is? You do not. Well, further ignorance and further need for education. *[Interruption]* But I would not give you a Geography lesson, Member for Oropouche East. *[Interruption]* There you go, it is in the constituency of Point Fortin, which, as you know, is south of San Fernando. I would just indicate that Serenity Place is the only treatment institution specifically for females in the English-speaking Caribbean, so we have a lot to be proud of in terms of the interventions offered, again, receiving a full subvention and they are also going across to Palo Seco in the near future.

On the State side we have the Piparo Empowerment Centre. Again, located in an Opposition constituency, fully funded by the State, fully staffed—these points were made on the other side and they have to be responded to, Member for Mayaro. *[Interruption]*

They have to be responded to—fully supported and with a very good recovery rate. So do not say or do not pretend to the population that we are relying on taxation alone—anti-alcohol and anti-drug effort—it is disingenuous and it is just not true.

I wish the Member for Princes Town North was here, because he would probably rise to applaud the work being done in his constituency, that centre providing national coverage; persons come from Tobago to attend this centre. Very unique, they do not know anything!

Mr. Sharma: He would never applaud.

Hon. Dr. A. Browne: Well, I do not know. They would not applaud the right thing; maybe they would applaud the wrong thing. On the other side there is Court Shamrock as well. We are talking about the south of the country, based in San Fernando doing excellent rehabilitative work, both with socially displaced persons and other individuals who are referred. Again, the prevention, treatment and cure of alcohol-related disease and other drug afflictions.

Alcoholics Anonymous: Do not tell me you have never heard of Alcoholics Anonymous?

Hon. Member: He was there, was he not? [*Laughter*]

Hon. Dr. A. Browne: No, I would not cast any aspersions on the Member for Oropouche East. Again, over 20 chapters right across Trinidad and Tobago, including in constituencies of which you should have a little better knowledge. There are two umbrella organizations serving alcohol prevention and drug prevention. There is the National Council on Alcohol and Other Addictions and there is also the Association of Substance Abuse Providers of Trinidad and Tobago (ASAPO). It is not just about taxes. There are other groups: Families in Action, Church of the Nazarene and so many other organizations working hand in hand, arm in arm, with the State, with the Government of Trinidad and Tobago, with the Ministry of Social Development in providing resources, treatment, care, support, prevention and information. It is really comprehensive.

NADAPP under the Ministry of Social Development has been doing consistent public information and education, including in schools. In the last fiscal year, 150 primary and secondary schools were direct beneficiaries of interventions from the NADAPP unit, just in the last fiscal year. We have a growing collaboration with Rebirth House to go out to every single educational institution, all the schools and providing the prevention work that is necessary and will always be necessary in a developing country.

We also do consistent work with the media and radio stations with regard to drug and alcohol prevention. Radio stations, including some based in south Trinidad and some of it in collaboration with the Ministry of Sport and Youth Affairs, they have a much heralded summer camp programme. Again, NADAPP has been in there with them exposing the children to drug and alcohol prevention. So do not come here and pretend it is just about taxes in this budget and the Government is doing nothing else—and you are failing to recognize this is just part and parcel of a much broader, much more comprehensive and much more effective policy on behalf of the Government. Sponsorship of "Eye on Dependency" and many other programmes—on *Gayelle*, there is the "Kuchursingh" family, specific interventions.

Hon. Member: Kochoor Singh.

Hon. Dr. A. Browne: K-O-C-H-O-O-R Singh, excellent. Thank you for that little lesson in enunciation again. They have gotten that family to focus on alcohol prevention and that has been a theme actually to help reach minds [*Interruption*] [*Laughter*] through the use of drama, so do not create the wrong impression and force these types of interventions. Also, southern radio station and we are doing more work with *Gayelle* as well. There are other state agencies. It is not just about NADAPP and the Ministry of Social Development. The National AIDS Coordinating Committee in the Office of the Prime Minister, also doing consistent work in alcohol and drug abuse prevention.

The Ministry of Education, through their Student Support Services Division; the Ministry of Sport and Youth Affairs, the Ministry of Health; it is right across the board, part and parcel of a very strong, very vibrant and growing Government social agenda, treating with the challenges and building efficiency.

In 2009, NADAPP also conducted lectures and demonstrations with over 8,000 participants across Trinidad and Tobago, not just in Diego Martin or Port of Spain and I can tell you young people in all constituencies are being touched. There is also now, for the first time, pre-school drug education, recognizing these prevention measures have to start from the very youngest and brought together the pre-school educators from the ECCE centres and provided them with training on the signs and tips to provide to young children. So, it really is a case of trying to fill some of the gaps in knowledge and Members opposite, specifically the two who spoke. I know the Member for Tabaquite is well educated and I am sure the Member for Fyzabad is, as well, on all of these measures.

We continue to do work on various radio stations and other media houses and are very open to opportunities to share these messages and roll back some of the

ignorance as presented on the other side, also, publications which I am going to have to bring and share with colleagues opposite because, clearly, they are not exposing themselves to the available material. The last publication done by NADAPP over 10,000 copies went in a flash and the demand is very high. It shows that the work is effective and the material is reaching the target audience. Males—Member for Oropouche East, you will be interested in this one.

Mr. Imbert: Why?

Hon. Dr. A. Browne: No, no, Oropouche East, I am speaking to you, through you, Mr. Speaker—

Mr. Imbert: Why would he be interested? [*Laughter*]

Hon. Dr. A. Browne: Males are also specifically targeted by the Ministry of Community Development, Culture and Gender Affairs.

Mr. Imbert: Why?

Hon. Dr. A. Browne: Because he is a male.

Hon. Member: Okay.

Hon. Dr. A. Browne: Because they conduct a men's caravan which has gone throughout the country, including County Caroni and other counties, and done interventions, specifically targeting males and prevention of alcohol and drug abuse in males. NADAPP has been collaborating with them.

On the policy side, just to close, Mr. Speaker, NADAPP also chairs an Inter-Ministerial Committee for the development of a national drug treatment and rehabilitation re-policy, and an Inter-Ministerial Committee to coordinate a common approach to media, anti-drug advertising and sponsorship, just to get some more consistency across media in terms of how we approach—and there are good examples in developed countries of even more effective media approaches to this issue.

So, it is not just about taxes, Members opposite. I hope you are now properly educated and informed, but this is just part of a much wider and more comprehensive social sector approach to these very challenging issues. So, I would invite you to join with the Government, join with the social sector in advancing this cause, supporting these advanced measures and also supporting these new taxations and the budget as presented by the hon. Minister of Finance.

Mr. Speaker, I thank you very much.

Mr. Chandresh Sharma (Fyzabad): Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It is clear that the Government is trying to save face. It is very clear that the Government could not wake up on the morning of the budget and decide that this problem obtains in Trinidad and Tobago.

In fact, having heard the last speaker, the Member for Diego Martin Central, we have heard the problems of when he became addicted to alcohol and cigarettes, et cetera, but when you become addicted to politics you run the tendency of starting to lie. Because what you have really said you do not believe it yourself. How is it you are aware of all of these things and before today none of this came to the national community's attention?

Dr. Browne: What?

Mr. C. Sharma: Hold on, hold on. None of it! You saw no problems. *[Interruption]* There was absolutely no problem. Everything was going okay. You suddenly needed more money because you have wasted the country's money and you need to find revenue earning capacity, so it has nothing to do with the problems. How it is all of this is happening and you have not come one day, even in your budget contribution and now other Members saw it fit—I mean, this is misleading the community and this creates problems, because you see, you are not fooling the national community. They are realizing that the Government needs to raise \$80 million.

In fact, when you look at the Government expenditure for Carnival, they spent in excess of \$100 million. What amounts of it goes into alcohol? What amounts of it goes into cigarettes? The very bars they promote—and for many years more than \$80 million have been spent on alcohol and related stuff. So to come today and pretend, we are a Government and we care about those who are drinking and those who are smoking, absolutely no evidence.

I would have thought that you would have come here today and level with the national community, indicate to the national community why people are using alcohol and what are the measures—but, Mr. Speaker, before I go there I want to say to the House that recently there was a motor vehicle accident in which five persons died and immediately after that accident a religious leader by the name of Pundit Dineshwar Maharaj from South Oropouche gave instructions to his group—he is the spiritual leader of a temple there—to start some work to draw attention to drunk driving. In fact, a little group emerged. It is called, South Oropouche Survivors Against Drunk Driving (SOSAD).

I would have thought the Minister having declared all of these groups, how come you are not aware of the newest group? *[Interruption]* Why are you doing

this? *[Interruption]* No, I agree, but you see, because it is so cosmetic in your view, from the time that accident took place the national community started to communicate with each other—by way of the media and a number of other groups—what was happening and a campaign has started and you see no Government assistance.

Now, one would argue, has the group applied? Also, it shows you how people respond and the fact that they have not come to you because they are not aware that you give assistance, or they do not believe in you, or they have come to recognize that the Government does not assist groups south of the Caroni River. *[Interruption]* In addition to that, about two years ago a young police officer by the name of Seeram Singh died of cancer—the Government failed to make basic medication available—and since his death two years ago they started the Seeram Singh Cancer Support Group in St. John Trace, Avocat. They have been doing a great deal of—again, no Government assistance.

So, for the Government to come today and to pretend that so much is happening and we are so concerned, I would have thought the Minister—and I do not expect the Minister to do everything. She does not have enormous capacity. She tries in her own way, but the Minister should have said or the Government should have said, these are some of the problems we are hearing.

The Member for Diego Martin Central tried to level with the contribution of the Member for Oropouche East and the Member for Tabaquite. This is not about who wins the debate here. You are talking about people's lives, you are talking about alcohol use and abuse and you are talking about families affected. To say you are doing all of these things, there is no problem. You criticize the mover. You see, the difficulty with the Government is they want to be critical all of the time. You have to learn to be complimentary. *[Laughter]*

The Member for Oropouche East raised concerns, but all you were concerned about is how you could destroy his argument, The Member for Tabaquite raised concerns and so did the Member for St. Augustine. *[Interruption]* I want to present why some people are drinking alcohol in this country. As you know, I am one of the few Members of Parliament here who do not drink alcohol nor smoke cigarettes.

Mr. Imbert: You! You stop.

Mr. C. Sharma: I want to wish the Member for Diego Martin North/East best of luck in his retirement. By December you should be gone, 18 years full pension.

Mr. Imbert: You reach 18 too, "eh".

Mr. C. Sharma: No, I look like 18. Now I would have thought that the Government would have done some investigation into the situation in Trinidad and Tobago, and not go on the Internet and pull down all of the American statistics and come and boast it here as if they are originators of this information. Why are people drinking in Trinidad? Have you studied it? Have you looked at it?

Well, we know they drink for social reasons, sometimes in celebration—*[Interruption]* Do you have something to say, Member for Tunapuna? Why do you drink? *[Laughter]* The point I want to make—the research shows people drink because of social pressures, when people are at social events where alcohol is served they may end up feeling pressured to drink.

Mr. Imbert: Because they are Members of the UNC.

Mr. C. Sharma: The Member for Oropouche East was asking if the Government would consider, at state functions, not to serve alcohol. Because you see when you go to a function, especially a State function—if I went to a function and the Member for Princes Town South/Tableland was there having a beverage that persons over the age of 18 are allowed to have people might feel pressured. I do not drink, but if I went to a function and I met the Member for Arouca/Maloney and she offered me a drink, I would think twice.

8.45 p.m.

Dr. Browne: You would think twice?

Hon. Member: I wonder why?

Mr. C. Sharma: Not to have it. This could be because the host keeps offering drinks. You know when you go to these Government functions, they walk all over the place because they have money to collect at the end of it. The caterer, whoever it is, the more they serve, the more revenue is generated. So they keep walking with these drinks. Before you finish a drink the server is there with you again.

Mr. Imbert: "I thought you doh drink?"

Mr. C. Sharma: I observe, Sir. I observe very clearly. Or it could be because there are no non-alcoholic drinks. Even at State functions I ask for non-alcoholic wine and there is none. No non-alcoholic wine. No one likes to feel like an outsider, but there are many other ways to be in. This is what the Government should be saying, there are other avenues; find a club, a group of friends who do not drink, with similar interests; participate in some kind of activity. That is why I raised today, that the recreation facilitates at the local government are not any

getting money, so persons cannot go out there to engage in some kind of sport activity and they will find themselves being forced in other ways.

Some people are uncomfortable at social events and use alcohol so that they can be more relaxed, and outgoing and would be able to talk to people. You will find that too. So again, you want to create an environment—that is what the Government should be saying, "These are some of the things we will be doing." Some people drink because of group pressure. This pressure is faced by most young people. At some point in time, a person may feel the need to drink, to show that they are part of a group. And I will come to advertisements a bit. Often, non-drinkers will be pressured to join in and drink with the rest of the group. You heard the Government Minister saying it is happening, but they are not saying how we are going to treat with it.

Member for Tobago West, welcome. If you have something to say, please, stand up. Often, non-drinkers will be pressured. It is hard to be your own person sometimes. Again, the research has shown, find a group of people who will support your desire not to drink. That is why I asked the Member for Diego Martin Central, are you aware of "SOSAD", a group that does not drink. In fact, as we speak tonight, the Islamic community is observing the month of Ramadan. They do not drink period. But again, if we encourage more people to go to religious places—certainly.

Dr. Browne: Thank you, Member, for giving way. I just want to indicate that I may not be aware of each and every group across the country, but if you are aware of a group that has been just formed, that might be desirous or needy of support, I would invite you to either share the information with me or ask them to do so, and as we always do, we would try our best to assist.

Mr. C. Sharma: Minister, you know I have confessed that I like you. I have said that openly because I see future in you as a young politician. I know you would fall for that. The fact of the matter is, you were written to as Minister, but your Ministry—[*Interruption*]

Dr. Browne: [*Inaudible*]

Mr. C. Sharma: No listen, you were written to in many instances. In fact, every Member here will tell you, letters written to Government Ministers are never replied to. Oftentimes they are not treated with, and oftentimes applications coming from Opposition constituencies are also not treated with. But I want to get back to that.

Dr. Browne: I received most of them.

Mr. C. Sharma: We will deal with it. The fact of the matter is that there has been a complaint from Members of the Opposition that they write Ministers of Government on numerous things, and oftentimes there are no replies. Also, many groups apply for assistance and they are not treated with, and that is evident. I have presented in the Parliament here, the case history with the National Commission for Self-help, and I asked the Member for Chaguanas East to tell us what and the rural electrification projects that community groups are applying for. But, of course, one must not paint the picture today, that all drinking is negative, that all drinking is wrong.

Mr. Speaker, there are some positive signs of it. Some professionals have argued in the case of positive signs, in the case of moderate use, alcohol has positive effects. You can get livelier, easier and relaxed. You can talk more easily and are less tired. So one drink may help, and that is the medical research.

Mr. Imbert: What did he say?

Mr. C. Sharma: According to some researchers—I will repeat it. I will repeat it for you.

Mr. Imbert: I thought that you do not know anything about alcohol.

Mr. C. Sharma:—moderate alcohol use, protects against heart diseases. This is the research that is available. So again, you need to come and make sure and assist the national community. So do not come here and pretend it is all bad because you want to know the positives and you want to know the negatives. As a medical practitioner, you are quite aware of some benefits. In fact, it is said that a maximum of two glasses of wine or beer a day for men, and one or two glasses a day for women. Member for Point Fortin, not more than one or two.

So again, we have to make sure that we present the information so that people would have an appreciation. When Government comes it must not pretend and say all kinds of things that have no basis. Of course, the negative effects: excessive alcohol use increases the risk of a number of diseases, and we have heard of infection of the liver, cirrhosis, sleeping disorders, sexual problems, infection, et cetera, infection of the stomach, infection of the pancreas, et cetera.

Mr. Imbert: How do you know all of that? Somebody tell you?

Mr. C. Sharma: Again, when you want to present the information, you want to make sure that the national community is going to benefit as much as possible.

Mr. Speaker, as it relates to alcohol, I would want to know, and we all would want to know, what assistance is available before people become alcoholics. Do not tell us of all these groups that are available after they become an alcoholic.

Mr. Imbert: Noooo!

Mr. C. Sharma: Hold on. Do not tell us of all these groups. Tell us that you are treating and how to treat, and that is why we went to task with the Minister of Sport and Youth Affairs to say, "Listen, what are you doing for the young people of the country?" Hold on. We have argued that. You talked about Cochrane in Point Fortin—it is not at the pre-school. You want to engage the young teenagers in activities that prevent them from going into drinking. So when you are talking about something in Point Fortin—well, before you get to Point Fortin, how many recreational grounds did you pass that need attention? The grass is not cut, there is no lighting on it. Simple little things. You come and argue all these things just to score points and there is no message in what you are saying, there is no real value in what you are saying, and you are always going after the problem.

The PNM is always about after the event, nothing before. We must look into prevention. For instance, smoking. You say you are doing all this work. You pay \$18,000 to put your faces on the newspapers, but you have not printed one thing, you have not presented anything both in the print and on electronic media about the ills of smoking. *[Interruption]* Hold on! Hold on! Hold on! You always claim to have done something. You are always claiming to have done something. Member for D'Abadie/O'Meara, if you do not wish to take me on, you could leave. You are not doing us a service here. You are a Member just like me. You may hold a ministerial title, that is temporary, but it does not give you any extra power.

Mrs. Nunez-Tesheira: You just told me that—*[Interruption]*.

Mr. C. Sharma: It does not give you any extra power. You have to be simple, you have to be humble. The title of Minister of Finance does not make you superior.

Mrs. Nunez-Tesheira: Is me you are talking to?

Mr. C. Sharma: Yes, I am, through the Speaker, of course. Smoking is fun some people are told because of the advertisements. And I want to talk about the advertisements I have seen appearing. I was hoping that the Minister of Health or the Minister of Social Development would have spoken about some of these things because we are seeing them every day.

Dr. Browne: You tell us.

Mr. C. Sharma: How do these advertisements get approval? We see them on the television, we see them elsewhere, we see them in magazines that are coming and they keep making them attractive. So young people—in fact, the advertisements are finding effect on the young people and we are seeing an

increase in smoking among the young people. Again, some people are encouraged to believe that smoking is a reward. Most of us are hungry for rewards, the research says. We want to be patted on the back.

A cigarette is a reward that we can give ourselves as often as we wish. And while there is a law that says persons under the age are not permitted to purchase cigarettes, you have said to us that in the schools we are finding use of cigarettes. What are we doing about it? When we have done anything well, for instance, we can congratulate ourselves with a cigarette, some young people say, which certifies in effect that we have been good boys. You know, sometimes we say, "Let us take a smoke break." We can promise ourselves, when I have finished this piece of work, then, when I have written this page of my last report, I deserve a little fun, I will have a cigarette. School kids tell us this. You are aware of this, what are you doing about it?

Dr. Browne: Any of your colleagues smoke?

Mr. C. Sharma: Any of my colleagues smoke? I do not care what my colleagues do. I care what you do as a Government. I can tell you a lot of things that I do. The first and last cigarette in the day are specifically significant rewards. People get up early on mornings and they want to have a cigarette, and you have to find ways.

When we talk about this, we must always encourage people, how to assist them. Some school kids tell us when they have a cigarette they are not alone. Some people feel lonely and their only companion is a cigarette, and raising these taxes will lead to the use of illegal drugs. You will see an increase in the use of marijuana because they will now find it cheaper to buy marijuana. If you have to smoke ten cigarettes to get "high", one marijuana joint may give you that "high". So again, you will have to explore it.

Mr. Roberts: What is the cost of it?

Mr. C. Sharma: The Member for St. Ann's East wants to know the cost of it. [Laughter] Here is a Member of the Government who is interested in knowing the cost of a joint of marijuana, and this is Government's policy. So are you going to subsidize it at whatever cost it is? [Interruption] Do you know at 10 o'clock there is a qualification?

Mrs. Nunez-Tesheira: What?

Mr. C. Sharma: Do you know at 10 o'clock there is a qualification? Do you know? I like to watch people smoke, some school kids tell us. You do not know about that?

Mrs. Nunez-Tesheira: No.

Mr. C. Sharma: Would you take me to dinner after? There is no dinner in there. Would you take me for dinner after? There is no dinner there. [*Laughter*] Smoking memories. Some people who smoke tell us smoking helps them to think. Kids at the university—[*Interruption*]

Mrs. Nunez-Tesheira: I now understand what you were saying so passionately.

Mr. C. Sharma: You do? I want to invite you to join me—"Smoking helps me to think." Some claim cigarettes help me to relax; some claim that cigarettes blow their troubles away. So you need to make sure your research and education attend to these concerns. Cigarette taste has to be acquired. Most people like the smell of tobacco, but dislike the taste of a cigarette. I was making the point now that the cigarettes manufacturers are using all kinds of things in it, including chocolates and honey so it will have very little effect on the throat. There is competition among young people on how many cigarettes they can smoke a day.

So, Mr. Speaker, I am hoping that the Government will assist our young children in finding ways how to avoid smoking, in the first instance, and even where it is happening, how to prevent it and how to put some kind of system in place. We want to reduce smoking, we also want to reduce the question of alcohol consumption among people, among young people in particular, and when the Leader of the Opposition presented on the last day, he talked something about a living wage, and the research is showing that where people are uncomfortable with their earnings, where they are unable to meet their daily needs in terms of food, clothing and shelter, they tend to move to alcohol and cigarettes.

So when the Leader of the Opposition on the last day spoke about a living wage—and there is a lot of research that is available, and again, rather than the Government criticizing the move, I would have thought— It is said even though there are enough resources for all the people in Trinidad to live in dignity, so many thousands—I think it is about 200,000—are living under the poverty line. And when you look at the alcohol consumption among that poverty group, it is high, and the Member for Diego Martin Central is aware of this information, it obtains in his Ministry. Also the cigarette use obtains among that group as well, and the Minister of Finance should seriously give consideration to a living wage, where the smallest of people in this country, with small families can go to the groceries, can meet their daily needs.

9.00 p.m.

You say that you are raising these taxes so that people would consume less, but the cost of food has gone up. Is it that people have to consume less food as well? You want to make sure that you do everything; it must be holistic, it must be at the family level.

Research has shown that where the parents in a house smoke, the kids oftentimes start to smoke. It is now said that premature death, resulting from smoking, is going to increase; in addition to that, the cases of cancer are going to increase. So we are losing a large number of our people, either to premature death, cancer or ills of these diseases, people who are in their best years of being productive. One way of treating with it is to make sure that people find ways of being comfortable.

It is said that a major portion of our population is prevented from obtaining a dignified standard of living, for a number of reasons. We have argued what those reasons are; we have said it is the inequality of treatment, the inequality of the spread of resources. If you can deal with that, then you may not have to raise revenue from alcohol and tobacco. If you are honest in saying, "We really are trying to reduce the ills of it", then you need to find the major causes. The major cause of it is that people are not happy in this country, because they are not earning a fair living. [*Interruption*]

You could leave my friend; this does not need your vote.

Mr. Speaker, alcohol taxes, prices and public health: I do not know who the Minister responsible for the persons involved in public health is, those who go around to the different communities, the district nurses and so forth. Oftentimes they go to deal with existing issues, rather than go with a holistic approach; one, they are overworked; two, the directions and the policies are not available to them.

At the constituency office in Fyzabad, I run, perhaps, the only ADR (alternative dispute resolution) centre in the country; you know what that is. But more than that, for the past how many years—as the Member for Diego Martin North/East was saying, at the end of this year we would have both been here for 18 years. It is a long time; I may qualify for a full pension. One of the things we have been able to do, and I have been able to engage a lot of volunteers; I have one of the largest networks of people going out there to visit homes and counsel persons.

This year we were able to achieve two things; we reduced the level of alcohol consumption; we were able to reduce the level of teenage pregnancy and, of course, smoking. People want to be engaged; you go to their homes and talk to them, and invite them to participate.

I have argued, for too long, about the need for a constituency fund for every Member of Parliament; not just for the PNM or the UNC, and when we leave office, it must continue. For instance, where someone goes to the office of an MP, there is a social pressure; there is a death in a family, somebody lost a job, somebody had an accident; you are driving a taxi and they have no source of income. If you do not counsel them, if you do not provide opportunities for them, they could become weak and fall to smoking and drinking. All of us must agree collectively that when people come to our constituency offices, we offer them the best possible assistance, not only advice.

If we want to reduce alcohol consumption and cigarette smoking, we must go deeper, we must be real. We must not just pull statistics on what the world is doing, because every country would have different experiences. We are a cultural type of people; we celebrate very quickly. So the drink, off and on, happens in all our families.

The Member for Oropouche was making that point, and you protested; you wanted to show the national community, "Oh, we do not drink", but they know better. Whether you drink or not, that is your business, but you have identified that there is an alcohol problem in this country. You cannot solve the problem by yourselves, this requires one to one. This requires us going to the homes of people, sitting in their galleries, talking with them and identifying with them. I have had tremendous success in my constituency in that regard, which I always have to share.

We heard some of the effects of alcohol on the human body. We know that it affects the central nervous system and liver. Lately we have seen an increase in alcohol related deaths and, again, we are not seeing the Government coming out and saying anything or doing and telling.

The Member for Diego Martin Central said that they printed 10,000 publications, but not one single went to the Member of Parliament offices on this side, and you must ask yourself why. Why is it that anything you print does not get to our offices?

Dr. Browne: We send them to schools.

Mr. C. Sharma: Even if you send them to the schools, also send them to the MP offices, because that is a public place. You are not a Government of only PNM members, and you must not appear to be that way. I was saying to one of my colleagues today—I think it was the Minister of Sport and Youth Affairs—that when we were in government, whoever was there—I think it was only the Member for Diego Martin North/East, the Member for Diego Martin West and my good friend from St. Ann's—we made sure that we communicated with our colleagues opposite and found out from them what the striking matters were.

Mr. Callender: That is "Anancy story"! [*Laughter*]

Mr. C. Sharma: You are "Anancy"; the Member for Tobago West was a parliamentary secretary at that time, I clearly remember, but he was a non-performing Member of Parliament, as he continues to be today. Again, for the delivery of goods and services in his constituency, he performs no functions; it is run by the THA. You just happen to hold the office, and that is the level of service you offer. [*Laughter*] Everybody knows that, but I do not want to get into the personality of it.

Mr. Imbert: Mr. Speaker, Standing Order 36(1). I must admit, I have been a bit distracted, but it is obvious that the Member is wholly irrelevant.

Mr. Speaker: I am giving the Member an opportunity to get back on track. I myself was distracted for a little while, but, please, come back to the Orders.

Mr. C. Sharma: I have been on it right through; if you could tell me where I went—I have been talking about the use of alcohol and I have spoken about cigarettes. I have not spoken anything else.

Mr. Imbert: You reached Tobago.

Mr. C. Sharma: Of course; is this not for Trinidad and Tobago? Mr. Speaker, am I not allowed to talk about Trinidad and Tobago? You are discriminating; I will not do that. This problem obtains in Tobago as well. [*Laughter*]

It affects motor performance; and we heard about the effects it has on the body. There is also the world public opinion. I went into it to find out what was happening; why were people moving to alcohol, because it is a global problem now. It is increasing in many countries, except those countries that have strict religious rules. But the world public opinion says that if persons are not taken care of, if their basic needs are not met, they migrate to alcohol, drugs and cigarettes, et cetera. It comes back to the point the Member for Couva North made, that you need to make sure you provide for all your citizens, if you want to reduce alcohol consumption and cigarettes as well.

In fact, a new world opinion poll of 21 nations around the world, finds that large majorities in every country say that their government should be responsible for ensuring that citizens could meet their basic needs for food, health care and education. So if these things are met and you are seeing a problem, then it means you are not doing something right. What is it that you are not doing right? You are not caring for the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago.

Mr. Speaker, I have looked at some practical cases here in Trinidad, and I have gotten a bit of information from Tobago. They show that those who consume alcohol at the lower level are spending a large amount of their income, simply because they do not have the guidance, simply because they do not have the support around them. In some institutions, there is the EPA, the Employee Assistance Programme, but in many places it does not obtain. In the private sector, it does not obtain at all. That is one area you would want to look into.

Also, concerning the social safety net here, the Member for Diego Martin Central, in his ministerial capacity, indicated that there was a large number of people who had received these Smart Cards, who should not have received them. So it means to say that persons who needed that Smart Card were not getting it and out of frustration they would move to alcohol. They have no other choice. What do they do? The biggest single chunk of that so-called "social safety net" is not reaching out to the persons who are in need of it most.

Based on research, I have found that some persons have been able to use their Smart Cards to obtain alcohol and cigarettes, when it was not intended to be so. Are you aware of that Member for Barataria/San Juan?

Mr. Ross: Yes.

Mr. C. Sharma: Even the Minister of Government is aware, but he is powerless; he cannot do anything about it, even when he became aware of it. I am sure the Minister is aware of that. I know a report was done by your office, that some persons were able to obtain alcohol and cigarettes using the Smart Card, when it was not intended so to be. [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Ross: False.

Dr. Browne: Member for Fyzabad, thank you for giving way. I am sure you have already been exposed, in this House and in the public media, to information with regard to a complete review of this programme and the fact that it is much more directed. Monitoring and evaluation systems are in place. So any of the abuses you might be referring to, certainly, would not be accurate.

Mr. C. Sharma: Could you say what is being done where the card has been used to obtain cigarettes and alcohol?

Dr. Browne: There are stipulations provided to each and every grocer, shop and supermarket that is involved in TT Smart Card Programme. There are also notices posted at each of the venues, and training is being provided to staff, et cetera, with regard to using it. If there are any cases that you are aware of

concerning ongoing abuse, I encourage you to certainly share it, and action would be taken in such cases.

Mr. Ross: Probably a UNC councillor.

Mr. C. Sharma: With these Smart Cards, the fact that you have information that some are being used, it might be a minority, but you want to make sure. If that is being done, then the cards are in the wrong hands. More than that, those families that were hoping to receive food stuff for it, are now receiving alcohol and cigarettes.

Hon. Members: Nobody was receiving cigarettes. [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. C. Sharma: It defeats the purpose. Oftentimes you find the abuse happening across the country.

Let us move on to something very important. We have found that persons engaged in alcohol consumption and smoking also tend to move to gambling. The Ministry is aware of this; the Minister is aware that there is an increase in gambling. I am surprised that the Government would talk about this alcohol consumption and cry that they are so sorry that this is happening, and about the cigarettes, and know that there are more than 75 institutions involved in gambling, including the Government run lotteries.

So the same research they claimed to have done, that found the increased use of alcohol and cigarettes, also discovered that there was an increase in gambling. It goes that way: smoking, drinking and gambling, and they do absolutely nothing. How does the national community see this? What is intended? There is no secret that alcohol use and gambling coexist. The Government is aware of that, so you are not believed. When you come here and you indicate, "Look, we want to treat with this matter," and you are aware of the other matter and you do nothing about it, it is not fair to the national community.

In fact, it is not surprising to hear that people who have gambling disorders also have alcohol use disorders. Member for Barataria/San Juan, you are aware of that, and as a Member of Government, you must stand up strong, and vice versa. New research indicates that the association between the two disorders is even more complex. [*Laughter*]

9.15 p.m.

I want to thank my Chief Whip: he said, you are going very good, continue. [*Laughter*]

Mr. Speaker, I want to make the point and I want the Government to respond. One of the weaknesses of the Government is that they will get up and close the debate and not treat with any issues raised by Members.

On the question of gambling, alcohol and cigarette use, gambling wins are more closely linked with alcohol in memory than gambling losses. That is a very important observation based on research. So you do not remember the times you lose when you gamble if you are under the influence of alcohol.

In many governments the world over, oftentimes they are found that senior government operatives—I do not want to say Ministers—are found to be high users of alcohol, smoking and gambling. We are very blessed in this country that this does not happen in our Parliament, at least not that I am aware of.

So we need to be real. I find it difficult to understand that you are aware of these things and you shelve this one. Why do you do that? How do you expect to get the support of the national community? I always say the Opposition are not your enemies, we are your friends opposite to you, we mean well, it takes time to bring this information and oftentimes you want to dismiss it very lightly because you did not bring it. All the information that obtains in this country must come from you. These findings suggest that therapy needs to focus on finding ways to break these over learned or unconscious associations between winning, drinking and smoking. Even moderate consumption by gamblers while gambling leads to increased risk taking during video lottery terminals. That information is available to us, this is not information that I alone have—the same place I got it, anybody else can get it.

Regular gamblers who were administered a mild dose of alcohol took more risk, and I shared it with my colleagues, I wish you would have gotten up and thanked me for it, to show that we share information. I gave it to you because I know you are involved in scholarships and so and I know students are—

Mr. Speaker, the research shows regular gamblers who are administered a mild dose of alcohol took more risk and played longer on video machines and they were recording it. So that in the country when you have so many institutions providing opportunities for gambling, you are going to have a high level of alcohol consumption and to cry that you are raising the taxes does not save you. In fact, people are now going to try to gamble to pay the increased taxes; whether it is the Play Whe, or the local Whe Whe.

Although legal gambling is available in the United States of America, is the gambling here legal? I am not sure. An examination of data collected from

gambling help lines callers indicate that individuals were most times drinking and smoking, it seems to be related. So I am advancing to the Government that you cannot treat the issue of the level of consumption of alcohol and smoking without treating the issue of gambling.

In fact, one research has shown when the Parliament invests in Members of Parliament and gives them research staff and computers this is the kind of good work you can see coming to your Parliament and when you allow us more use of our laptops in the House, I am certain that you will get even higher levels of contribution even from Government Members.

Raising alcohol tax to reduce drinking can backfire, drinkers switch to cheaper brands, drink more, but they also produce illegal alcohol and you are aware of this. So when the Minister moved this, did they do the research? In the Panday administration when the matter had to come to the Parliament, it was discussed among the Members in the first instance and then we went further out because we wanted to get the best ideas, and the discussion also took place with Members opposite informally as well, they were not taken off guard.

Researchers have found that increasing the prices of alcoholic beverages to reduce alcohol consumption may actually have the opposite effect since drinkers who are buying the more expensive brands will switch to cheaper drinks and because they are cheaper than what they were paying for originally, buy and drink more. So you are really opening a can of worms here.

It has long been thought that raising alcohol prices through taxation reduces alcohol sales and related problems associated with drinking with a new study. Now this study is available to all of us and it has found that across the board, prices increase in alcoholic beverages have the opposite effect.

Mr. Speaker, having said this, I would think that the Government would reconsider this and not close the debate tonight. This information has come to them and they should treat with it, but because it is coming from an Opposition Member, ignore it.

One study accepts the assumption that alcohol is a complex good composed of different beverages such as beer, wines and spirits as well as quality brands that can be high, medium or low-end and this was done at the Prevention Research Centre.

We then go on to examine the impacts of brand distribution of alcohol beverages, cigarette prices upon sales of alcohol. The results show that higher alcohol prices may or may not cause reduction in alcohol sales and related

problems. So if you are aware of this why are you imposing this on this House tonight? You are not solving anything, and if the newest research that is available is pointing to the opposite effect, then you need to revisit how you do things and the Government seems very weak in doing this.

There are different taxes in different markets and different distribution of prices. And the Professor who is in charge of this is Prof. Rawle Cartino at the University Texas School of Public Health. This is a renowned school of research. Dr. Gopeesingh, are you aware of this school?

Dr. Gopeesingh: Yes.

Mr. C. Sharma: It is very well known. The evidence suggests that as you increase taxes and alcoholic beverages become more expensive, usage of alcohol continues at the lower level.

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

Motion made. That the hon. Member's speaking time be extended by 30 minutes. [*Mr. H. Partap*]

Question put and negatived.

Mr. Speaker: I do not think that you really mean it.

Hon. Members: Yes.

Mr. Speaker: You do?

Hon. Members: Yes.

Mr. Speaker: The Motion is 30 minutes. Let me put the question again.

Hon. Members, the speaking time of the hon. Member for Fyzabad has expired.

Motion made. That the hon. Member's speaking time be extended by 30 minutes. [*Mr. Speaker*]

Question again put and negatived.

Mr. Speaker: I regret to advise that the House has not decided to extend your speaking time, hon. Member for Fyzabad.

Mr. C. Sharma: So be it, Sir.

Dr. Hamza Rafeeq (*Caroni Central*): Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I just rise to make a very brief intervention in this debate which I did not really plan to do, but the Member for Diego Martin North/East has really drawn me into this debate.

Mr. Imbert: I draw you?

Dr. H. Rafeeq: Mr. Speaker, tonight is a very special night in the Islamic calendar when Muslims spend the night in the mosque. I was supposed to have been there for the entire night, during which we do some meditation, contemplation and supplication, prayers and so forth. But, of course, we are on duty here, so I will make my intervention very brief, and then I hope we will be able to leave shortly thereafter.

Mr. Speaker, there is nothing that Members on that side can say to convince us that alcohol drinking or alcoholism is wrong, it is bad for health and for so many other reasons social and otherwise. There is nothing that we do not already know and we probably know more than you.

There is nothing they can say that can convince us that tobacco cigarettes are bad. As a matter of fact, the Member for Diego Martin North/East mentioned that we did participate in the initiative in Geneva; the Framework Convention of Tobacco Control.

So, Mr. Speaker, any initiative to decrease the consumption of alcohol and cigarettes and so on, we will support those initiatives. But Mr. Speaker, the initiatives that have been put forward here today—and that is the increase in taxes—we are not really convinced that these will impact on the consumption of alcohol and cigarettes.

And I really would have liked someone on that side to give some kind of information as to whether in fact, when taxes are raised that there is a decrease in the consumption of alcohol and cigarettes. Because this has been done in the past; taxes on cigarettes and alcohol had been increased and I thought that some kind of empirical study would have been done so that we could get the data here to say that there is data, so we are on solid ground that if we increase the taxes, there will be a concomitant decrease in the consumption. That, of course, would have convinced us that the Government is on good grounds with these measures.

There is no evidence and no information presented to us on that side as far as that is concerned and, as I say, while we will support any measure to decrease the consumption of alcohol and tobacco, because we are aware of the dangers, we are not convinced that any information has come forward as far as that is concerned.

Mr. Speaker, there is a Tobacco Bill before Parliament, it is in the other place and that has very stringent measures against the use and sale of tobacco and so forth. I would have thought that is a piece of legislation which, if passed and made into law, can have the effect of decreasing the consumption of tobacco. It is a piece of legislation that is before a select committee I think in the other place.

Mr. Imbert: I thank the Member for giving way. The fact is that that legislation is experiencing some difficulties in the other place, and we do hope we can get it out of there quickly. But in that tobacco convention protocol in which you participated, increasing taxes on tobacco is one of the most highly recommended measures and that would not have been done unless there was scientific evidence that increasing taxes on tobacco does have a beneficial effect.

Dr. H. Rafeeq: That might be so and that is the next point I was coming to. I was going to say that instead of bringing one little piece of measure like this, if you had brought a comprehensive package like the Anti-Smoking Bill, that would have been easier for us to participate in because it is a comprehensive package. But just raising the taxes by a few cents, and I wanted to find out really who is this legislation targeting.

Mr. Speaker, there are a lot of young people now who are getting involved in drinking alcohol. If you go to parties, the university and some of these parties that are held on weekends, you will see many young people participating in the consumption of alcohol. It is a serious problem and we need to do something. The point I am making is that there should be a comprehensive package and I am saying that the tobacco one is really a comprehensive piece of legislation.

9.30 p.m.

Dr. Browne: Thank you, hon. Member, for giving way. I just wanted to respond to your invitation to share some data in terms of the impact of raising taxes on alcohol consumption. The Government is certainly aware of the research studies and, with your permission, Mr. Speaker, I just want to share from the January issue of the *Addiction* Journal, a journal referenced as *Addiction*.

“The evidence is statistically overwhelming that communities can reduce alcohol consumption by raising alcohol taxes.”

This is according to a report from the University of Florida, a team of researchers. The *New York Times* also reported on January 20th of this year, that a review of 110 previously conducted and published studies concluded that higher taxes tended to reduce drinking among social drinkers and problem drinkers as well as teens and underage drinkers.

Dr. H. Rafeeq: That might be so and I am not disputing that. The fact is, I would have liked to have seen a Trinidad and Tobago study because the whole environment here is different. I mean, people drink for all kinds of different reasons and I would have liked to see—Minister, you understand the point I am making?

Dr. Browne: You asked for the research, a thorough research.

Dr. H. Rafeeq: What I really wanted was a Trinidad and Tobago piece of research, because I am saying that it had been done before in Trinidad and Tobago. Taxes had been raised in Trinidad and Tobago before and I would have liked to see, since then, what has happened to alcohol consumption. I am sure the data is somewhere there; it is a matter of pulling it together, and so on. It would have been a lot more convincing.

My colleague mentioned a while ago that among some of the things that can be done—one is raising taxes, but you have the advertisement on alcohol and advertisement on tobacco. There is a particular piece of advertisement on tobacco, to me, it looks very innocuous, but a very dangerous piece of advertisement. Do you know what it says? And this is run by the tobacco companies. It says: "If you can't vote, don't smoke." The implication is that you can vote at age 18, and if you do not have the age to vote, then you should not smoke. The corollary is true, that if you can vote, then you can smoke. That is the subliminal message that that advertisement is sending, that if you can vote it is okay for you to smoke. So while you are below 18 you should not smoke, but once you are 18 years and over, then it is okay for you to smoke.

I am saying that one of the areas that you should tackle is the area of advertising. You know that our young people spend a lot of time looking at television. In the past they never did that; they were outside. But now they are inside; they are on the Internet; they are on the television and alcohol and tobacco advertisements bombard them throughout the shows.

I am saying that we need to look at advertisements as far as alcohol is concerned. I am really for a total ban on alcohol, that is, a total ban on advertisements on alcohol. But if you are not going to have a total ban on advertisements, at least put them later in the night where the little children would not see them, because these advertisements glamorize the use of alcohol. You know, it makes you look so successful and happy, and that is what children see and, of course, that is what they would emulate. I am saying that you need to do that for tobacco as well as alcohol, that is, the advertisements.

I was making the point that a lot of young people are getting involved in alcohol and smoking, and we accept the point that once they drink, they get involved with cigarettes and then they go on to alcohol, then they want to go on to other things. That should be nipped in the bud. I am saying all these things contribute.

Honestly, I am not convinced that sending up the price by a few cents—

Mr. Imbert: A few cents?

Dr. H. Rafeeq: By how much?

Mr. Imbert: From \$8 to \$9.

Dr. H. Rafeeq: Eight dollars to \$9, okay. You go to one of these fetes that you pay \$200 or \$300 or so; paying a couple dollars more for a couple drinks, what difference would that make? If you had a substantial increase I would say, maybe. But do you know what the effect of this can be? The effect of this can be counter-productive in the sense that there are people who have a small amount of disposable income and, as my colleague from Oropouche East said, they will continue to drink. And what that will do is to make less income available for other things, because if the father of the home has to drink alcohol he will have less money for other things and that has to be shared around for the other things. So it can be counter-productive. That is the point I am making. I am saying that you need to do a lot more than just raise taxes. That is the point I am making.

There are a couple other points. If this measure is intended to deal with the health of the population, again, you need to do a lot more to deal with that. You need to engage in primary health care. I do not want to make this into a health debate, which I can, but you need to do a lot more; you need to put a lot more emphasis on primary health care and disease prevention.

Again, our young people today are not engaging in activities like exercise and so on. They are behind a computer; they are in front of the television; they do not get the amount of exercise that they should and that is another area that definitely needs to be looked at.

The other thing is, if you get a heart attack at age 40 years, your artery did not begin to get clogged at age 40; your artery began to get clogged from age one or two years and that is when you begin to eat badly; when you begin to eat the fried foods, junk foods, fast foods and all of this. These things need to be looked at.

We have a fast food industry in Trinidad and Tobago that is growing astronomically and we are going to pay very, very dearly for that in years to

come. We are going to pay very dearly as far as the health of our young people and the health of citizens. So if we are concerned about the health of our citizens, we need to look at fast food, not only alcohol and cigarettes. They contribute, yes, but the fast foods contribute a lot. The number one cause of death is cardiac disease and I am saying that fast foods are one of the main reasons for cardiac disease. So you need to look at the fast food industry and do something positive about it.

I cannot give you all the solutions. I mean, we can sit down and discuss it, but the thing is, I am sure you have technocrats who can guide you. The thing is that we need to look at the fast food industry. That is extremely important. You need to look at the other aspects of preventative medicine and the other aspects of primary care if you are really interested in dealing with the health of the population.

Two things have been singled out here for health and that is alcohol and tobacco.

Mr. Dumas: Why you never bring a Motion on that?

Dr. H. Rafeeq: I am saying there is a lot more that needs to be done, as far as health is concerned, besides alcohol and tobacco. The breathalyzer, that has been mentioned, that certainly will save lives; it will also save injuries and so on. We know that when the seatbelt was introduced in Trinidad and Tobago, that had a dramatic effect in this country as far as saving lives are concerned, and the breathalyzer will do the same thing. There will be a dramatic decrease in the number of people who are losing their lives because of road accidents, and so on.

The other thing is that people are losing their lives on a daily basis—four, five and six—on crime. You need to deal with that as well if you are interested in people's health and well-being. You have people who are being killed on a daily basis, but you also have a lot of people who are victims of crime who do not die. They get injured; they get shot; they get chopped or they get stabbed and they go to the hospital; they do not die. That, of course, contributes to the morbidity.

There is a whole issue with children legislation. Is that in effect right now, all of it? Is all of the children legislation in effect now?

Dr. Browne: Thank you for giving way. Just for clarification, you participated and assented to votes on two key pieces of children legislation and you may be aware that two other pieces are with committees of the Lower House, particularly the very important Children Bill and the Government is working with the Opposition on finalizing these pieces of legislation.

Dr. H. Rafeeq: Right. These pieces of legislation and other modalities are other important things as far the health of the nation is concerned.

I just want to mention one final thing in closing and that is that sometime ago when we dealt with some piece of legislation—I do not remember which one it was—the issue of driving and talking on cellphones was mentioned.

Mr. Imbert: The breathalyzer.

Dr. H. Rafeeq: The breathalyzer, that is right. During the breathalyzer debate the issue of driving and talking on cellphones was discussed. We may not have, again, empirical data, but I am sure that all of us have anecdotal evidence of talking on cellphones—

Dr. Browne: There is empirical data of accidents and speaking on cellphones.

Dr. H. Rafeeq: Okay, right. So there is empirical data as far as accidents and speaking on cellphones is concerned. This is a serious distraction and that is, again, something that can be looked at. The point I am making is that if you really want to look at the health of the population, you have got to look at it holistically. There are lots of things that you can do. This is one small measure that I am not too sure, as I said, that will really make a significant impact. There are so many things that can be done that will not cost a lot of money; many things that can be done to look after the health of the population, both the children and the adults.

Again, I want to put on the record—and this is why I stood up, really. I want to put on the record that I belong to a Muslim organization which is doing a lot of work to prevent people from drinking. I myself have printed some pamphlets, some booklets which we have distributed. We give a lot of lectures, and so on; we have a lot of seminars dealing with alcohol and drugs. We do a lot of that in the organization that I belong to, because I am a firm believer in this. I am saying I am a firm believer in this but my party also is a believer in this, that is, as far as excess alcohol is concerned. I believe in not drinking at all, but my party believes in drinking in moderation.

So I wanted to put that on the record and to say that we do not support excessive drinking; we do not support alcoholism and things like that and any measure that will decrease the consumption of alcohol and cigarettes, we are prepared to support.

Thank you very much. [*Desk thumping*]

Dr. Tim Gopeesingh (*Caroni East*): Colleagues, I just want to spend about three or four minutes to make about three suggestions. My colleague just spoke about the need for disease prevention. We all know the deleterious effects of alcohol and tobacco, particularly tobacco and the commonest problem that

tobacco causes is heart disease. It blocks the arterioles; it helps to reduce blood flow and patients get heart attacks; they die; they get strokes; they get Buerger's disease and a number of negative effects.

There is the question of disease prevention and disease prevention is by education. We would like to challenge the Government to utilize some of that funding for a strong strategy in public education. We see some element of it coming now and then as far as tobacco is concerned; we see the long picture; we see a few sporadic advertisements, but what we want to advise and, probably through you all to the Minister of Health is that you make a concerted effort in advertisements, particularly the radio, the newspapers—a large percentage of the population obviously cannot read; we have a high functional illiteracy—and possibly, to some extent, the television. Instead of making the advertisements glamorized, as my colleague indicated, we have to impact upon the population the real death scenario, what these things can cause.

So we should have heavy advertisement on tobacco use and the deleterious effects, and on alcohol use and the deleterious effects—and also what my colleague indicated a while ago, strong advertisements against obesity and all the factors. One of our colleagues on the other side, the Member for Tobago East, indicated that we should probably consider bringing a private Motion on that, and it is something that has aroused my need to do that, because we know that from obesity springs diabetes, hypertension and those two go on to give all the negative effects of heart disease, strokes, renal failure, blindness, leg amputations, and most of the hospitals are overcrowded by the complications of diabetes and hypertension, resulting in a number of cases from obesity.

So if we can utilize a lot of the funding for disease prevention by strong advertisement in these three areas, alcohol, tobacco and the whole question of obesity—my colleague mentioned fast foods. The industry is about \$2 billion in fast foods in Trinidad and Tobago per year. You see it with the annual returns on Prestige Holdings and on Royal Castle and so on.

9.45 p.m.

We know what it causes and about one million soft drinks are being sold per day. One soft drink has about 150 calories, therefore when people consume two soft drinks a day, it is equivalent to two meals and this is bad sugar for them. We challenge you to get the Ministry of Health involved heavily in these advertisements.

Secondly, tobacco causes a lot of cancers as well. It is the commonest cause of death in men and the second leading cause of death in women. Internationally, I

want to bring a picture of what happens in Canada. My colleague, the Member for Fyzabad, linked gambling, smoking and alcohol. In Canada, the Ontario government has managed a lottery system to fund St. Margaret's Hospital, which deals with cancer in the entire Ontario area.

The lottery system brings a lot of money to Trinidad because there is a lot of gambling. That money goes into the Consolidated Fund. I would suggest to the Government that it seriously considers dedicating a certain percentage of this lottery profits to the health care system although health has its own budget. If you do not have enough money in health for disease prevention and advertisement, if you can use some of the lottery profit in that scenario, we will find that the budget for health will decrease significantly in the medium term.

There are two areas I got up to speak about: one is an active strategy for strong advertisement. Bombard the radio and the television—less in the print because of the difficulty in reading—with these three aspects, the deleterious effects of alcohol, tobacco and obesity. The second is to consider a lottery system to support that type of venture. The third is that most likely we will continue our research into obesity and its link to all these disease processes. We most likely will consider bringing a private Motion to strengthen and standardize the whole question of the fast food industry. You do not want to rob anybody of their ability to make profits, but they must do it within the confines of a healthy type of fast food industry. The citizens must be aware of what they are eating and the side effects of obesity.

These are the three recommendations I make and I thank Members for allowing me to make them.

Mr. Subhas Panday (*Princes Town North*): Mr. Speaker, I see the hon. Member for D'Abadie/O'Meara wants to get up; I would not be very long.

The Government is collecting taxes here tonight to deal with this problem of tobacco and alcohol. The Ministry of Community Development, Culture and Gender Affairs gives a lot of funding to organizations for certain functions. When we give money for a particular type of show, we give it *carte blanche* and the kinds of songs they produce encourage people to drink rum and idolize drinking. For example, in some chutney shows, "Rum till I Die" idolizes it. When you watch the television, you see it all the time. If you are giving funding, you should set parameters. When you give money, drinking should not be idolized. It must be nation building, giving directions to the youth. So the Government can take its funding and direct the society as we go along.

Another thing is that if you want to see drinking, bacchanal, violence and even accidents, go to those all inclusive fetes, from 8.00 in the evening to 4.00 in the morning. What we need to do when they apply for licences to have a fete—I think it is called a dance hall licence and a liquor licence—we should increase the dues for those people. They come and they pay a small sum; they invest the money and, at the end of the day, the people drink, go down the road and the society suffers. We need to have a holistic view of dealing with the issue of alcohol and rum.

When you drink and drive, you can cause accidents. We had set up legislation for a number of testing stations for motor cars to make sure that these cars are roadworthy. Imagine a situation where these young people go to these fetes and they are driving a vehicle coming down the road without proper brakes and lights and without it being mechanically fit.

This small measure will not really deal with the issue and we should have a holistic approach to it. I ask the hon. Minister of Works and Transport—I think we have over 40 testing—

Mr. Imbert: The Minister, in the budget speech, had indicated that a number of penalties would be increased with respect to traffic offences. That requires amendments to the Motor Vehicles and Road Traffic Act. It cannot be done using the Provisional Collection of Taxes Order. So, before the expiry of four months, we will come with the Finance Act, which should be capable of amending the Motor Vehicles and Road Traffic Act to address those matters.

In addition, I personally intend to make my best effort to bring all the necessary amendments to the Motor Vehicles and Road Traffic Act, by January for the latest, to deal with all these things: the introduction of radar guns, tightening the laws with respect to the vehicle inspection stations, and so on. It is on the programme. It is a very important policy initiative of the Government to tighten up the vehicle and traffic laws.

Mr. S. Panday: It seems that I have knocked on an open door. I really hope that this legislation comes and that the society will benefit from what we have contributed here tonight.

The Minister of Finance (Hon. Karen Nunez-Tesheira): Mr. Speaker, I will be brief because I believe that, in a sense, the various contributors to these Motions have repeated what I had said. I am saying that particularly in relation to the opposite side and what I had said in my presentation of the Motions.

When we speak about a budget and fiscal measures, we speak about the prose and its arithmetic. What we are attempting to do, in relation to the issue with regard to alcohol and cigarettes, is not telling people—in a democratic society such as ours we have to respect persons' democratic rights and I am sure the Member for Tabaquite would remind us if we dare forget that—that they cannot use alcohol, but it is whether we have personal issues and it is something we should abstain from. It is not the use; it is the abuse.

The fiscal measures are just one of the several mechanisms and measures this Government is utilizing to get its message across about the abuse of alcohol and cigarettes. Actually I should not say the abuse of cigarettes, because we understand the implications for the use of cigarettes both to your health, our family life and the socio-economic implications. That has been ventilated extensively; I do not intend to go back over all of that.

We are saying to you that increasing the excise and duty tax on alcohol and cigarettes is one of the fiscal measures that this Government is utilizing, on one end, to promote healthy lifestyles and, on the other end, to act as a disincentive. The Minister of Social Development has gone through an extensive list of initiatives from his Ministry in its participation in dealing with the issues of drug and alcohol abuse. As he indicated, it should not start when the problem has manifested itself, but even at pre-school, at a very early age, to have a preventative and proactive approach. He indicated a number of initiatives. The Minister of Education also partnered in that regard with the Minister of Sport and Youth Affairs. As I indicated when I began this debate, the Ministry of Health has done extensive work, not only with the Tobacco Bill and its own education drive, but with direct mailing to homes.

The Member for Caroni Central had indicated that we need to focus on primary care because an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure. I indicated in my opening that we have a number of district health facilities in place.

We applaud the suggestion from the Member for Caroni East. My only concern is that if the Government—and he used the word strong; a robust advertising initiative—and unfortunately he said, and he said it twice, about the literacy level. For a country that has a high functional illiteracy level, which I do not know about because we seem to read a lot of newspapers. In this country we have three daily newspapers and several weeklies. If that is a barometer, it appears that people are quite literate and quite capable of reading the newspapers. But we take your point. The only difficulty I have with that recommendation is that I am concerned that the next thing we will hear is that we are using the advertisements for party propaganda. *[Interruption]* You would not do that. I hold you to your word.

I am glad that there is some empirical data; the Member for Caroni Central said that we should do something on Trinidad and Tobago. We have no difficulty with that suggestion, but we are dealing with human beings and many of the reasons that cause people to drink whether they are from the United States or England—[*Interruption*] Member, I am not discounting that. If you come to Trinidad and Tobago and do the empirical research, it is closer to home.

I understand what you are saying, but we are dealing with human nature and the same factors would cause people to drink. While I understand what you are saying, there is value and the empirical data has been undertaken that taxation does act as a deterrent. Therefore, it only supports Government's initiative in its many approaches to dealing with the issues of alcohol and cigarette abuse in the democratic society in which we all live. That is just one of the things we are doing to discourage persons from abusing alcohol and using cigarettes. Your Government tried it too when you were in office, with the alcohol beverage tax. So this is not anything unknown to you.

10.00 p.m.

I want to say my last one, because I went through the trouble, because the Member for St. Augustine was so adamant that, he was being misrepresented, he did not say what the Member for Diego Martin North/East said and he was so sure that he had not, I said: You know what? Let me go and look at the record. I went in the *Hansard*—[*Interruption*] Member for Princes Town North, why are you laughing? Are you in anticipation? Let me just read this. I know it is unrevised, so I am putting that.

“Mr. Imbert: I want to thank the Member for St. Augustine, a true gentleman—unlike some of the other Members on the other side—for giving way.

Is the Member saying—I took notes—that the taxes on alcohol and tobacco are going to hit people on fixed incomes the hardest, especially pensioners? Are you advocating the consumption of alcohol and tobacco smoking by pensioners? Is that what you are advocating?”

Member for Princes Town North, I know you want to say he was leading the witness, but we know that the Member for St. Augustine is a brighter man than that. He is an independent man. He cannot do that to the Member for St. Augustine; a brilliant man like that. No, no, I would not have that. I would not have you insulting him like that. What did he say?

“Mr. V. Bharath: I am advocating that this is a free country and they can do whatever they please with their money. Do not take it away from them; let them use it for whatever they please to use it for.”

[*Continuous laughter*]

I am sorry, Mr. Speaker, but I really—[*Interruption*]

Mr. S. Panday: You are putting words in his mouth.

Hon. K. Nunez-Tesheira: Sorry, no, no these are his words. He did not just say—Member for Princes Town North I know that you are trying your best. I am not putting words in his mouth. All he had to say was no. Do you know what he said?

“I am advocating that this is a free country and they could do whatever they please with their money.”

Do you know who he is talking about? He is talking about the pensioners; the people on fixed incomes. He said:

“Do not take it away from them; let them use it for whatever they please to use it for.”

Mr. Speaker, I know that I am ending on a very light note. He said it again. When Minister Imbert said it and he referred again to the senior citizens:

“**Mr. Imbert:** So they can drink and smoke—

Mr. V. Bharath: No, no, so they can do with their money what they wish.”

Mr. Speaker, I am just mentioning this to put on the record that the Member for Diego Martin North/East did not misrepresent what the Member for St. Augustine said; he is of the view that those persons on fixed incomes and senior citizens, if they have a little income, let them do what they want with it. If they want to drink it to their grave; a late grave, because they are older, that is their right. Smoke it out, drink it out. Pillar 2, as I have indicated, is Nurturing a Caring Society.

I want to end on this. I want to say just for clarity that this is a budget and we are dealing with fiscal measures. All we are saying it is only one of the initiatives in the context of a democratic society that this Government is advocating.

You have heard from the Ministries of Health, Social Development, Sport and Youth Affairs and Education. There are several initiatives all encouraging persons, promoting a healthy lifestyle and encouraging and not abusing alcohol because of its many, many negative implications. There is empirical data to support that.

Mr. Speaker, I beg to move.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved:

That the Provisional Collection of Taxes Order, 2009 be confirmed.

**CUSTOMS (IMPORT DUTY)
(CARIBBEAN COMMON MARKET) (AMDT.) ORDER**

The Minister of Finance (Hon. Karen Nunez-Tesheira): Mr. Speaker, I beg to move,

Whereas it is provided by section 7 of the Customs Act, Chap. 78:01 that the President may by Order increase or reduce any import or export duty of Customs or impose new import or export duties of Customs and from the date of publication of the Order in the *Gazette* and until the expiry of the Order the duties specified in the Order shall be payable in lieu of the duties payable prior thereto:

And whereas it is provided by subsection (2) of the said section that every Order issued under that section shall after four days and within twenty-one days from the date of its first publication be submitted to Parliament and Parliament may by resolution confirm, amend or revoke the Order and upon publication of the resolution of Parliament in the *Gazette*, the resolution shall have effect and the Order shall then expire:

And whereas the Customs (Import Duty) (Caribbean Common Market) (Amendment) Order, 2009 was made under section 7 of the Customs Act and first published in the *Gazette* on the 07th day of September, 2009:

And whereas it is expedient to confirm the said Order:

Be it resolved:

That the Customs (Import Duty) (Caribbean Common Market) (Amendment) Order, 2009, the contents of which are set out below, be confirmed:

- L. N. No. 50 of 1980 1. The Customs (Import Duty) (Caribbean Common Market) Order, 1980 is amended in the Schedule by deleting all the Tariff Heading Numbers from 2202.90.20 to 2403.10.00 and the respective Tariff Descriptions and Common Market Rates of Duty in the First, Second and Third Columns, respectively, and substituting the following:

<i>FIRST COLUMN</i> <i>Tariff Heading Number</i>	<i>SECOND COLUMN</i> <i>Tariff Description</i>	<i>THIRD COLUMN</i> <i>Common Market Rate of Duty</i>
2202.90.20	Malt Beverages	\$0.26 per litre at an original gravity of 1050 and so in proportion for any difference in quantity or gravity.

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<i>FIRST COLUMN</i> <i>Tariff Heading Number</i>	<i>SECOND COLUMN</i> <i>Tariff Description</i>	<i>THIRD COLUMN</i> <i>Common Market Rate of Duty</i>
2203.00.10	Beer	\$4.28 per litre at an original gravity of 1050 and so in proportion for any difference in quantity or gravity.
2203.00.20	Stout	\$4.28 per litre at an original gravity of 1050 and so in proportion for any difference in quantity or gravity.
2203.00.90	Porter and Ale	\$4.28 per litre at an original gravity of 1050 and so in proportion for any difference in quantity or gravity.
2204.10.00	Sparkling Wines	\$29.33 per litre.
2204.20.00	Other Wine; grape must with fermentation prevented or arrested by the addition of alcohol:	
2204.21.00	In containers holding 2 litres or less	\$13.69 per litre.
2208.30.00	Whiskies:	
2208.30.10	In bottles of a strength not exceeding 46% vol.	\$140.08 per litre Alc./Vol. and so in proportion for any part of a litre or for any greater or lesser strength.
2208.30.90	Other	\$140.08 per litre Alc./Vol. and so in proportion for any part of a litre or for any greater or lesser strength.

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<i>FIRST COLUMN</i> <i>Tariff Heading Number</i>	<i>SECOND COLUMN</i> <i>Tariff Description</i>	<i>THIRD COLUMN</i> <i>Common Market Rate of Duty</i>
2208.40.00	Rum and other spirits obtained by distilling fermented sugarcane products:	
2208.40.10	In bottles of a strength not exceeding 46% vol.	\$66.04 per litre Alc./Vol. and so in proportion for any part of a litre or for any greater or lesser strength.
2208.40.90	Other	\$66.04 per litre Alc./Vol. and so in proportion for any part of a litre or for any greater or lesser strength.
2208.70.00	Rum Punch	\$66.04 per litre Alc./Vol. and so in proportion for any part of a litre or for any greater or lesser strength.
2208.50.00	Gin and Geneva:	
2208.50.10	In bottles of a strength not exceeding 46% vol.	\$140.08 per litre Alc./Vol. and so in proportion for any part of a litre or for any greater or lesser strength.
2208.50.90	Other	\$140.08 per litre Alc./Vol. and so in proportion for any part of a litre or for any greater or lesser strength.
2208.60.00	Vodka	\$140.08 per litre Alc./Vol. and so in proportion for any part of a litre or for any greater or lesser strength.

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<i>FIRST COLUMN</i> <i>Tariff Heading Number</i>	<i>SECOND COLUMN</i> <i>Tariff Description</i>	<i>THIRD COLUMN</i> <i>Common Market Rate of Duty</i>
2208.70.00	Liqueurs and cordials	\$140.08 per litre Alc./Vol. and so in proportion for any part of a litre or for any greater or lesser strength.
2208.90.90	Other Potable spirits	\$140.08 per litre Alc./Vol. and so in proportion for any part of a litre or for any greater or lesser strength.
2208.20.00	Spirits obtained by distilling grape wine or grape marc:	
2208.20.10	Brandy, in bottles of a strength not exceeding 46% vol.	\$140.08 per litre Alc./Vol. and so in proportion for any part of a litre or for any greater or lesser strength.
2208.20.90	Other	\$140.08 per litre Alc./Vol. and so in proportion for any part of a litre or for any greater or lesser strength.
2402.10.00	Cigars, cheroots and cigarillos, containing tobacco	\$26.23 per kilogram.
2402.20.00	Cigarettes, containing tobacco	\$3.81 per pack of 20 and so in proportion when not so packed.
2403.10.00	Smoking tobacco, whether or not containing tobacco substitutes in any proportion	\$49.78 per kilogram.”

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Question proposed.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved:

That the Customs (Import Duty) (Caribbean Common Market) (Amendment) Order, 2009, the contents of which are set out below, be confirmed:

- L. N. No. 50 of 1980 1. The Customs (Import Duty) (Caribbean Common Market) Order, 1980 is amended in the Schedule by deleting all the Tariff Heading Numbers from 2202.90.20 to 2403.10.00 and the respective Tariff Descriptions and Common Market Rates of Duty in the First, Second and Third Columns, respectively, and substituting the following:

<i>FIRST COLUMN</i> <i>Tariff Heading Number</i>	<i>SECOND COLUMN</i> <i>Tariff Description</i>	<i>THIRD COLUMN</i> <i>Common Market Rate of Duty</i>
2202.90.20	Malt Beverages	\$0.26 per litre at an original gravity of 1050 and so in proportion for any difference in quantity or gravity.
2203.00.10	Beer	\$4.28 per litre at an original gravity of 1050 and so in proportion for any difference in quantity or gravity.
2203.00.20	Stout	\$4.28 per litre at an original gravity of 1050 and so in proportion for any difference in quantity or gravity.
2203.00.90	Porter and Ale	\$4.28 per litre at an original gravity of 1050 and so in proportion for any difference in quantity or gravity.
2204.10.00	Sparkling Wines	\$29.33 per litre.

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<i>FIRST COLUMN Tariff Heading Number</i>	<i>SECOND COLUMN Tariff Description</i>	<i>THIRD COLUMN Common Market Rate of Duty</i>
2204.20.00	Other Wine; grape must with fermentation prevented or arrested by the addition of alcohol:	
2204.21.00	In containers holding 2 litres or less	\$13.69 per litre.
2208.30.00	Whiskies:	
2208.30.10	In bottles of a strength not exceeding 46% vol.	\$140.08 per litre Alc./Vol. and so in proportion for any part of a litre or for any greater or lesser strength.
2208.30.90	Other	\$140.08 per litre Alc./Vol. and so in proportion for any part of a litre or for any greater or lesser strength.
2208.40.00	Rum and other spirits obtained by distilling fermented sugarcane products:	
2208.40.10	In bottles of a strength not exceeding 46% vol.	\$66.04 per litre Alc./Vol. and so in proportion for any part of a litre or for any greater or lesser strength.
2208.40.90	Other	\$66.04 per litre Alc./Vol. and so in proportion for any part of a litre or for any greater or lesser strength.
2208.70.00	Rum Punch	\$66.04 per litre Alc./Vol. and so in proportion for any part of a litre or for any greater or lesser strength.

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<i>FIRST COLUMN</i> <i>Tariff Heading Number</i>	<i>SECOND COLUMN</i> <i>Tariff Description</i>	<i>THIRD COLUMN</i> <i>Common Market Rate of Duty</i>
2208.50.00	Gin and Geneva:	
2208.50.10	In bottles of a strength not exceeding 46% vol.	\$140.08 per litre Alc./Vol. and so in proportion for any part of a litre or for any greater or lesser strength.
2208.50.90	Other	\$140.08 per litre Alc./Vol. and so in proportion for any part of a litre or for any greater or lesser strength.
2208.60.00	Vodka	\$140.08 per litre Alc./Vol. and so in proportion for any part of a litre or for any greater or lesser strength.
2208.70.00	Liqueurs and cordials	\$140.08 per litre Alc./Vol. and so in proportion for any part of a litre or for any greater or lesser strength.
2208.90.90	Other Potable spirits	\$140.08 per litre Alc./Vol. and so in proportion for any part of a litre or for any greater or lesser strength.
2208.20.00	Spirits obtained by distilling grape wine or grape marc:	
2208.20.10	Brandy, in bottles of a strength not exceeding 46% vol.	\$140.08 per litre Alc./Vol. and so in proportion for any part of a litre or for any greater or lesser strength.

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<i>FIRST COLUMN</i> <i>Tariff Heading Number</i>	<i>SECOND COLUMN</i> <i>Tariff Description</i>	<i>THIRD COLUMN</i> <i>Common Market Rate of Duty</i>
2208.20.90	Other	\$140.08 per litre Alc./Vol. and so in proportion for any part of a litre or for any greater or lesser strength.
2402.10.00	Cigars, cheroots and cigarillos, containing tobacco	\$26.23 per kilogram.
2402.20.00	Cigarettes, containing tobacco	\$3.81 per pack of 20 and so in proportion when not so packed.
2403.10.00	Smoking tobacco, whether or not containing tobacco substitutes in any proportion	\$49.78 per kilogram.”

EXCISE DUTY (ALCOHOLIC BEVERAGES) ORDER

The Minister of Finance (Hon. Karen Nunez-Tesheira): Mr. Speaker, I beg to move,

Whereas it is provided by section 13(2) of the Excise (General Provisions) Act, Chap. 78:50 that the Minister may by Order impose any new excise duty or increase any excise duty and from the date of publication of the Order in the *Gazette* and until the expiry of the Order the duties specified in the Order shall be payable in lieu of the duties payable prior thereto:

And whereas it is provided by the said subsection that every Order issued under that subsection shall after four days and within twenty-one days from the date of its first publication be submitted to Parliament and Parliament may by resolution confirm, amend or revoke the Order and upon publication of the resolution of Parliament in the *Gazette*, the resolution shall have effect and the Order shall then expire:

And whereas the Excise Duty (Alcoholic Beverages) Order, 2009 was made under section 13(2) of the Excise (General Provisions) Act, and first published in the *Gazette* on the 07th day of September, 2009:

And whereas it is expedient to confirm the said Order:

Be it resolved:

That the Excise Duty (Alcoholic Beverages) Order, 2009, the contents of which are set out below, be confirmed:

1. The excise duty on alcoholic beverages is as follows:

New excise duty on alcoholic beverages	“Tariff Heading Number	Product	Excise Duty
	2202.90.20	Malt Beverages	\$0.26 per litre at an original gravity of 1050 and so in proportion for any difference in quantity or gravity.
	2203.00.10	Beer	\$4.28 per litre at an original gravity of 1050 and so in proportion for any difference in quantity or gravity.
	2203.00.20	Stout	\$4.28 per litre at an original gravity of 1050 and so in proportion for any difference in quantity or gravity.
	2203.00.90	Other	\$4.28 per litre at an original gravity of 1050 and so in proportion for any difference in quantity or gravity.

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New excise duty on alcoholic beverages	“Tariff Heading Number	Product	Excise Duty
	2208.40.00	Rum and other spirits obtained by distilling fermented sugarcane products:	
	2208.40.10	In bottles of a strength not exceeding 46% vol.	\$66.04 per litre Alc./Vol. and so in proportion for any part of a litre or for any greater or lesser strength.
	2208.40.90	Other	\$66.04 per litre Alc./Vol. and so in proportion for any part of a litre or for any greater or lesser strength.
	2208.70.00	Rum Punch	\$66.04 per litre Alc./Vol. and so in proportion for any part of a litre or for any greater or lesser strength.
	2208.50.00	Gin and Geneva:	
	2208.50.10	In bottles of a strength not exceeding 46% vol.	\$140.08 per litre Alc./Vol. and so in proportion for any part of a litre or for any greater or lesser strength.
	2208.50.90	Other	\$140.08 per litre Alc./Vol. and so in proportion for any part of a litre or for any greater or lesser strength.
	2208.30.00	Whiskies:	
	2208.30.10	In bottles of a strength not exceeding 46% vol	\$140.08 per litre Alc./Vol. and so in proportion for any part of a litre or for any greater or lesser strength.

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New excise duty on alcoholic beverages	“Tariff Heading Number	Product	Excise Duty
	2208.30.90	Other	\$140.08 per litre Alc./Vol. and so in proportion for any part of a litre or for any greater or lesser strength.
	2208.60.00	Vodka	\$140.08 per litre Alc./Vol. and so in proportion for any part of a litre or for any greater or lesser strength.
	2208.70.00	Liqueurs and cordials	\$140.08 per litre Alc./Vol. and so in proportion for any part of a litre or for any greater or lesser strength.
	2208.90.90	Other	\$140.08 per litre Alc./Vol. and so in proportion for any part of a litre or for any greater or lesser strength.
	2208.20.00	Spirits obtained by distilling grape wine or grape marc:	
	2208.20.10	Brandy, in bottles of a strength not exceeding 46% vol.	\$140.08 per litre Alc./Vol. and so in proportion for any part of a litre or for any greater or lesser strength.
	2208.20.90	Other	\$140.08 per litre Alc./Vol. and so in proportion for any part of a litre or for any greater or lesser strength.
	2204.10.00	Sparkling wine	\$29.33 per litre.

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New excise duty on alcoholic beverages	“Tariff Heading Number	Product	Excise Duty
	2204.21.00	Other wine; grape must with fermentation prevented or arrested by the addition of alcohol: In containers holding 2 litres or less.	\$13.69 per litre.”

Clause 8 of L.N. Nos. 266 and 277 of 2006 revoked.

2. Clause 8 of the Provisional Collection of Taxes Order, 2006 is revoked.

Question proposed.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved:

That the Excise Duty (Alcoholic Beverages) Order, 2009, the contents of which are set out below, be confirmed:

New excise duty on alcoholic beverages	“Tariff Heading Number	Product	Excise Duty
	2202.90.20	Malt Beverages	\$0.26 per litre at an original gravity of 1050 and so in proportion for any difference in quantity or gravity.
	2203.00.10	Beer	\$4.28 per litre at an original gravity of 1050 and so in proportion for any difference in quantity or gravity.

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New excise duty on alcoholic beverages	“Tariff Heading Number	Product	Excise Duty
	2203.00.20	Stout	\$4.28 per litre at an original gravity of 1050° and so in proportion for any difference in quantity or gravity.
	2203.00.90	Other	\$4.28 per litre at an original gravity of 1050 and so in proportion for any difference in quantity or gravity.
	2208.40.00	Rum and other spirits obtained by distilling fermented sugarcane products:	
	2208.40.10	In bottles of a strength not exceeding 46% vol.	\$66.04 per litre Alc./Vol. and so in proportion for any part of a litre or for any greater or lesser strength.
	2208.40.90	Other	\$66.04 per litre Alc./Vol. and so in proportion for any part of a litre or for any greater or lesser strength.
	2208.70.00	Rum Punch	\$66.04 per litre Alc./Vol. and so in proportion for any part of a litre or for any greater or lesser strength.
	2208.50.00	Gin and Geneva:	
	2208.50.10	In bottles of a strength not exceeding 46% vol.	\$140.08 per litre Alc./Vol. and so in proportion for any part of a litre or for any greater or lesser strength

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New excise duty on alcoholic beverages	“Tariff Heading Number	Product	Excise Duty
	2208.50.90	Other	\$140.08 per litre Alc./Vol. and so in proportion for any part of a litre or for any greater or lesser strength.
	2208.30.00	Whiskies:	
	2208.30.10	In bottles of a strength not exceeding 46% vol.	\$140.08 per litre Alc./Vol. and so in proportion for any part of a litre or for any greater or lesser strength.
	2208.30.90	Other	\$140.08 per litre Alc./Vol. and so in proportion for any part of a litre or for any greater or lesser strength.
	2208.60.00	Vodka	\$140.08 per litre Alc./Vol. and so in proportion for any part of a litre or for any greater or lesser strength.
	2208.70.00	Liqueurs and cordials	\$140.08 per litre Alc./Vol. and so in proportion for any part of a litre or for any greater or lesser strength.
	2208.90.90	Other	\$140.08 per litre Alc./Vol. and so in proportion for any part of a litre or for any greater or lesser strength.
	2208.20.00	Spirits obtained by distilling grape wine or grape marc:	

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New excise duty on alcoholic beverages	“Tariff Heading Number	Product	Excise Duty
	2208.20.10	Brandy, in bottles of a strength not exceeding 46% vol.	\$140.08 per litre Alc./Vol. and so in proportion for any part of a litre or for any greater or lesser strength.
	2208.20.90	Other	\$140.08 per litre Alc./Vol. and so in proportion for any part of a litre or for any greater or lesser strength.
	2204.10.00	Sparkling wine	\$29.33 per litre.
	2204.21.00	Other wine; grape must with fermentation prevented or arrested by the addition of alcohol: In containers holding 2 litres or less.	13.69 per litre.
Clause 8 of L.N. Nos. 266 and 277 of 2006 revoked.	2.	Clause 8 of the Provisional Collection of Taxes Order, 2006 is revoked.	

EXCISE DUTY (TOBACCO PRODUCTS) ORDER

The Minister of Finance (Hon. Karen Nunez-Tesheira): Mr. Speaker, I beg to move,

Whereas it is provided by section 13(2) of the Excise (General Provisions) Act, Chap. 78:50 that the Minister may by Order impose any new excise duty or increase any excise duty and from the date of publication of the Order in the *Gazette* and until the expiry of the Order the duties specified in the Order shall be payable in lieu of the duties payable prior thereto:

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And whereas it is provided by the said subsection that every Order issued under that subsection shall after four days and within twenty-one days from the date of its first publication be submitted to Parliament and Parliament may by resolution confirm, amend or revoke the Order and upon publication of the resolution of Parliament in the *Gazette*, the resolution shall have effect and the Order shall then expire:

And whereas the Excise Duty (Tobacco Products) Order, 2009 was made under section 13(2) of the Excise (General Provisions) Act, and first published in the *Gazette* on the 07th day of September, 2009:

And whereas it is expedient to confirm the said Order:

Be it Resolved:

That the Excise Duty (Tobacco Products) Order, 2009, the contents of which are set out below, be confirmed:

1. The excise duty on tobacco products is as follows:

Tariff Heading Number	Product	Excise Duty
2402.10.00	Cigars, cheroots and cigarillos, containing tobacco	\$26.23 per kilogram
2402.20.00	Cigarettes containing tobacco	\$3.81 per pack of 20 and so in proportion when not so packed
2403.10.00	Smoking tobacco, whether or not containing tobacco substitutes in any proportion	\$49.78 per kilogram.”

2. Clause 6 of L.N. Nos. 266 and 277 of 2006 revoked.
2. Clause 6 of the Provisional Collection of Taxes Order, 2006 is revoked.

Question proposed.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved:

2. The excise duty on tobacco products is as follows:

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<i>“Tariff Heading Number</i>	<i>Product</i>	<i>Excise Duty</i>
2402.10.00	Cigars, cheroots and cigarillos, containing tobacco	\$26.23 per kilogram
<i>“Tariff Heading Number</i>	<i>Product</i>	<i>Excise Duty</i>
2402.20.00	Cigarettes containing tobacco	\$3.81 per pack of 20 and so in proportion when not so packed
2403.10.00	Smoking tobacco, whether or not containing tobacco substitutes in any proportion	\$49.78 per kilogram.”
Clause 6 of L. N. Nos. 266 and 277 of 2006 revoked	2.	Clause 6 of the Provisional Collection of Taxes Order, 2006 is revoked.

Motion made and question proposed that the House do now adjourn to a date to be fixed. [Hon. C. Imbert]

Question put and agreed to.

House adjourned accordingly.

Adjourned at 10.10 p.m.