

Leave of Absence

Wednesday, September 15, 2010

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Wednesday, September 15, 2010

The House met at 10.00 a.m.

PRAYERS

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

LEAVE OF ABSENCE

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, I have received communication from the hon. Dr. Suruj Rambachan, Member for Tabaquite, requesting leave of absence from sittings of the House during the period September 15 to September 17, 2010. The leave which the Member seeks is granted.

APPROPRIATION BILL

(BUDGET)

[Third Day]

Order read for resuming adjourned debate on question [September 08, 2010]:

That the Bill be now read a second time.

Question again proposed.

The Minister of National Security (Sen. The Hon. Brig. John Sandy): A very pleasant morning to all my colleagues in this Chamber. Mr. Speaker, please permit me, first of all, to express my sincerest thanks and appreciation for allowing me to participate in this debate in this honourable House. Additionally, I wish to embrace this opportunity to compliment my esteemed colleague, the Minister of Finance, the hon. Winston Dookeran, on the presentation of a well considered, innovative and expertly delivered Appropriation Bill. [*Desk thumping*] I salute you, Sir.

Last Wednesday, the Minister of Finance in his presentation identified that one of the major challenges this Government and, by extension, our beloved twin island State, continued to face, was the prolonged escalation of violent criminal activity and antisocial behaviour.

Were we to ask anyone, any native of Trinidad and Tobago living here or abroad, what was his or her main concern for Trinidad and Tobago, he or she would tell you that it was crime. In fact, our hon. Prime Minister indicated to us that following her last visit abroad, some of our nationals who she invited to return home indicated that they were fearful of the crime.

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I remember some years ago, my posting in Washington as this country's defence attaché, I referred to Trinidad and Tobago as "paradise No. 1". I am appalled now and would be embarrassed to meet some of my colleagues, who I am sure would have read a lot about Trinidad and Tobago and our criminal activity. This is, indeed, a most fundamental menace to the economic and social development of country and, more importantly, it threatens the well-being of our people. Unless crime is brought under control and there could be some assurance of human safety and security, our beautiful country would be robbed of the opportunity to attain its optimum potential.

I wish to emphasize that the Government of the People's Partnership, under the astute leadership of the hon. Kamla Persad-Bissessar, remains eternally committed to the restoration of law and order in our land and we will pursue all necessary lawful measures in and of this Parliament to realize this objective.
[*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Speaker, I remain most disappointed in the Leader of the Opposition, someone who I have known for many years and admired, and hoped that I would learn something from him in this Parliament. Crime being on the front burner was not even mentioned by him. Further, I was appalled to hear the Opposition Leader refer to our children as "duncy". [*Interruption*]

Hon. Members: Shame! [*Crosstalk*]

Dr. Rowley: Mr. Speaker, I did no such thing. That is a misrepresentation; imputing motives.

Mr. Roberts: I have the *Hansard*.

Hon. Members: Misrepresentation of the facts! [*Crosstalk*]

Sen. The Hon. Brig. J. Sandy: I still admire him.

We know that crime as a multifaceted problem requires a multipronged approach towards a solution. Over the past decade, there have been a number of structural problems that facilitated crime and that continue to do so. Among these are illegal drugs and the illegal drug trade within the avenues of which reside the illegal firearms trade. The traders bring in the narcotics and the guns; unfortunately the transshipment effect takes most of the drugs away, but leaves the guns here to be pointed against all our decent folk and law-abiding citizens.

There is alienation from the political process—or there was—there is a lack of participation and consultation at the community level, as well as economic

arrangements which have led to a growing divide between the haves and the have-nots. In addition, the very obvious moral and spiritual decay in our society today, especially in the hearts and minds of our young people, continues to haunt this country.

The situation reflects, not only the breakdown of values and morals in our society, but also the apathetic and merciless leadership to which we were exposed, which considered the loss of life as merely unintended or incidental damages related to an intended outcome. The less than empathetic decree was simplified as "collateral damage". [*Crosstalk*] Accordingly, the previous administration failed in its attempts to deal with the lawlessness and indiscipline that now pervade our society and which feed the environment within which crimes resides and flourishes.

Our Government recognizes the critical situation that this country faces, as it relates to crime, and the need to act quickly and definitively. As a consequence, we are taking a comprehensive approach that will address the political, economic, social, technological and managerial dimensions required to reinstate safety and security in Trinidad and Tobago. My colleagues and I on this side are eternally committed to that.

While the Ministry of National Security will quite naturally remain the vanguard agency in this initiative, primarily as a result of its responsibility for law enforcement, safety and security, other ministries and state agencies will be engaged to implement an all embracing approach to this national challenge. You see, Mr. Speaker, we are a team and we are in this together and we will assault it together. [*Desk thumping*]

The Ministry of National Security is guided by pillar No. 3 of the 2010 manifesto of the People's Partnership, labelled "National and Personal Security-Human Security for Peace and Prosperity". I will say that again: "National and Personal Security-Human Security for Peace and Prosperity". That pillar identifies our objective to reduce crime and the fear of crime, diminish gang warfare, restrict the use of unlicensed firearms, improve road traffic management, improve customer service delivery, enhance public trust and confidence, engender community patriotism and reintroduce family values and virtues. Family values have gone out the window.

Yesterday afternoon one of my colleagues during his contribution lamented the fact that simple things like "good morning", "good evening", "thank you", and "please" we have lost. We need to regain our society. [*Desk thumping*]

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The pillar to which I refer identifies our objectives to reduce crime and the fear of crime, as I said, because at present our citizens fear even having a function at their homes; wakes are being invaded. The criminals have no respect even for the dead.

The former government assumed power in December 2001 and at the end of fiscal 2001 serious crimes stood at 16,610 with a detection rate of 23.5 per cent.

10.15 a.m.

By fiscal 2009 serious crimes had risen to 20,621 with a detection rate of 14.9 per cent. That represents a 24 per cent increase in serious crimes and an 8 percentage point or 36 per cent decrease in the rate of detection. One of the reasons for that is that the Trinidad and Tobago Police Service was totally demotivated. As you would see later on, they were ignored by the previous government.

Murders went up from 160 in fiscal 2002 to 549 in fiscal 2009, a whopping 243 per cent over a mere 7-year period meaning that many more families had to suffer the trauma of their loved ones being taken away from them, at times through very heinous acts, sometimes even in their presence. Can you imagine the number of our children who would have witnessed their parents being killed? Can you imagine what that would have done to their tender minds?

Larceny-dwelling house—in 2002 stood at 362. By 2009, this figure had escalated by 45 per cent to 525. It was understandable, therefore, when our citizens lamented on how vulnerable and insecure they felt. The environment became one in which nothing seemed sacred anymore. Human life had lost its value for the criminals who snuffed it out daily and our homes, those places of safety, sanctuary and solace, were constantly under threat. Bandits invaded homes at will. It reminds me of the calypso: "We living in jail"; still pertinent 30 years after it was written.

To that extent we are burglarproofing and enclosing ourselves with steel. *[Interruption]* You are quite right. With the aid of big, strong pit bulls.

Mr. Sharma: Any Rottweilers?

Sen. The Hon. Brig. J. Sandy: It was understandable, therefore, when our citizens lamented on how vulnerable and insecure they felt. As that situation continued, the then government, paralyzed by its inability to change the criminal activity landscape, continued to propose a multitude of plans and initiatives. Admittedly, some of these harboured considerable merit and I wish here to

publicly commend my predecessor, Mr. Martin Joseph, with whom I communicated upon assuming this chair. [*Interruption*] Yes, I communicated with him. I sent him a letter. I am that type of person. [*Desk thumping*] I almost invited him to join us but then I was cautioned not to.

However, the true value of any plan can only be discerned with its implementation. Because the will and determination to implement were lacking, those potentially feasible plans degenerated into a host of empty promises to the population. They promised repeatedly to reduce crime which, we are well aware, they failed at miserably. They promised to increase crime detection rates. Let me share with this honourable House in a little more detail what the rate of detection of serious crimes has been over the last eight years: 2003; 23.6 per cent, as indicated earlier; 2004, 23.4 per cent; 2005, 22.2 per cent; 2006, 22.1 per cent; 2007, 21.4 per cent; 2008, 17.2 per cent; 2009, 14.9 per cent. The figures speak for themselves.

They promised to appoint a Commissioner of Police. The process to select a Commissioner of Police commenced in August 2007 when the vacancy was advertised. Following that process which lasted 11 months, the Government refused—they refused—to approve the nomination on the grounds that the process was flawed and did not result in the selection of the best pool of candidates. That was the proffered reason. An amendment to the legislation was subsequently pursued to bring effect to the desired changes, following which the process was restarted.

Given the track record of delays and indecisiveness of our predecessors, had the People's Partnership not assumed government and arrested that situation, we would be still in that position today, without a Commissioner of Police designate.

I continue with their broken promises. They promised to take delivery of three offshore patrol vessels aimed at alleviating crime, particularly international crimes, such as the illegal trade in drugs, arms and ammunition. That acquisition is still not complete and we now are expected to give it serious review and we are doing that.

They promised to regularize the Special Anti-Crime Unit of Trinidad and Tobago. Since its establishment in 2003 with a specific mandate to tackle crimes of national significance, the role of SAUTT has been expanded, further highlighting the need for its status to be regularized. In 2004/2005, the previous government took the decision to develop legislation to confer a legal personality on SAUTT, making it into a statutory body with a defined mandate. On their removal from office, SAUTT's status was not regularized.

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They promised to introduce a payroll system in the Trinidad and Tobago Prison Service. Since 2004 Cabinet approved the appointment of a payroll introduction committee to initiate a payroll system. That committee completed its report in fiscal 2007 and submitted it to the Minister of National Security for consideration. An action plan was developed but to date, unfortunately, the much needed payroll system, which would have been instrumental in alleviating the problems associated with overcrowding in the nation's prison, is not existent.

They promised to effectively address the issues of flooding in Trinidad and Tobago. This issue continues to plague many of our citizens, even as we speak. Our citizens, every rainy season, continue to lose their homes, appliances, livestock and garden produce. It was left for the Government of the People's Partnership to take the bull by the horns, as it were. [*Desk thumping*] And I am sure the Members of this honourable House will recall our hon. Prime Minister, her first official operation was to don her boots and get into the swampy waters to add some solace to our citizens who were flooded out.

Further to that, when the community of Gasparillo, in particular Harmony Hall, was devastated two months ago and under eight and a half feet of water, our hon. Prime Minister, together the Minister of National Security, did an aerial reconnaissance by helicopter. When we were over the Harmony Hall area she said to the pilot: "Pilot, I need to get down there." He said to her: "Prime Minister, it is difficult because of the swampy area." She said: "Find somewhere; we need to get down there." He said to her: "Prime Minister, I am sorry. We may not be able to make that."

Mr. Speaker, over the past three months I have grown to know my Prime Minister a little better and I recall whenever you hear her say, "Sir", it means that she is not going to take no for an answer. And when I heard that, I said, "Oh, oh." She said: "Sir, we are getting down there. Those are my people. I have to go down there with them." And we did.

Subsequent to that, the Leader of the Opposition remarked that the hon. Prime Minister was still politicking; that she is still out there canvassing. What they do not recognize is that this side, we are here to serve the people and their problem is, after getting into government people do not see them. The people do not see them.

They promised to put systems in place to effectively manage the private security industry. A committee was established; a report compiled and nothing further was done. In the meantime, some indiscriminate and unscrupulous

opportunists posing as businessmen are recruiting questionable characters and subversive elements to serve as private security personnel in homes and business enterprises.

Our plan: to make a change. We in the People's Partnership gave our commitment to the people of this country that by using a multidimensional approach this Government will reinstate safety and security in our land. That change has to come. Our focus, as stated in our manifesto, will include primarily effective management of the institutions of law and order and the provision of viable alternatives to crime. More specifically, we would address the resolution of the outstanding issues that are negatively affecting law enforcement, the criminal justice system, disaster preparedness and societal recovery.

10.30 a.m.

Mr. Speaker, what we have done in our first three months in Government: Consistent with our agenda, within the first 120 days in office, apart from other positive measures, the People's Partnership Government has successively launched a wide-ranging assault on crime, traversing from the preventive to the operational. Trinidad and Tobago has had enough.

Already we have approved the appointment of a Commissioner of Police and Deputy Commissioner of Police, attesting to the strong will and determination of this Government to stabilize the police service and position that organization and the other law enforcement agencies to confront and reverse the crime situation in this country.

Additionally, because of Government's recognition that it is our lead agency in the battle against crime, the police service, for the very first time in the history of allocations in the Appropriation Bill in Trinidad and Tobago was afforded the autonomy of its own budget.

We have advanced the initiative for the early introduction of a parole system in Trinidad and Tobago. This will allow some degree of relief for our hard-working prison officers by reducing the volume of inmates who could subsequently contribute to society with periods of community service. It is proposed as well to engage partnership with the Mediation Board of Trinidad and Tobago to contribute to the preventive approach to criminal behaviour.

Mr. Speaker, we have initiated discussions with the Trinidad and Tobago Police Service on the long outstanding issue of salary negotiations as well as adequate staffing.

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I have been privileged to visit our police officers and spend time with them on roadblocks, sometimes in the early hours of the morning and the enthusiasm exhibited never deflates. For three long years, these patriots have worked; a lot of them beyond the call of duty and not allowed to negotiate for increased emoluments.

Our Government will ensure that negotiations in this regard commence in quick order, not only for our police officers; but also the other divisions in the Ministry of National Security who work equally diligently in the interest of law and order in Trinidad and Tobago.

Mr. Speaker, we have placed on the front burner the development of legislation relating to human trafficking, gangs, the Special Anti-Crime Unit of Trinidad and Tobago (SAUTT) and the private security industry; to name a few.

In the last 120 days, the Ministry of National Security, through its various arms of law enforcement, also implemented a number of short-term measures to circumvent and curtail this avalanche of criminal activity.

We have enhanced police visibility with an increase in joint police/army roadblocks and patrols both foot and mobile. In this respect, the hon. Prime Minister did not hesitate when the police commissioner, Acting Commissioner of the Police at the time, indicated to us that there was a requirement for vehicles in the police service. She immediately granted the request and 75 vehicles were given to the police service. The Minister of Works and Transport said: "Done."

Mr. Speaker, there are more aggressive criminal investigations to secure arrests of perpetrators. In recent months, there have been increased vigilance and police raids in the known gang areas with more stop-and-search operations. We have redeployed law enforcement personnel and other assets to deter the frequency of criminal activity.

We have adopted a zero tolerance policing strategy especially with regard to traffic and minor offences. Mr. Speaker, if we do not attack the lawlessness, then the criminal activity will escalate; lawlessness, like those who think it is the norm to toss an empty beer can or bottle out of a moving vehicle; those who think that nothing is wrong with breaking a red light. It is a norm in Trinidad and Tobago. We need to arrest those small demonstrations of lawlessness if we are to attack our crime problem.

We have redeployed law enforcement personnel and other assets to deter the frequency of criminal activity. We have adopted a zero-tolerance policing

strategy, especially with regard to traffic and minor offences. We have recalled and begun the process of employing former members of the protective services and the defence force to man stations while allowing the younger policemen to supplement our requirements on the streets and in the neighbourhoods.

We have been focusing on a more user-friendly and customer-friendly atmosphere at police stations with victim support systems in place. Too often we have had complaints of citizens, particularly females, going to our police stations and not being treated as a victim. In fact, they are treated as perpetrators and criminals.

We have increased municipal and transit police patrols; increased coastal patrols by the Trinidad and Tobago Coast Guard as well. There is also the launch of the Private Security Network Commission. Initially, when I proposed that initiative, the Leader of the Opposition was heard to remark that we are going to be putting Africans and Haitians on security posts to assist the police service.

That is furthest from the truth and this is why we are hastening to bring to this Parliament a Bill in respect of private security companies, which will outlaw any private security company that is not registered. It will also demand that each private security officer have in his possession a certificate of good character before he is admitted to serve with any security company.

Mr. Speaker, the Private Security Network Commission is one that allows us use of other security companies, their eyes and ears. So if there is a security officer posted at a location at the corner of Henry and Queen Streets and he observes two men walking up the street and they are armed, he does not have to wonder whether he should use his cellphone because it just has 50 cents on it or go in and use the company's phone. He has an immediate network to which he can send that information; to a police station so that they could respond.

Mr. Speaker, this initiative, under the guidance of the Deputy Commissioner, invited several heads of reputable security companies, themselves keenly interested in assisting in the fight against crime, and I wish to sincerely thank them for their demonstration of patriotism.

This will entail a dedicated communications network that will engage the eyes and ears of security officers at their respective locations when criminal activity is being witnessed or suspected.

The offshore patrol vessels: With respect to the OPVs, the Cabinet is considering all the possibilities pertinent to the acquisition of the three OPVs

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sourced by the previous administration. I wish to advise this honourable House that this matter as well as other major projects is receiving the attention of your Government by way of a due diligence exercise, which started several weeks ago.

Careful consideration is being given to the financial and legal implications and, indeed, the security implications of any amendment to this programme. I wish to assure you, Mr. Speaker and this honourable House, that the Government is committed to making the best decision for Trinidad and Tobago as it relates to the offshore patrol programme and its potential contribution to our national security strategy.

Youth community programmes: Mr. Speaker, the Government has also begun its work with the youth population through the implementation of preventive programmes, with a view to finally dealing with crime and the youth population's involvement in criminal activity.

In this regard, Government is actively pursuing a number of programmes. Let me take the opportunity to commend the previous Government on the proposal for the Morvant/Laventille Initiative, which regrettably remained on the shelves of our predecessors.

Having recognized the potential of that programme and, in keeping with a similar proposal, the Community Patriotism Initiative, we envisaged for challenged communities nationwide, our Government has already begun its further development with a view to early implementation. Allow me to share briefly with this honourable House and the national community information on these programmes.

The Morvant/Laventille Initiative is a change management strategy developed and sponsored by the Ministry of National Security intended to transform the socio-economic/socio-cultural landscape of the wider Morvant/Laventille community.

It is intended that this intervention will bring much needed comfort and relief to residents in the short-to-medium term and will eventually lead to the path of long-term transformation and development of the community. The key objectives of the initiative are to achieve the strategic goal of improving the quality of life in the community.

Mr. Speaker, we have taken upon ourselves to invite the representatives from the respective communities. We have also taken the liberty to invite our colleagues, the Member for Laventille West/Morvant, who did show up on Independence Day at St. Barb's. We invite them to join us in this effort.

This initiative will be implemented by means of a service-oriented, joint community services centre where members of the community can obtain prompt, efficient and effective advice, guidance and education in order to facilitate their access to policing and other social services and programmes in the community.

10.45 a.m.

To date, aspects of this initiative have already commenced. A model has been developed, which once introduced, would allow for its feasibility for implementation in some of the high-risk communities to be determined. Additionally, as part of this project, the following three facilities have been identified for refurbishment and upgrade: the Beetham Police Youth Club, the All in One Child Development Centre; and the Each One Teach One Special Programme Centre. Also, collaboration with key stakeholders, including Ministries, has been initiated and plans are on the way to schedule community consultations with the various communities at the heart of this intervention.

The Positive Adolescents Network Panyard Initiative: Work has begun in designing a programme to be introduced to key panyards in the north, east, central and south Trinidad, as well as in Tobago. This is being designed as a means of elevating the quality of life in the community and to provide safe and secure spaces for residents, in particular our young people.

These friendly panyard spaces will be used for the personal development of our young people, while re-establishing and invoking the strong passion and commitment to this unique art form by members of the community. In this regard, discussions have been held with officials of the Birdsong Steel Band Academy, who have already implemented such a programme. The Ministry will partner with Birdsong, as we seek to emulate their panyard initiative and spread it out to other communities. Discussions are also being held with Solo Harmonites Steel Band and other steel bands in Central and South Trinidad. What is encouraging is that there are number of other steel bands calling and saying: "We want to be part of this." This is encouraging, indeed. To oversee the administration of the programme, an implementation working committee, comprising stakeholders from the communities, has also been established. I want to say that again slowly. To oversee the administration of the programme, an implementation working committee has been established.

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. Sharma*]

Question put and agreed to.

Sen. The Hon. Brig. J. Sandy: Thank you very kindly and thank you to my colleagues.

Mentoring: This is very dear to me, because I myself was privileged to be mentored. When I speak with young people, and I have a passion for young people, I never shudder to tell them where I came from. I grew up on Nelson Street in the days of gang warfare. Those days were pelting bottles and stones. Now, it is guns. This is why I was able to go back into that community and sit and talk with them. I was able to go to St. Barb's and sit and talk with them. I was able to go to Gonzales and sit and talk with them, because I understand their situation and I can associate with their wants and their needs.

In Trinidad and Tobago, precursor conditions such as high unemployment rates and evasive crime and drug culture, poverty and poor family structures have resulted in an increased at-risk youth population within our society. In order to address this concern, the Ministry of National Security is championing mentoring at national level as an effective strategy to aid at-risk youths in their holistic development.

Research has indicated that formal mentoring can serve as a preventive measure in reducing juvenile delinquency or the involvement of youths in criminal activity. Mentors help youths to learn to understand and communicate their feelings, relate to their peers and develop relationships with adults. These are some of the areas that are so lacking in our youth today. The desired end result is to assist and guide Trinidad and Tobago's youth in becoming socially, psychologically, emotionally and economically balanced adults who can contribute positively to society.

Other young people are reminded of the idiomatic affirmation: If it is to be, it is up to me. I share that with them every time I get an opportunity to speak with them. Because, coincidentally, the teacher who left this with me when I was probably six years or so, in second stage, passed on over the weekend and she is being buried today; coincidentally. She made us say, every morning, after prayers, and also affirm: If it is to be, it is up to me. Her name is Mrs. Cyril. She taught me in second stage at Nelson Street Boys and most of the Nelsonians who would have passed through her hands would remember: If it is to be, it is up to me. She would make us say it and she would shout it. It has remained with me today. This is what we want to share with our young people. We want to let them know that they can achieve anything, once they put their minds to it. That is what we want to nurture in our society. This is what we want to bring back to our youth; respect and dignity.

I met a youngster on Independence Day in St. Barb's. I am advised that he is responsible for quite a number of murders in the area. When I interacted with him, all he needs is a little love and attention. This is what we want to do with our mentoring programme.

In an effort to mobilize the programme, the Inter-Ministerial committee has promoted a stakeholders consultation on mentorship to jointly inform the public on the concept of mentoring and to encourage them, if suitable, to become mentors to young persons. That event was held this morning at the Crowne Plaza, at which a number of my colleagues here attended in support.

We also, among several key stakeholders, have the energy sector, the commercial sector, religious organizations, NGOs and educational institutions; all of whom were represented there this morning. There was standing room only, this morning at the Crowne Plaza auditorium. This only goes to show the type of interest that other interested parties in Trinidad and Tobago have, with respect to assisting in the Ministry of National Security in ensuring that our youth are properly mentored. [*Interruption*]

Mr. Warner: No community leaders.

Sen. The Hon. Brig. J. Sandy: No community leaders. We met law-abiding upstanding citizens who want to assist in bringing back Trinidad and Tobago to what it used to be.

The Ministry of National Security will also be embarking on a school outreach programme from October 2010, where various agencies and divisions of the Ministry, sporting personalities and other role model figures will be visiting and lecturing to primary and secondary school students throughout Trinidad and Tobago. That is why I say that we are a team here. When I raised that with the hon. Minister of Education, he engulfed me in his arms and said: "Yes, that is the way to go. I am on board." There was no hesitation. This programme is to be implemented in a sustained formal structure, where different agencies' persons will be assigned to particular schools or school regions.

When I hinted earlier on that we want to do that and we wanted to put soldiers and members of the protective services in schools, they said: "You are putting soldiers there with arms." That is not the plan. I remember years ago, there was what we call in the military a big brother/big sister programme; more so big brother, because our female soldiers were too young at the time. We went in the schools in Arima. Some of the people from Arima should remember that. The impact that a soldier, one who looked like me, in uniform entering the school, that

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in itself was so effective, that after speaking with the youngsters, you realize that impression had already worked wonders. As the saying goes: “You do not get a second chance to make a first impression.” That was the idea behind it and some people were misunderstood.

It is proposed that the programme will aid young persons in developing their self-esteem and self-efficacy; enhance the youth’s image of himself and herself; improve general negative perception of some young people; allow assigned role model figures to transmit various life skills and attitudes such as discipline and civics; build a level of trust and respect for personnel of the defence force and protective services and demonstrate the commitment of all agencies and divisions of the Ministry of National Security and the Ministry of Education, as well the Ministry of Sports and Youth Affairs and the community to preventing and reducing crime.

It is also intended to spread the Trinidad and Tobago Cadet Force—by the way, they are celebrating their centennial anniversary this year—to establish a unit in every secondary school now. I have been told in the past that there was a unit in every secondary school. That is not true. There may be a cadet or two, but what we need is a unit in every school. In collaboration with the Ministry of Education, we want to get principals on board. I remember when I was a cadet the principal was part of it and principals were part of it. They encouraged it. We need to get principals on board.

We feel confident that the energies and resources we invest in these particular programmes will greatly redound to our benefit as a country. We believe that an investment in our youth is surely a worthwhile investment in the future of Trinidad and Tobago.

11.00 a.m.

The Citizens Security Programme: Mr. Speaker, one of the key community programmes being administered by the Ministry of National Security is the Citizens Security Programme, which was started by my predecessors. Its main focus is to increase the levels of safety and security within our nation's communities. So far, the CSP is partnering with 22 high-needs communities throughout the country. The CSP's main focus is on high-needs youths between the ages of seven to 24, and seeks to provide them with positive alternative lifestyles to violence, criminal activity and juvenile delinquency.

The community patriotism initiative proposes to utilize the CSP base to launch its programme which carries the message: “Let's compete in sports and culture and not guns and violence.” [*Desk Thumping*] In pursuit of this, there will be

competitions in environmental cleanliness and beautification; various sporting disciplines, as well as in the realm of culture; including elements of song and dance.

We want to return to building communities. A number of us in this esteemed Chamber would easily remember the glory days of football. When Colts is leaving Belmont to go into the savannah to play Malvern or Maple, the whole of Belmont is going with Colts. When Desperados is coming down the hill for Panorama, the whole hill is coming down with Desperadoes, but we have reached a stage where Desperadoes had to run from the hill; their own community, and that speaks for itself.

Mr. Roberts: Shame!

Sen. The Hon. Brig. J. Sandy: Mr. Speaker, the winds of change are blowing. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Sharma: And it feels good!

Sen. The Hon. Brig. J. Sandy: Hon. Members, with everything this Government is doing, we are reminded of our responsibility to the people of this nation. We can feel the winds of change blowing already. We are encouraged by the fact that while regrettably there are kidnappings perpetrated against the citizens of this country, over the last three months, of the four kidnapping victims, three were rescued and safely returned to their families on the same day. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Sharma: Not a cent was paid.

Sen. The Hon. Brig. J. Sandy: The other victim was released within two days of his kidnapping. [*Desk thumping*] In all these cases, suspects have already been arrested and charged for these crimes. The winds of change are blowing. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Speaker, we share some guarded optimism when we review the statistical data on reported serious crimes. As indicated by the Commissioner of Police only yesterday, there has been a considerable decrease in criminal activity over the last three months. He did not say over the last year, but over the last three months. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Sharma: The Minister of National Security is at work.

Sen. The Hon. Brig. J. Sandy: In May this year, there were 1,856 reported serious crimes; in June there was an increase, 1,913 serious crimes reflecting a 3

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per cent increase; in July, 1,615 serious crimes, reflecting 15.6 per cent decrease; in August, 1,439 reported serious crimes, reflecting a further decrease of 10.9 per cent. [*Desk thumping*]

In terms of specific offences, murders fell by 29 per cent between June and August; larceny-dwelling house witnessed a 22 per cent decrease over that same period; break-ins and burglaries fell by 14.8 per cent between June and July and 16.1 per cent between July and August; robberies saw a 20.5 per cent reduction from June to July and a 1.2 per cent reduction from July to August; larceny showed a 15.3 per cent decrease from June to July and a 7.9 per cent reduction between July and August; larceny motor vehicles fell by 23.8 per cent between June and July and by 22.9 per cent from July to August.

Improved surveillance by law enforcement has also seen the arrest in a number of high-profile cases, and the seizure of a cache of firearms and ammunition in recent weeks. One raid in particular comes to mind, where officers have seized a number of firearms and high-powered rifles; a large quantity of ammunition of various calibres; a quantity of marijuana and also illicit devices. Over the past 15 weeks, 144 firearms of varying calibres were seized by the police together with 3,129 rounds of ammunition. [*Desk thumping*] The winds of change are blowing.

Mr. Speaker, we wish to commend the acting police commissioners; both immediate past and present and all officers involved—operators as well as service support—for the work done to bring about these results. Our Government is also committed to continue working with law enforcement to ensure that these results are sustained. Accordingly, we welcome the appointment of the new police commissioner by the Police Service Commission with the expectation that new systems and applications will be introduced. The winds of change are blowing. [*Desk thumping*]

Installation of traffic surveillance bays: These will be installed along our highways: the Uriah Butler Highway in the first instance, to allow static posts for police vehicles to observe and detect delinquent drivers. [*Desk thumping*] Mr. Speaker, I have reason to travel from Port of Spain to La Brea quite frequently, and in the past and the not too distant past, we would reach La Brea and not see one police vehicle on the highway, that has changed. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Speaker, these traffic surveillance bays will also accommodate easy egress north or south along the roadway. We have seen this abroad. Most of us have been abroad and we have seen where the vehicles are parked and any errant

driver going right or left they can easily follow or send a wireless message to their colleagues three miles up the road in another bay. I am advised that in Canada they sometime park empty vehicles and when people see the empty vehicles, the drivers would stop. We cannot afford to do that here, because of the culture inculcated by our previous government, they would probably steal the old car. [*Desk thumping and laughter*]

So, as I said, this will also accommodate easy egress north or south along the roadway to allow pursuit of lawbreakers and any other user of the road who they feel could be a suspect in any area of crime. The use of these bays would be unlawful for any vehicle other than those of the protected services, and heavy penalties will be introduced for those found in violation. Similarly, the CCTV network installed in those areas would be able to detect the lawbreakers.

Emergency Response Systems—ODPM: The upgrading of the response systems at the Office of the Disaster Preparedness and Management, in the event of a major hazard impact is being undertaken. The structure, strategies and operations of the organization are being reviewed, particularly as they affect relief operations, and the Ministry of Works and Transport and the Ministry of Local Government are partnering with us in that respect; again, teamwork. [*Desk thumping*]

The ODPM in partnership with TSTT has also recently launched an emergency short messaging system. This allows the ODPM to warn people in times of natural disasters so that they could be pre-warned by text messaging. We intend to pursue this and discussions have began with the ODPM and TSTT to develop that system to assist in crime. So they would put out an OPB and that OPB is put out on people's cellphones in the respective areas so that if there is a robbery, and a red car is going down the street, a person may see and call and say it just went across whatever street and so on. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Speaker, the Ministry of National Security is now in the process of addressing the issue of repatriated nationals from the United States of America who have been deemed undesirables in that country. Our law enforcement agencies, including our Immigration Department have continued to experience challenges with these persons most of whom returned with criminal records. Our Immigration Department is also addressing the means by which the issue of renewal of passports at home and missions abroad could be expedited.

Mr. Speaker, I now wish to deal with a most disturbing situation that has reared its ugly head against our hard-working officers of the protective services. I

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refer to the all too frequent incidence of attacks some with fatal consequences perpetrated against our dedicated officers of the police service and prison service in particular. The Government condemns, in the most vociferous terms, any attempt at injury against our officers. These criminals would be caught and brought to justice. [*Desk thumping*]

Additionally, the Ministry of National Security remains determined to provide the necessary protection for personnel as they sacrifice their energies in the interest of ensuring a safe and secure country for us all. In this regard, discussions are ongoing with the respective administrations and associations.

Mr. Speaker, permit me now to summarize some of the plans of the Ministry of National Security. The Government will continue to provide the necessary resources and support for the Trinidad and Tobago Police Service, the defence force and other protected services.

The Government will launch and develop a nationwide youth mentoring programme. We shall continue building upon the good works started by the Citizens Security Programme.

The National Security Operation Centre will be established to coordinate different activities including the formation of teams in respect of intelligence operations and logistics support.

A monthly special allowance of \$1,000, non-taxable will be paid to all serving members of the Trinidad and Tobago Police Service. [*Desk thumping*]

The Government will establish a national recognition programme that honours officers of the protective services and the defence force who go above and beyond the call of duty and, Mr. Speaker, a number of them do.

The introduction of an aggressive recruitment drive for the police service: The police service is understaffed by some 1,641 police officers and remains seriously constrained by a protracted manpower shortage. The recruitment drive will involve the development of an effective marketing thrust intended to attract and select the best candidates and train at least 800 recruits. In that respect as well, there is the ongoing programme and we are in the process now of recruiting former policemen, soldiers and members of the protective services.

The Government will continue to refurbish and upgrade police stations across the country to improve the working conditions of our officers. Construction of four fire stations will commence during the fiscal year: Sangre Grande, Couva, Mayaro and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*]

11.15 a.m.

Government will establish and develop a Victim of Crime Support Programme. The private security network commission with its dedicated communication frequency will be developed to include the input of private security officers in the assault on crime. Surveillance bays will be installed along the highways. Legislation will be pursued in effect of gangs, bail administration, human trafficking and private security companies among others, administrative amendments to ensure the issue and renewal of passports in a timelier schedule. Continuation of the expansion of the Trinidad and Tobago Cadet Force to ensure that we develop units in every secondary school. The community patriotism initiative will be launch with communities being encouraged to compete in sports, culture and encouraging friendly rivals.

Conclusion. Mr. Speaker, hon. Members, I have highlighted some of the initiatives and programmes to be pursued by the Ministry of National Security, in collaboration with my colleagues, our team, during fiscal 2011. Our vision includes the return to the days when every member of the Defence Force and protective services will exhibit profound pride in the wearing of his or her uniform—[*Desk thumping*] every policeman, every prison officer, every fire officer, every soldier, every sailor, every air man. Our children must boast to their friends, my father is a policeman. The policeman, regardless of rank, must proudly wear his uniform to and from work. We look to the day when all our officers in the service of the State are role models for the youth of our beloved nation. [*Desk thumping*]

I wish to reiterate that the People's Partnership Government will continue to work relentlessly with all of Trinidad and Tobago, to ensure that we return our twin island state to the safe and secure paradise it used to be not long ago. Mr. Speaker, I mean all of Trinidad and Tobago, including my parliamentary colleagues on the other side. In the final analysis, hon. Members, we are all Trinidadians and Tobagonians and we all enjoy living here.

I was heartened to hear the Leader of the Opposition in his closing remarks indicate that he will work with us. I am hoping that he transfers that to the other Members on the other side, and they work with us. We have taken on board all of Trinidad and Tobago to work with us, and I must tell you the response is tremendous and encouraging.

Once more, Mr. Speaker, I thank you very sincerely, for affording me the opportunity to participate in this debate in this most august House, and like my distinguished colleague, the Member for Arima, hon. Rodger Samuel, I invite God's richest blessings on us all.

Thank you. [*Desk thumping*]

Miss Donna Cox (*Laventille East/Morvant*): Mr. Speaker, it is indeed an honour to make a contribution in this House this morning. I want to start by congratulating our Opposition Leader for his excellent response to the budget debate. [*Desk thumping*] From listening to the budget presentation, I remember the saying, "many plans are made for the wedding, but few for the marriage", which is much more important than a wedding ceremony. It is clear that the Government has no plans and they cannot be trusted. [*Desk thumping*] Since the election campaign, we have been saying to the people of Trinidad and Tobago, that they have no plan, and the budget clearly shows that.

Mr. Speaker, the Member of Parliament for Tabaquite stated yesterday that there was no word on crime from the Opposition Leader. I also heard the Minister of National Security make the same statement. In the first two sittings of Parliament, we spoke on crime, and the Opposition Leader is the one who led off that debate. There was no need for him to belabour the point. I will be dealing with the issue on crime. They cannot tell us when to talk, what to talk, and what topic to talk about. We have been dealing with the crime situation. We did our best. They have taken over and they have stated that they will solve crime. We want to hear. We are here to listen and to see how they are going to solve crime to the best of their ability.

Mr. Speaker, before I deal with the crime situation, I want to deal with sports.

Mr. Roberts: Oh, yes!

Miss D. Cox: To quote the Minister of Finance:

"The highlight of the Government's Sports Programme is a pathway model that promotes systematic approach to achieving the optimum attentions of athletes, coaches, officials and administrators, from amateur to elite levels."

Mr. Speaker, the Minister's use of the word "highlight" is instructive. In other words, the context in which the Minister used the word "highlight" can be interpreted to mean "high point, climax, zenith, peak, height and centerpiece". When a Minister is saying to the population that the pathway programme is the most important part of the People's Partnership's thrust in sports for this fiscal period, let me make the population aware and take this opportunity to correct the record that the pathway programme is the initiative of the PNM government. [*Desk thumping*] This programme was conceived and designed by the People's National Movement. [*Desk thumping*] Let me tell the Minister of Finance how the statement should be read:

"The highlight of the PNM Government Sports Youth Programme is a pathway model that promotes a systematic approach to achieving the optimum potential of athletes, coaches, officials and administrators, from amateur to elite levels."

The pathway to excellence programme, which is a correct name for the programme, was accepted by the PNM's Cabinet in early 2010, and formerly launched by the PNM government in May 2010. [*Desk thumping*] This programme was as a result of tireless work by all sport stakeholders, countless hours of research and examination of numerous pivotal documents from the Narine Commission Report on Sport to the Australian Sporting Commission Report, and numerous sessions of consultations with national sporting organizations.

The sporting fraternity had agreed unanimously, that finally with the establishment of the pathway to sport excellence, Trinidad and Tobago has a system for sport, [*Desk thumping*] the ethos of which is athlete centred, coach driven and administratively supported. Therefore, the highlight of the Government's sporting thrust is a PNM programme, conceived and designed by the People's National Movement. [*Desk thumping*]

The Minister of Finance also indicated that sport tourism is being pursued. The PNM government in 2002, passed in Cabinet, and laid in Parliament, a National Sport Policy. Objective No. 8 of the National Sport Policy states and I quote:

"To promote Trinidad and Tobago as a hub of Caribbean sporting activities and by so doing position the country as a preferred destination for international sports events."

That, Mr. Speaker, is sports tourism. Nothing new!

Let me also take this opportunity to correct some misinformation that has been spreading in the media from time to time. Work on the National Sport Policy began under the PNM of 1991, and not between 1995 and 2000. The truth is that the National Sport Policy was conceived and designed by the PNM. The fundamental thrust of the National Sports policy therefore, can be captured in the statement and I quote:

"To enrich our lives through total participation, quality training and excellence in sport."

Trinidad and Tobago is one of the few countries in the hemisphere with a National Sport Policy and that is a result of the vision of the People's National Movement. [*Desk thumping*] Therefore, we must conclude from the utterances of the Minister of Finance with regard to sports, that this Government is continuing PNM policy, a policy that is producing results. We merely had to look at our recent achievements in many sporting disciplines, both regionally and internationally. Those things do not happen overnight. For example, Carifta games, largest medal haul in history; IAAF World Championships, we had superb results.

Mr. Roberts: What were the results?

Miss D. Cox: Pan Am Games, largest medal haul in history. The Youth Olympics, we got a gold medal. The upcoming Commonwealth Games will also prove fruitful; all indicators of a steady growth path. It did not happen in three months. Clearly, Mr. Speaker, we are heading towards Olympic gold in 2012, and that will only be achieved with the continued pursuit of the PNM's policy. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Speaker, we must pay attention to what was not said. What about community sporting programmes? The PNM had over 135 sustainable programmes in train throughout the length and breadth of Trinidad and Tobago. To achieve this, over 45 qualified and competent sport development officers were hired and deployed in communities to manage and implement these programmes. [*Desk thumping*] They have achieved marvelous success in many communities, most significantly, the at-risk communities with some of these in the constituency of Laventille East/Morvant. At the end of October, I would like the Minister of Sport and Youth Affairs to tell me if he will be sending these competent and dedicated officers home. Will he be putting these officers on the breadline? I would like an answer when he speaks.

I am informed that the Minister of Sport and Youth Affairs has stopped all community sport programmes, thereby denying the youth, especially those at risk in communities, an alternative to criminal activity. I will say it again. I am informed that the Minister of Sport and Youth Affairs has stopped all community sport programmes, thereby denying the youth, especially in the at-risk communities, an alternative to criminal activity. Mr. Speaker, I must tell the Minister of Sport and Youth Affairs that these programmes are necessary in the constituency of Laventille East/Morvant, in the Laventille constituencies, Port of Spain South—[*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Roberts: Mr. Speaker, point of order.

Dr. Rowley: What is the point of order?

Mr. Roberts: Point of order? First of all, 33(1), 36(1). Standing Order 36(5), Sir. Thank you very much.

Hon. Member: Which one?

Mr. Roberts: Standing Order 36(5), Sir. Thank you very much.

Dr. Rowley: Which one?

Mr. Roberts: All! Because it is about three points.

Mr. Speaker: I did not get the impression that she is imputing any improper motives. Continue.

Miss D. Cox: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I guess the Minister will get his time to clarify. I was informed of this. If it is not so, then you will let us know.

Mr. Roberts: Will you give way? Will you give way? "You ain't giving way?"

Miss D. Cox: Just now is lunch time. Mr. Speaker, the proposed expenditure—I go to the fashion—for the national purse in the development of any industry, must have at its centre the interest of having products produced, being labelled with five very important words, "Made in Trinidad and Tobago." When these words are attached to a product, it ensures that there is a domino economic effect and large groups are afforded the ability to participate in and contribute to, thereby creating many layers of spinoff, high added value and maximum economic benefits, the more processes that take place locally towards the production of products, the better.

Mr. Speaker, to commit \$10 million towards the fashion industry to market products abroad, and if an order is secured, where will the products be produced? Is it in China, India, Panama or in Costa Rica? The money that was spent, is it to benefit abroad? Where is the local economic benefit? Clearly, the Minister of Finance is unaware that the production capacity or expertise does not reside locally in any significant quantum to satisfy foreign orders.

11.30 a.m.

What consideration is given to the seamstresses and tailors who would like to expand their capacity into larger operations and thus may be able to export later on? Clearly this Government is putting the cart before the horse. An investment of \$10 million in boosting the production capacity of the fashion industry is money far better spent [*Desk thumping*] with a greater chance of creating a large return on investment. [*Desk thumping*] The needs of many outweigh those of the few, Mr. Speaker.

A slush fund for a few to joyride around the world cannot compare to the benefits of investing in boosting production capacity which will have a much longer lasting effect and benefit a much wider group in Trinidad and Tobago. Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister is better advised to consult with a larger cross-section of the industry instead of a limited cabal of her personal stylists to pronounce on an entire industry. Serve the people. You said serve the people but do not fool the people, Mr. Speaker. [*Desk thumping*]

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Mr. Speaker, the long awaited crime plan for the UNC-led coalition did not really form part of the Minister of Finance's budget statement. They promised to deal with crime in the election campaign. In fact, they gave the commitment in the manifesto on page 25. So far, all they have done is to use various aspects of PNM's crime plans and initiatives and parade them as their own, Mr. Speaker. [*Desk thumping*] I have no problem with the use of some of our initiatives but, at the end of the day, give us the credit. Do not pretend that it is a new plan and it is your idea [*Desk thumping*] and we did nothing and all of that. That is not correct at all. Okay?

For example, you know you are saying that we failed to deal with the crime situation? The statement made by the Minister of National Security is that we failed to deal with the crime situation and taking credit for all the initiatives. For example, the CSP Programme is one of the programmes that was our idea and it was implemented under the People's National Movement. [*Desk thumping*] When he said it—[*Desk thumping*] by his predecessor—and he said it down in his throat. There is no need to do that—no need to do that; at all. We need to be honest.

Concerning the Cadet Force, there has always been a policy of National Security that one—the Cadet Force, one—a unit in every school. This is nothing new and the principals [*Desk thumping*] are already involved. [*Desk thumping*] The principals of the schools are involved. I have met with principals. I have sent letters to the Education Minister at the time to make sure that the principals are involved. We have a principal here who stated that she was involved. So the principals were always involved in the school and we have always stated that a Cadet Force would be in every school and that is what we were pursuing at the time, Mr. Speaker. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Speaker, the Minister spoke about kidnapping. At the end of the day—you talk about kidnapping, all right? Kidnapping was down more than a year ago, all right? This has been stated. You talk about three months ago that, am—

Miss Mc Donald: It started back.

Miss D. Cox: It started back, actually, three months ago, all right? But kidnapping was down, and, give us the right statistics. When you are giving statistics, you know, give us the right ones, all right? Kidnapping has been down. [*Desk thumping*] Why do you think the kidnapping has been down? It is because many of the persons who were involved in kidnapping were arrested and they were in jail.

Hon. Member: Exactly!

Miss D. Cox: They were in jail, many of them—[*Desk thumping*] many of the people who were kidnapping, all right? [*Interruption*] So at the end of the day let us be honest when we are speaking, Mr. Speaker. Let us be honest about it, right?

Dr. Rowley: What about the equipment and training?

Miss D. Cox: You did not even talk about the equipment. This has happened. Why? It is because of the type of equipment that was given to the police officers, the resources and the training. Some of these statistics, do you think this happened in three months? This was because of a sustained effect that had been taking place before.

Dr. Rowley: That is right. [*Desk thumping*]

Miss D. Cox: That had been taking place before. [*Desk thumping*] “This ain’ nothing new.” It is because of all the training and so on that has taken place with police officers that they are now able to—the detection rate is even better, and this has nothing to do [*Desk thumping*] with the UNC-led coalition government, and be honest about that. [*Desk thumping*]

One initiative, Mr. Speaker, that the UNC coalition presented to the public was a plan to use private security to assist the police in dealing with the crime situation in this country. What emerged from that initiative which is doomed to fail, Mr. Speaker, is the fact that some Government Ministers and party officials own or have interests in private security firms [*Interruption*] to be contracted by the Government. [*Interruption*]

Hon. Sandy: They are not being paid!

Miss D. Cox: Thank God! [*Interruption*] Thank God! [*Interruption*] Thank God for the outcry [*Interruption*] from the Opposition Leader [*Interruption*] and members of the public about it.

Mr. Speaker: Order, order!

Hon. Sandy: The officers are not being paid.

Miss D. Cox: Mr. Speaker, I am aware—I am sure many people are aware of some of the security officers. I am sure some people are aware. I mean, I know many security officers who are really diligent and they are excellent, they do very good work and so on, but many of us would have had encounters with security officers who we know should not really be security officers.

I visited an establishment recently, Mr. Speaker, and, you know, I went, I spoke to the security—the security guard could not even speak English. He could

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not understand me, I could not understand him. I went up, I said, “Good morning, I came to visit Mr. So and So.” “Hear the security guard, ‘Are you a—who are—who’”—I do not know what the man was saying. [*Laughter*] The man cannot even speak English, Mr. Speaker, yet they want—but “he have on uniform and he guarding”. [*Interruption*] “He have on uniform and he guarding. Yuh understand?” [*Interruption*] And this is last—this recently happened. [*Interruption*]

As an aside, Mr. Speaker, I am sure that that poor soul is working for \$9 or less an hour. This Government promised to raise the minimum wage to \$20 or \$15. [*Interruption*] The bottom line is—

Mr. Roberts: Fifty dollars.

Miss D. Cox:—that workers, like that security guard, who cannot speak English, are still waiting on their promise. Can you trust them?

Hon. Members: No!

Miss D. Cox: You cannot trust them at all. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Speaker, the national security community was taken aback when the contract of the Acting Commissioner of Police, Mr. James Philbert, was suddenly terminated. Mr. Speaker, many police officers are not happy with the way the acting Commissioner was sent home, but, because of the regulations governing the police and the discipline structures, they cannot speak out, but, at the end of the day, [*Interruption*] whether they like Mr. Philbert or not, it is one of their own who was treated in such a callous manner.

Mr. Speaker, it is disturbing that the head of the Police Service Social and Welfare Association stated that after their meeting with the Prime Minister that they had expressed their concerns about Acting Commissioner of Police to her. They were actually claiming victory for the removal of Mr. Philbert. Imagine, the letter sent to Mr. Philbert was sent by a most junior police officer. [*Interruption*] How low can they get! How disrespectful! And clearly the AG’s threat was fulfilled.

Mr. Speaker, when we advised against putting a practising politician as Chairman of the Police Service Commission, all sorts of excuses and reasoning were put forward by the Government as to why he should be there. It is clear for all to see, that, regardless of what the Government is trying to say about the situation, there was indeed political interference in the treatment of Mr. Philbert. [*Desk thumping*] Mr. Speaker, if it walks like a duck and quacks like a duck, it is a duck. It is a duck.” It acts like a duck, it is a duck. How can we trust them, Mr. Speaker?

How can the people of Trinidad and Tobago trust this Government which is bent on victimizing people and then pretending, “Oh, is not so. I did not mean that”? There is more to why the Acting Commissioner of Police was sent home. We want to know. *[Interruption]* You all owe this country a proper explanation. *[Interruption]* You owe the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago a proper explanation. *[Interruption]* “Wha’ it is yuh saying, take care I ain’ geh a wuk?”

I heard the Acting Commissioner of Police on the news *[Interruption]* two nights ago. He stated that there was a decrease in crime over the past three months. Anyone with common sense, Mr. Speaker, will realize that Mr. Philbert must have been doing something right because you do not get these results overnight. *[Desk thumping]* On behalf of the people of Trinidad and Tobago, I wish to thank Mr. Philbert *[Desk thumping]* for all his service and *[Desk thumping]* we wish him all the best in his retirement, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to place on record that on this side we are saying that no public officer should be treated in that way, whether it is a policeman, an attorney, a doctor, an accountant, a teacher, a fireman, absolutely no one, especially after serving the people of Trinidad and Tobago for over 40 years then to be dumped on the roadside like a derelict vehicle. *[Interruption]* You all should be ashamed of yourselves. *[Desk thumping]*

In his budget statement—*[Interruption]*

Mr. Speaker: All right, okay, order.

Miss D. Cox: In his budget statement, the Minister of Finance singled out the Police Service for special mention. “Police officers will be receiving a special \$1,000 a month tax-free allowance.” Mr. Speaker, I heard the Minister of Finance on the news stating that on the evening of September the 9th, giving a rationale for the police officers receiving this money and part of his rationale goes like this. The rationale was that, in fighting crime, the police officers put life and limb at stake and also the intention is to have highly motivated individuals in the police service.

Mr. Speaker, there are other arms of the protective services that put life and limb at stake and that need to be kept motivated. What about the municipal police? What about the SRPs? What about the firemen? What about the prison officers? What about the members of the Trinidad and Tobago Defence Force? They should all be given the \$1,000 tax-free allowance if that is the case. *[Desk thumping]*

With regard to the municipal police and SRPs, according to the President, the President of the Police Social and Welfare Association stated that these officers

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perform the same duties on a daily basis and should therefore be treated equally. [*Desk thumping*] Mr. Speaker, we can all agree that there must be equal pay and treatment for persons doing the same job. [*Desk thumping*] According to your Attorney General, he says there must be equity. [*Interruption*]

With regard to the Trinidad and Tobago Fire Service, I must inform this honourable House that the fire service is the first response organization that is summoned whenever and wherever a fire incident or any other emergency occurs in the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago. Apart from known risks associated with responses to incidents in typical premises such as dwellings and offices, firefighters are also faced with unknown risks and dangers when responding to incidents in premises where the occupancy use has been changed without their knowledge. Unknown too are the risks and dangers that fire officers may face when responding to simple calls.

During the 1970 uprising and in the insurrection of 1990, firefighters were at the forefront in attempting to extinguish fires resulting from these incidents. In the early and initial responses, fire officers responded to calls unaware of the origin or nature of the event and without any escort from the police or military. Even when the details were known and escort was provided, fire officers responded bravely and assisted in bringing the country back to normalcy in the quickest possible time.

In their daily tours of duty, Mr. Speaker, fire officers are called to extinguish fires set by disenchanted and angry residents who resort to civil disturbance, some of which is politically motivated, to highlight their cause. Similarly, in cases of domestic disputes or in crime ridden areas, fire officers are frequently summoned to respond to incidents that require their intervention, whether it is to extinguish fires or to provide ambulance services. In many instances of this nature, officers are subjected not only to verbal abuse but also to threats to person, vehicle and equipment. Only in the minority of cases if the police acquire knowledge of the incident then some sort of escort is provided to accompany the fire officers in the performance of their duties.

More often than that, however, a call is received indicating that there is a fire or that an ambulance is required without the inherent dangers being known beforehand. So at times they do not know what dangers exist but they go because they receive a call. Historically too, the fire service has responded to incidents or accidents where arms and ammunition, legal or otherwise, and suspicious substances have been found. In these instances officers, fully aware of the risks and dangers involved and mindful of no real protection to themselves or those under their charge, remain and oversee items until police officers are summoned and arrive on the scene.

It is therefore important to note that the members of the fire service are subjected to a number of circumstances in the performance of their duties which comprises not only their safety but also their security. In other words, they also risk life and limb. [*Desk thumping*] Fire officers continue to serve selflessly with hardly a dissenting voice. Be mindful that these circumstances may not always exist. The mere idea that police officers would be given the special allowance does not go down well with many of them. [*Interruption*] It is important, Mr. Speaker, that we acknowledge and recognize the contribution that this organization and its members have made and continue to make towards the development of this country.

11.45 a.m.

Mr. Speaker, prisons officers serve as the last bastion of the nation's security and constitute one of the four primary agencies in the criminal justice system: the police, the Judiciary and probation being the others. Not only is it their job to secure the public from persons who would run afoul of the law, and for a significantly longer period than the police at that, but also to devise and implement strategies and programmes aimed at these persons rehabilitation and subsequent reintegration into society. This holds true whether the inmate is remanded or convicted, as in most cases the average holding time for a remanded inmates awaiting trial for murder is five years. The congregation of these criminal elements in one common area brings with it a heightened level of risk to prisons officers that does not accrue to any other of the criminal justice system agencies.

In recent times, the proliferation of threats to officers and the actual follow through on these threats serve as potent elements of the inherent risks.

Mr. Speaker, technological improvements in the wider society and specifically the popularity of the cellphone, with all of its attendant capabilities, has brought with it an elevated level of risk, where the police have now been able to prove that hits on prisons officers are being called from within the prison.

The opportunity is also ripe for communicable diseases such as red eye, chicken pox, tuberculosis, scabies and the like, to affect officers, far more than they would have otherwise been affected. In the final analysis, the fact remains that the role of the prisons officer brings with it a risk of greater proportion than applies to any of the other arms of the criminal justice system.

The mere fact that prisons officer are made to work in close proximity with the criminal elements for extended periods of times, predisposes both him and his family to a real and present danger, also given the fact that he is easily

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identifiable. When one considers that this is a job carried out in the service of country and fellowmen, as is the case with the police and others, it seems only reasonable that any special consideration given to the police officer should also be extended to the prisons officer, especially as it pertains to the concomitant and sometimes even unusual risk of the profession.

What about the members of the army? Do they not need to feel motivated also? Do they not risk life and limb? What about the coast guard officers who now have to battle the new crime wave of pirates on the sea that came in simultaneously with this untrustworthy Government? [*Desk thumping*] What are all these people supposed to do for the Government to give them a special allowance also, undermine the head of their service, threaten to boycott official events that pose a threat of embarrassment to the Government, be muzzled and deal up with politics? Was this payment supposed to muzzle the police officers because of the disparity in the salary of the new Commissioner of Police and the Trinidad and Tobago officers? What is that \$1,000, hush money? Mr. Speaker, \$1 million for the commissioner and \$1,000 for police officers. Is this the value placed on policing in this day and age? Is this allowance for police officers sustainable?

Police officers must note that since this \$1,000 is not part of their basic salary, it will not be included in the computation of pension when the police officer retires. The disparity between income during employment and retirement would then widen.

In an effort to facilitate the development of an appropriate compensation package for the police officers on the basis of the unique nature of the policing function, the then Minister of National Security established a Police Compensation Review Committee with a mandate to, and I quote:

1. "Examine the current proposals of the...Police Service Social and Welfare Association..., in relation to the Ministry's perspective on the compensation of police officers;
2. Develop a criterion..."—to measure worth for compensation purposes;—
3. "Review the existing...allowances..."—to develop...an efficient modality for application;
4. "Identify the various resources...of a holistic, and efficient...compensation system..."

Mr. Speaker, I would like you to note the composition of that committee. Representing the Police Service Social and Welfare Association, Corporal Emrol Bruce, the President; Assistant Commissioner Stephen Williams—do you know that

name?—now acting Commissioner of Police; he was one of the persons on that committee—[*Crosstalk*] Assistant Commissioner Stephen Williams was on that committee dealing with the review of the compensation package for police officers—[*Crosstalk*] Inspector Steve Nandoo and woman police constable Jacqueline Solomon; representing the Ministry of National Security, Mr. Keith Renaud, Director OLEP; Mr. Curtis Belford, Deputy Director and Ms. Rohini Jaikissoon. This is a copy of the report of the committee signed by the Permanent Secretary, Ministry of National Security; [*Miss. Cox displays document*], as a matter of fact, signed off by the PS; also signed by the then Commissioner of Police and signed off by the President of the association. I understand that the Chief Personnel Officer has the documents in her possession.

In aiming at an appropriate benchmark for compensating officers, the following factors were considered by this committee:

- "The existing level of wages offered to professional personnel within the public sector;
- The unique nature of policing and the extensive demands placed on police officers on a daily basis;
- The tremendous personal, organizational and constitutional responsibilities that are associated with policing activities;
- The exceptional level of personal risks and dangers which are inherent in the discharge of routine policing functions; and
- The dire need to attract, motivate and retain the calibre of officers which are essential to policing as a profession."

Hon. Sandy: Thanks for supporting us.

Miss D. Cox: In relation to allowances, the committee identified six categories for police officers—This is how you do allowances; listen clearly. These allowances are to compensate officers for activities in the following areas: special responsibilities; special technical skills; educational incentives; duty allowance, which is for those who work in excess of the stipulated office hours; personal provisions and a performance incentive. These are the six categories; I would just explain one.

In the report it is stated that the purpose of the performance incentive allowance is to motivate officers and transform the police service by encouraging enhanced levels of performance. The provision of such a monetary compensation is intended to reflect the appreciation of the Trinidad and Tobago Police Service to all officers. This allowance will be awarded annually and payment would be

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reflective of an officer's performance for the previous year. This allowance is also envisioned to encourage greater participation and ownership and to promote the policing for people philosophy. You have opted to give this allowance to police officers across the board, even non-performers. I make a plea for the Special Reserve Police (SRP), for the municipal police, for members of the defence force, for members of the fire services, for prisons officers. Remember, there must be equity. [*Desk thumping*]

I agree that police officers should be adequately compensated, but we must recognize that there is a demand by the public for good service from members of the Trinidad and Tobago Police Service. The report also stated that the Police Executive has also acknowledged that there was a need for good service, and the public demands that. I will, therefore, just give an example of the kind of remuneration package that was sent to the Chief Personnel Officer, because I understand that the past Government, according to the Minister of National Security, did nothing for the police. As a matter of fact, this is with the CPO; that is how far it has reached. This was done by the past regime.

I do not like it when Members come here and say things that are not true or what they do not know about, because that is not the case. This went to the CPO; therefore, you cannot blame the past regime for this, because this was signed off by the Ministry of National Security; it was signed off by the association; it was signed off by the Commissioner of Police and it is with the CPO.

All this work has been done and is ongoing. Speak to your Director of OLEP who has been in charge of this. But you cannot come here and say that we have not done anything for the police service; that is not correct at all. [*Desk thumping*] I am going to give you an example of the salary that was put forward to the CPO, which was agreed by the policemen themselves and which they are awaiting. So giving them an allowance is not as sustainable as a great increase in salary.

There is a big disparity in the percentage increase. I will tell you what the increases are. I will start with a trainee, because he receives a stipend of \$4,800. In the new proposed structure, recruits will now get \$8,000. This is dealing with the PNM Government. A constable whose salary is now \$5,123, which is more or less the basic salary, will now move up to \$10,000, and that is just the first scale. [*Desk thumping*]

A corporal whose salary is now \$6,745, the proposed basic salary is \$11,500, a percentage increase of 19.53 per cent. A sergeant, basic salary \$8,205, the proposed salary will now be \$13,225, a percentage increase of 19.29 per cent. I

move to senior superintendent, his basic salary is now \$14,111; the proposed salary is \$23,130.61, a percentage increase in salary of 39.56 per cent.

So when you say that we have not done anything, this is now before the CPO, and we want to make that very clear. It is before the CPO. This is something that was done, so you should not come here and say that we have not done anything for the police or anybody else; that is not correct. [*Desk thumping*] You could be in something, but you do have to be of it; do not get involved in that.

This is an excellent package for police officers. I hope that the Government would push and try to get this implemented as soon as possible for the police. It was at CPO and we were pushing it, so we want them to continue to push it to get it done. We want them to continue to get it done. We would not have gone through with this if we did not want it to come into fruition.

We all live in Trinidad and Tobago and we are all aware of the crime situation, therefore, we must give members of the protective services a compensation package that is sustainable and reasonable. Now is not the time to play politics with crime. [*Desk thumping*] The Government must seek to address the compensation package for police officers. Stop the campaigning and start running the country for which you have been elected. You do not need to campaign, you are there already. Treat our brothers and sisters in a righteous manner.

This special allowance can be taken away at any time. I am sure any right thinking person would want a proper compensation package rather than an allowance which you could give and take at whim, to suit yourself.

I want the Government to push that compensation package. I urge to act with haste to implement the compensation package agreed to and signed off by the officers I mentioned before.

I would like the Minister of National Security to tell me about the bicycles. How are they going to be used in Laventille?

12.00 noon

I am happy to hear about the Laventille/Morvant Initiative, which the Minister of National Security is claiming as if it is a new programme. It is not. I chaired that. I did not hear you. [*Desk thumping*] I chaired that committee with the Laventille/Morvant Initiative and you came here and spoke as if it is your initiative, and it is not. It is not. I have been a part of that initiative from inception, Mr. Speaker.

Hon. Brig. Sandy: And where did it reach?

Miss. D. Cox: That is why I am saying, when you come here, speak the truth. When you come here, speak the truth. We were at the planning stage of that initiative, and we were almost finished. *[Interruption]* Note, implementation. As a matter of fact, I went to certain places in Laventille looking for a venue. We were looking for a venue to start the implementation, so we were finished with the planning, we met with stakeholders.

Miss. Mc Donald: They met the plans right there.

Miss. D. Cox: You met all the plans there, also. *[Interruption]*

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, I would suggest that you address me and avoid the crosstalk.

Miss. D. Cox: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Okay, so at the end of the day, I just want people to be honest and do not come here and talk as if it was their plan, because it was never stated that it is our plan. *[Desk thumping]* I chaired that committee, Mr. Speaker, so I am very aware of it. Okay? And we were going forward with all the things. What we were looking for at the time was just a venue. Avenue. So we were in the process of looking for a venue. I visited two places with officials from the Ministry. They brought no plan and want to take our plans like it is theirs, Mr. Speaker. *[Desk thumping]*

Mr. Speaker, at the end of the day, I wish the Government all the best with the crime situation. I know it is not easy. I am aware it is not an easy situation, so I feel aggrieved that people will come and stand here and act as if it was just a walk in the road, or a walk through the mill. I am sure you are aware of that. And do not come here and pretend like it is such an easy situation, because it is not. It is not. And I am saying, at the end of the day, I wish them all the best, because crime affects all of us.

Miss. Mc Donald: Yes.

Miss. D. Cox: Crime affects all of us.

Mr. Peters: Not them. The country.

Miss. D. Cox: Yes, them, because they said they had the solution to crime. Yes, Mr. Speaker, let me get back to you. So, Mr. Speaker, I am not here for criticizing sake, which I realized happens here. People come here and criticize for criticizing sake. I am not here to do that. I wish them all the best and I agree that the approach to crime is a multipronged approach, and all of us must be a part of it. I agree with that. All of us need to be a part of it.

It is time to stop the blaming game and move forward; because when we keep going back about it is this one and that one, and who did, and who did not do, we

cannot go forward. All of us are affected by crime, Mr. Speaker, and all of us must take responsibility. All of us need to take responsibility for the different areas. We must cooperate when they come into our community. We must be part of it. We must cooperate, because we want the crime to go down also. That is how we feel. That is not a victory for anybody by saying there is so much crime under who. It is not a victory for all of us. All of us are losers when the crime situation continues to escalate, Mr. Speaker.

Before I conclude, it would be remiss of me if I failed to use the opportunity to speak on behalf of the people of Laventille East/Morvant, who reposed their confidence in me overwhelmingly, re-electing me into office on May 24th. [*Desk thumping*] Earlier this year, the Government, of which I was honoured to be a part, implemented the Laventille Initiative, which was a continuation—

Mr. Speaker: The speaking time of the hon. Member has expired.

Motion made, That the hon. Member's speaking time be extended by 30 minutes. [*Miss. M. Mc Donald*]

Question put and agreed to.

Miss. D. Cox: Thank you very much. Thank you to my colleagues on the other side. Mr. Speaker, I was talking about the Laventille Initiative in my conclusion. You know, it is a programme that has been implemented in the Laventille area, called the "Laventille Initiative", and the objective is to improve the quality of life of the people of Laventille. There has been some work that started already, and I would like that work to continue.

I, therefore, call on this UNC-led coalition Government to continue these projects in the same manner as you are continuing the same projects of the former PNM administration, as enunciated in the budget presentation made by the hon. Minister of Finance. Among these projects, Mr. Speaker, are the Morvant community centre, for which the designs have been completed and approved. This community centre, Mr. Speaker, was the first centre to be built not just in Trinidad and Tobago, but in the wider Caribbean. The original structure was demolished to make way for a modern facility, and, therefore, I would like to see this centre constructed. There are other centres to be refurbished, rebuilt, and so on, like the same community centre.

I would like to see the rehabilitation of the major roads. My colleague from Chaguanas West, I would like to see the continuation of the rehabilitation of roads. Some work had started in the Laventille and Morvant area, which had stopped, and we would like to see that continue, please. [*Desk thumping*]

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There are major roads in Malick, Caledonia, Morvant, Mon Repos, Beetham, and Success/Laventille. Some started in Coconut Drive, Morvant, earlier this year, and there are some other roads to be completed, and we would like to see some work done in the area, please. Mr. Minister of Works, I have already written to you and I do not know if you want me to send a reminder. [*Laughter*]

So, Mr. Speaker, I would like to see the completion of pipe-borne water supply to Cipriani Avenue, upper Malick, Coconut Drive area and Alexis Street. This work has started in some areas and we would like to see some work done in that area. I would like to see the improvement of the drainage system in Morvant, Shine Street extension, and Coconut Drive, also. With respect to the upgrading of the Morvant, Coconut Drive, and Malick recreation grounds, Minister of Sport and Youth Affairs, we would like to get some upgrading. The work started and some of the areas got lights. They were lit earlier this year and it is just now for the recreation grounds to be upgraded.

Mr. Speaker, a number of basketball courts were earmarked to be upgraded and converted to multipurpose courts, so we would like these courts to be done. The constituents of Laventille East/Morvant are eagerly awaiting the completion of these projects which, as I mentioned, form part of the Laventille initiative. [*Interruption*] [*Laughter*]

What I would like to remind you, I would like to remind you that you now form the Government of Trinidad and Tobago, and you are supposed to be the Government for all. I want to repeat. [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. Members: All. All.

Miss. D. Cox: With all these comments that the Member for Mayaro is making, you now form the Government of Trinidad and Tobago, and you are supposed to be a Government for all; so remember that. I am looking forward— [*Interruption*] Yes, because at the end of the day, in our time, Member for Mayaro, you got three community centres. You got three, in our time. At the end of the day— [*Interruption*]

Mr. Peters: The people of Mayaro.

Miss. D. Cox: Yes, the people of Mayaro; but the people of Laventille East/Morvant deserve the same treatment. [*Desk thumping*] And I am looking forward, Mr. Speaker, to seeing if they will walk the talk. It is a set of talk, but let me see them walk it, Mr. Speaker. We talk about serve the people, serve the people, serve the people. Yes, but do not fool the people. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. [*Desk thumping*]

The Minister of Sport and Youth Affairs (Hon. Anil Roberts): Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As I rise to make my maiden contribution in this august House, I say good morning to all; and if I am not as energetic as normal, I have been under the weather a little bit, so please forgive me. Let me, first of all, start off by congratulating the hon. Minister of Finance; the first economist to deliver a national budget in the history of Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*] As one can tell, that is a very critical point.

Dr. Rowley: That is not true.

Hon. A. Roberts: It was not delivered by a geologist. It was not delivered by a lawyer who wrote a book on ethics and forgot to read her own book. [*Laughter*] It was delivered by a man who understands the economic situation, and, therefore, you can tell by the out swelling and outpouring and understanding of the people of Trinidad and Tobago that it was indeed a budget of the future for the future, bringing hope to all of our people. [*Desk thumping*]

Ladies and Gentlemen, while some of my colleagues on the other side who have nothing to say have criticized my Minister of Finance for his pronunciation of the word “balance”, which he did say, and that is okay; but once they understand that when he “balances” the budget, the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago shall be able to balance. [*Desk thumping*]

I would like, at this juncture, to put on record in this House that I, on behalf of the People’s Partnership Government—and I see the 12th man is gone. He had to go because he knows I am coming there. I would like to thank the honourable Ms. Pena, the prophetess of the Guanapo church, for advising the 12th man, singly, wholeheartedly, on her own, without consultation to any of those on the other side, whether they be former ministers, colleagues, or advisors, to call an election on May 24th. Thank you very much, Madam prophetess. [*Desk thumping*] She singlehandedly saved this country from more geologists.

I will first start with the hon. Leader of the Opposition, the Member for Diego Martin West, who had an opportunity to show the population that he was indeed a Prime Minister in waiting. That he had the calibre, quality and experience to one day aspire to the office of Prime Minister, but unfortunately, he spent two and a half long, dreary hours. So I must say in the words of Sir Courtney Hannays, who in this House, in the 1940s, after a Member opposite spoke for two and a half days, got up and said, “Mr. Speaker, I, too, have nothing to say,” and sat. [*Laughter*]

I would like to say to the hon. Minister of National Security that you are in a much more fortunate position than myself; because you called the former Minister

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of National Security and exchanged pleasantries. I, unfortunately, sitting in this seat of D'Abadie/O'Meara—the last person who sat here delivered a budget, but the communication between the former MP and Minister of Finance and myself ceased when, during the election, she raided my office and abused my brother. Since then, I have not heard from her, so at least you got to discuss something with your former colleague. I did not get that opportunity.

I would also like to apologize, and I think that the entrance of my learned colleague, the Minister of Trade and Industry, as Dr. Rowley takes his exit. You have good timing. You better go fast. As Minister Cadiz sits here, I would like to humbly apologize to the Minister of Trade and Industry for the disrespect shown to him by the man who is now walking out of the chamber, the Leader of the Opposition, after we were forced, and respectfully so, to listen to his diatribe.

When Minister Cadiz was making his response, the Leader of the Opposition sat in the gallery, disrespecting the hon. Member for the entire contribution. I could understand if he had a press conference and he was not in the House; but when the Minister of National Security is stating that we need to get our children to respect and be able to instill family values, a man waiting to be Prime Minister sits down having a conversation with a Senator who was thrown out by the 12th man also, [*Laughter*] and another one from Arima who was thrown out twice by the 12th, man, and disrespecting my colleague; I humbly apologize to you, Sir, on his behalf.

Now, Dr. Rowley started his contribution—sorry, the Leader of the Opposition started his contribution.

Mr. Speaker: Just one second. I just believe that I should indicate to hon. Members that in this House, we refer to Members of Parliament by their electoral district, and let us not go into the 12th man or 13th man. The hon. Member for San Fernando East; recognize him as the Member for San Fernando East. Okay? Go ahead.

12.15 p.m.

Hon. A. Roberts: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and I humbly apologize, but I did not know; I am glad that you understood who the 12th man was. I could have been referring to the media up there, but since you know, now the whole world knows who I am speaking about. I am just saying, the 12th man. I did not know who I was referring to. But thank you for clearing up that, Mr. Speaker.

So let me move on to the hon. Member for Diego Martin West who has just suddenly left the Chamber. I do not know if he is hungry early, but he started his

contribution, attempting to rebut the budget presented by the People's Partnership and the Minister of Finance. He named the theme of his response: "In Search of Confidence - a Moment of Truth". One part of that was correct; 50 per cent; it was his moment of truth. So I hereby congratulate him twice for making his first and last presentation as Leader of the Opposition, as Member for San Fernando East is on his way back in December.

Now, the Member for Diego Martin West was playing smart with foolishness, as I borrow his term. You know, he always says everybody is playing smart with foolishness. He discussed, and he looked at the budget estimates in these documents and stated that the Prime Minister was telling falsehoods; that our hon. Prime Minister was lying; that she said: "Read my lips. No new taxes." And he held up this and turned—and ladies and gentlemen, there are about six more of these; I only have two. I am just not strong enough to hold up all. He then scoured the documents and found that in the budget estimates—and a budget estimate, as he said in his presentation, really is just a period of perception of what you think may occur. But he held up that and said, "Look \$100 million estimated increase in lands and buildings taxes; revenue for 2011 as opposed to 2009, and therefore the Prime Minister told a fib". And he said that she said, "Read my lips." Well, I would like to tell him that my Prime Minister has very thin lips being of East Indian origin. Me, being of the dougla origin, I got the lips from my Tobagonian father, so maybe he would read my lips quite easier: No new taxes. [*Desk thumping*]

The Cabinet note is quite clear for those of us who could read and yes, I am one of those "duncy" children. I do not mind being a "duncy" child, because if being bright puts you on that side, I want to be "duncy"; I "go" stay right here.

Mr. Speaker, I would just like to say that the hon. Minister of Finance stated categorically that the Property Tax Act will be repealed; we will return to the lands and buildings tax at the old valuations before Members on that side tried to extort money from the population while they were not giving good service. So it is quite simple and it is quite clear. So to quote one figure in here and then say that our Prime Minister is lying is a bit unfortunate.

Now, if we use the Member for Diego Martin West's logic that even though the Cabinet note is clear, even though the Minister of Finance was exclusively clear; he was pellucidly clear—thank you, Member for Chaguanas; oh word—pellucidly clear. Let us use the Member for Diego Martin West's logic and therefore I would say, as he stated, that the Scarborough Hospital is incomplete, and I would use his logic and say, well, it is incomplete possibly because all the

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material went to Landate. So if I ignore all his victories in the Integrity Commission; his victory against the Member for San Fernando East; his victories in the court, dealing with the Landate matter; I ignore all of those facts and I say there was an accusation by a gentlemen of this House and, therefore, the Scarborough Hospital is not complete because the material went to Landate, that would not be fair of me, Sir, and I think that that was unfortunate that the Member for Diego Martin West would try to tell the national population that our Prime Minister was untruthful.

Furthermore, following that logic, when the Member for San Fernando East was somewhere on this side—I believe in this seat right in front of me—and he looked up at the Member for Diego Martin West who was on that side and he said: "\$10 million, Cleaver Heights, where the money gone?" And the Member went; he got lawyers; he got the HDC chairwoman, Miss Chong; he got even the former Minister, the Senator, Minister Dick-Forde, to clear him and say that there was no \$10 million gone, the hon. Member for San Fernando East stood up a following Friday and said: "It is not \$10 million; it is \$20 million. Where the money gone?"

So if I am to ignore all the evidence, all the people, including Mr. Garcia, who said that the former Minister, the Member for Diego Martin West, had nothing to do with Cleaver Heights; if I ignore all of that and take the word on the *Hansard* record of the Member for San Fernando East, I, too, say that the money went somewhere. But it is not true. I would not do that. I would not mislead. This is serious business. It is people's business we are dealing with. So, ladies and gentlemen, members of the media, you could snap a picture now. Take my big lips. Read my lips: No new taxes. [*Desk thumping*] Thank you.

Now, another theme of the Member's flopping statement, he stated that the People's Partnership had no new plan. It was echoed by the Member for Laventille East/Morvant. At least they are in communication. You see, this half communicates and that half has to go behind there to talk, because they do not call each other. They said we have no new plan. This is the Member for Diego Martin West. Yet 10 minutes after saying that the People's Partnership has no new plan and all the plans are PNM, he then stated, all of those policies that we present are failed policies. Contradiction, Sir.

Then he went on to accuse our Minister of Finance for saying that oil has been a curse and he went on, on a long, boring tirade about it is oil that gave us concrete to build schools; it is oil that gave us things to build roads. Very nice. But what he did not understand, being a geologist—you see, he spoke about brick and mortar, so anything to do with stones he would understand, being a geologist, but this economist understands the economic philosophies and the problems with

over-dependence on oil and gas. It is called Dutch Disease. It means when you have people who are not qualified and are put in charge of the public purse and tend to take things that are easy and cannot see into the future, they tend to just take what is at hand and neglect all other sectors of the economy.

So in that way the oil under the PNM turned out to be a curse for our people because the resources never trickled down. They were never managed efficiently. We are compared to other islands in the Caribbean, and said that we are doing great. But these other islands exist on tourism, on agriculture. They do not have oil and gas, especially not going up to \$147 a barrel. They do not have that.

So to say that we are better than they are, I think your benchmark for success is very low and that is why you are on that side. So it is not that oil is a curse. Oil is not a curse. Oil in the hands of the PNM who put geologists as Ministers of Finance—PNM is the curse. [*Desk thumping*]

Then the Member for Diego Martin West went into his abracadabra mode. I am sure the media was impressed with his eloquence. He said that the Minister of Finance is budgeting for increased revenues "abracadabra". Brilliant! And he had the audacity to call our Form 1 students "duncy". But I would not do that; I would never do that.

He talked about the vehicle taxes; how come the Minister could budget for an \$8 million or \$12 million increase in tax receipts from vehicle taxes, not understanding that due to the global financial meltdown, which he mentioned, last year was the slowest year in 20 years for vehicle sales. Now that the economies of the world are rebounding in some way, through China, India and Latin America, we have seen in Trinidad and Tobago a requisite increase in purchases of vehicles.

Now, all you had to do is walk the street. If you lime on the ground, you would know that. If you called one of our car distributors you would know that sales started to pick up in March. Where last year March they sold five cars in Ansa Automotive, this year they sold 30. Therefore, if the number of cars being purchased increased, does it not follow that the revenue accrued from motor vehicles tax would increase? I do not think that is abracadabra; I think that is just common sense.

Then the Member for Diego Martin West went even further to quote spurious statistics in this House, where we stated that due to the increase in cigarette tax, cigarette consumption had gone down. Maybe he has been spending too much time in the golf club, swinging clubs and sipping beverages. But, Sir, there has been no decrease. In fact, there has been an increase in consumption of cigarettes in Trinidad and Tobago since the poor man tax was put on people on false information, that somehow an addictive substance like nicotine and cigarette; that because you raise it by

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\$3, that a man or a woman who smokes will miraculously stop. It never worked anywhere in the world; it has never worked and it did not work. In fact—and the media can check it—Witco Company posted their largest profit after they increased the tax. So it is actually the reverse. Cigarette smoking went up.

So for him to stand there and say: "How does the Minister of Finance understand that more revenue would be accrued to the Government from cigarette tax?" It is because the Minister did his homework. He did not come here just to talk without research; a lazy man's approach to responding to a budget.

Furthermore, the Minister of Finance, rightfully so, said that there will be increases in revenue to the Government from Corporation Tax. How and why? Do you want to know why? Because this Government will not make sweetheart deals with friends like ESSAR Steel and give them 500 acres of prime land for free; then give them 10 years customs duty off; 10 years tax holiday on corporation tax and no tax on profit. We will tax them if they come to invest and, therefore, we will get more revenue. It is not abracadabra. What it is, is prudent fiscal management. [*Desk thumping*]

Then the learned gentlemen, the geologist over there, went to quote the Caribbean's Nobel Laureate, Sir Arthur Lewis' 1954 study which stated that when you inject foreign investment into an area, the investment trickles down and the surrounding communities benefit. Yes. What he failed to realize was that in the 1970s, 20 years later, after receiving the Nobel Laureate prize, Sir Arthur Lewis admitted that he was wrong. It did not work! He forgot to read that part. He read 1954; he did not read the 1970s. And there are many doctoral theses showing that, unfortunately, while it sounded good in 1954, empirical evidence shows that it never worked and in 2010, a man aspiring to be the Prime Minister, comes here to tell this House and to tell the national population that an economist got it wrong. I beg to differ, Sir. No one who is in a government that moved us to second-to-last place in innovative competitiveness could ever discuss that they have the plan.

Then the hon. Member for Diego Martin West went on to talk about the poverty line and remember for years the Members on that side were saying in this House that poverty had been reduced. Now, those of us who were on the other side and who took time to read reports would know that playing with statistics does not the truth make. So in 1993 the last survey was done and a baseline of TT \$625 was used as the poverty line and at that time 34 per cent of the population was deemed to be below the poverty line.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, I think this is a good time for us to have some

lunch. This sitting is now suspended until 1.30 p.m.

12.30 p.m.: *Sitting suspended.*

1.30 p.m.: *Sitting resumed.*

Hon. A. Roberts: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, I trust that everyone had an enjoyable lunch. I hope to aid the digestion of some of my colleagues on the other side. I see that only a few have managed to return.

The hon. Member for Diego Martin West went on, in his attempt to debunk the budget presented by the hon. Minister of Finance, to state that the poverty line in Trinidad and Tobago shows that his Government reduced poverty during their tenure. I was making the point that to play with statistics belies the reality of the situation.

In 1993, the figure used was TT \$625 per month to determine the poverty line. If you earned \$624 or less, you were deemed to be below the poverty line. This is based globally on a US \$100 figure. So at that time there was some 34 per cent of the population, in 1993, under the PNM government below the poverty line.

The next statistical survey and information came in 2005; and miraculously the line over that 12-year period only increased by \$40, from \$625 a month to \$665 a month. Now, anyone living in Trinidad and Tobago would know that the purchasing power parity of a dollar in 1993 as compared to 1995 was not and could never be simply increased by a mere 6.67 per cent. For example, in 1993, we would buy a "doubles" for 75 cents or \$1 with extra cucumber; but, in 2005, that same "doubles" was \$3/\$3.50. You could buy ochroes at \$3 per pound in 1993. In 2005, it was something like \$10 to \$12 a pound. So really, over that period, the inflation, the increase in costs and the requisite diminishing of the value of the purchasing power of a dollar went down by 300 to 400 per cent; yet the figure used was only adjusted upward by 6.7 per cent. Therefore, those on that side said that they have reduced poverty; it is down to 17 per cent.

I put it to you, Mr. Speaker, that any careful analysis of the situation would show that the real poverty line in 2005 and after should have been somewhere in the vicinity of \$1,800 and when you plug that into the raw statistics of the population, you will see that 38 per cent of our population actually live below the real poverty line.

Why am I making this point? Because it is clear that the Member for Diego Martin West—and I must commend him for going it alone; it is clear that he did not ask anyone with economic background or an economics degree to help him with this contribution. It was, therefore, simplistic at best, superficial and a waste

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of two and a half hours.

We all know that the Central Bank of Trinidad and Tobago works assiduously to maintain our exchange rate between TT \$6.25 and TT \$6.40 per US dollar, which may be deemed as a dirty float, meaning that it is a managed float. Our dollar does not float. If it were allowed to float freely, we may see a situation where it would be TT \$12 or TT \$13 to US \$1. So, for the Member for Diego Martin West to say that his government reduced poverty, I am very sorry. He would not know because when you travel the streets and maybe when you are on radio and meet more people than he would have the opportunity to do, you would know that there is no way in Trinidad and Tobago that poverty has declined.

People are suffering after \$300 billion and the Member for Diego Martin West insults our intelligence by dividing the GDP by the population size and saying that his Government tripled the economy and, therefore, the per capita income trebled up to US \$13,000 per month. You can count on your hand how many people make US \$13,000 a month and more.

However, the statistics are clearly skewed by our blessing of oil and gas because while the overall GDP increases, because of the PNM policies it never trickled down. So simply to divide a larger pie so that the price of oil goes up from \$55 to \$137 per barrel, they say people get rich. No. Some of their friends and families got rich. The PNM was great for Mr. Calder Hart. By the way, where is Calder Hart? Anybody can help me?

Mr. Ken Julien may have done well under the PNM with eTecK as so eloquently put yesterday by the Minister of Trade and Industry. Mr. Uthara Rao, where is he, Mr. Speaker? Some of the Members opposite may not know of whom I speak, yet they are staunch proponents of the People's National Movement. While they are elected Members who only get \$30,000 or \$40,000 a month to service their entire constituency, some of them with 60,000 and 80,000 constituents, Mr. Calder Hart was getting \$200,000 per month to service himself; plus he was in control of UDeCott, which had the amazing ability to negotiate with the PNM government.

UDeCott's fees increased with cost overruns. Have you ever heard something so ridiculous? If UDeCott were to get 4 per cent of a budgeted project of, let us say, \$300 million, their fees, if they held to budget would be \$12 million. Do you know, if UDeCott allowed the project to go to \$1 billion, they were not penalized? Do you know, they got 4 per cent of the extra \$700 million also, in this country, under this administration? And they come here and talk about morality, trust and

confidence.

Dr. Douglas: Shame!

Hon. A. Roberts: I must concur with the Member for Lopinot/Bon Air West. Shame, Mr. Speaker.

Let us just take one project, the Tarouba project. There is an overrun of \$800 million. Do you know how many pensioners could get \$3,000 a month with that? If we were to take one month, we could take 266,667 citizens and pay them \$3,000. And then they have the audacity to say that the People's Partnership Government is renegeing on promises. They cannot spell the word "promise"; not even with a big P.

Then the Member for Diego Martin West went on to use another statistic to show the prowess of that side. He said that in 1977, the monthly figure for a family or for citizens to be comfortable was \$1,000. In 2007, he used the same figure of 1,000 and said they improved people's lot in life and standard of living. Again, \$1,000 in 1997 was worth about \$600 in 2007. Anybody, even our children in Form I, who just did SEA would know that something is wrong with that mathematics. [*Interruption*] Well, if they are "duncy", I am happy because that means I am "duncy", too. I do not mind being "duncy", Sir. I guarantee you that.

The Member spoke of Vision 2020. I would like to ask: How many on that side, in that former government, ever read the document? If they did, they would realize that everything written in that document, which is a good document; very good; a lot of citizens consulted on it, based on good policies and lofty goals. The problem is that they never read it, so everything they did went against their own Vision 2020 and that is why they are on Vision 2010 on that side with 12 seats.

Pillar 1 of Vision 2020 states: "Develop an innovative people". This document was presented to the PNM General Council in 2003. So, in 2003, the number one objective was to develop an innovative people and, in 2010, we are second-to-last in the world in that category. I think they were truly world-class in the wrong direction.

They said develop an innovative people, yet we had to sit through years of foreigners getting everything. Suddenly, former Minister Dr. Lenny Saith, Dr. Ken Julien and Mr. Calder Hart made a trip in June 2005 to China and, miraculously, Dr. Lenny Saith said, they took different planes and ended up in Malaysia to meet Sunway. Suddenly, the CEO of Sunway comes out of the former Prime Minister's office and the Prime Minister then, on his website and in the media, stated that Sunway had great expertise in building highways and in

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quarrying. That Government then went on to offer an open contract competitive tender for quarrying. Take a wild guess who won. Sunway.

We heard about foreigners to run the port; foreigners for traffic plans; Mastrofski, \$85 million, foreigner for crime plan; yet their number 1 pillar was to create an innovative, creative people. Yet we had to listen for years as the Member for Diego Martin North/East let everyone know that we were incompetent, not worthy; that our architects, consultants, contractors, police force, our people, our public servants were incompetent and not worthy. He created all those special service companies because the public service is of no use. Yet their objective Number 1 was to create an innovative people.

Mr. Speaker, the Member for Diego Martin West spoke about inflation right now being at 14.3 per cent. He got confused between core inflation and headline and I forgive him because when you have a geology degree, you do not have to take economics.

However, he also said that this Government under the hon. Kamla Persad-Bissessar was dragging its feet on the appointment of boards and, therefore, spending has dried up over the last three months. We have not spent any money. If we did not spend any money in over three months because we did not appoint boards, what exactly pushed the inflation rate from 9 per cent in May to 14 per cent? I leave you all to ponder that because I do not have the answer. It is illogical.

The Member for Diego Martin West said that the PNM will not defend wrongdoing. Which PNM? I remember the Member for San Fernando East, after the beginning of the Uff enquiry into UDeCott and the construction sector, which they added to waste time, defended Mr. Calder Hart on 45 occasions saying that he was the bastion of intelligence and implementation. He was the best thing. Then suddenly, this very said former Prime Minister, Member for San Fernando East, stated to the media, quite arrogantly, that the former Attorney General had told him about an investigation that began in September 2009 and made him aware, as the head and Chair of the National Security Council, of where the investigation into Mr. Calder Hart reached.

1.45 p.m.

Do you know what the hon. former Prime Minister did? He ran to Mr. Calder Hart and said: "This is where it has reached, do what you have to do." The next thing is that Mr. Calder Hart disappeared.

Mr. Speaker, they stand there and talk about mortality, trust and confidence. I am in shock. The PNM will not defend wrongdoing, but the entire Cabinet sat quietly as people like Calder Hart overspent on Tarouba, the Ministry of Legal

Affairs building and every single project, “NAPA, SAPA, WAPA”; all of them, and they said that they do not defend wrongdoing.

The Member for Diego Martin West got up in this very House and talked about UDeCott and Calder Hart. In fact, he said he went to the former Prime Minister in 2003 to discuss Mr. Calder Hart. Yet, when an election was called, the very said Member got up on a platform and said: “Well, forget all ah dat. Is time for ah election, leh we go down de road together.” Now he stands here, three months later, begging the population to believe that the PNM will not defend wrongdoing? I beg to differ.

Let us go to the laptops. Last year—[*Interruption*] I would not do any such thing, but it would be remiss of me if I let it slip and slide. Member for Diego Martin, for the record, I would like to check his attendance because over the last three months, he has been outside more than inside because I missed him. When I come to Parliament, the first chair I want to look at is Diego Martin North/East. I think I know when he is here and when he is not here and I do not see him.

Last year our Prime Minister who was on the other side at that time, had the opportunity to be the first woman to respond to a budget presentation and she did a remarkable job. The Member for Diego Martin North/East who was sitting right where the Member for Chaguanas West is sitting now, got up and in his contribution called the Member for Siparia dotish 21 times, foolish 13 times and dyslexic one time. I will not do that. I will never do that in this House.

When the Member for Diego Martin North/East buys a boat called *Su*, it never sailed, it never moved, it is on dry dock and it is flooded. I would not call him dotish; that would be unparliamentary. When the Member for Diego Martin North/East—when the Joint Council of Contractors and all the consultants were saying: “Where did this rapid rail come from? Where is the feasibility study? How do we know that by putting a rapid rail our citizens will give up their cars?” We are a people that like our cars. We like to “gallery”. We like to cruise. We like to show off. Also, we are not a direct people. If I am coming by you for lunch I would stop by the Member for Barataria/San Juan. On the way, I would pop in by the Member for Chaguanas West. I might pull up and stop by the Member for Port of Spain South, just to see “how she going”. “She looking dapper over there.” Then I will come to you.

Was there a study to determine if we are a direct people; if we go where we say we are going? Only if we are of that type, could any sort of mass-transit system work. Did they do a study on this? No, the Member for Diego Martin

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North/East got up and said that all the local contractors and consultants were suffering from sour grapes because they did not get it and that the feasibility study had been done. At the sum of \$520 million later, he just paid for a feasibility study. [Interruption] Sorry, \$566 million, no \$576 million. “Ooh good, it going up!” At the cost of \$576 million later, the Member of Diego Martin North/East just paid for a feasibility study. He could have built a Hilton with that, but I would not call him dotish 21 times. That would not be right. I would not do it.

Then the Member for Diego Martin North/East, the expert of experts, “ah little rain fall in de Beetham”—which for some unknown reason my citizens, “ah love dem, dey vote for dat” balisier without any thought—and it was under four feet of water. The meteorologist, the Member for Diego Martin North/East said: “It was a phenomenon that occurred every 30 years.” One cloud came and just dumped rain on the Beetham. I would not call him dotish. I would not do that. I cannot do that.

Then, “lightening hit” in Maraval in his constituency and a house came tumbling down, rain and landslides. The meteorologist said: “It was the lightening that hit the dirt and loosened it and pelt down the house. I would not call him foolish. I will not do that.

As you know, I used to be on a television show called Spalk. It is shown in Grenada. I did not know it was so big in Grenada. I went over there to relax. I took a drive and I saw something that looked like a building in Beirut; something that purported to be a stadium built by the genius from Diego Martin North/East. I called him genius. I would not call him dotish. A breeze blew it down, but yet he, for nine long years, looked at all the citizens and told us we are no good and they brought in Shanghai, “Bai Xing Xang Xung, Xing Lan, Bijoux” and all the rest, but their number one pillar was to develop an innovative people. They did, they developed China. China is reaching 9 per cent growth this year. They developed Canada, Geneva and all the foreigners and left our people suffering. So, do not let them come here and talk about our budget and say that there is no plan. They had a plan. It dealt with drainage; drainage of the Treasury.

Mr. Speaker, let me move on now, because since the removal from the political leadership of the People’s National Movement, it appears that the General Council of the PNM has gotten back their voice. The General Council of the PNM and its Vice-Chairman, John Donaldson who I must say, my father is very friendly with, came out with a statement that the People’s Partnership Government is wrong, out of place and wicked to remove a brilliant economically viable smelter. First and foremost, I am glad that the general council could talk,

because when the Member for San Fernando East removed the Member for Diego Martin West and the Diego Martin West constituency wanted the same John Donaldson to discuss the matter, he said: “I doh have dat power.” But he has the power to criticize our decision to stop the smelter. I welcome back the PNM General Council.

It was the very Minister Conrad Enill, who stated to the media that the PNM General Council does not discuss government matters. This was shocking for me. As you know, unfortunately or fortunately, I was born a PNM. “Ah cyah help way ah was born; mother and father both.” Not again, They were born and “dey would not dead dat”, so I know a lot about it. In fact, I put it to them on that side that I know more about it. I think they never even read the PNM constitution. Because they would not understand that the general council is supposed to have much more power than that. *[Interruption]* Because I am a “duncy I get ah laptop yuh know.”

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. Sharma]*

Question put and agreed to.

Hon. A. Roberts: Thank you very much Mr. Speaker and thank you to my colleagues on this side and on that side. I wish I could get another hour, but time is of the essence.

Let me move on, because the theme of the response from that side is: “We was going to do that. Alyuh, we was going to do that. Yuh see, we was going to do dat.” It reminds me of a scenario. As I told you, I was a Member of the People’s National Movement. I had a good friend in a high place at one time in the PNM. It reminds me of a story he told me. Just after he got married he said: “I am going to be a great husband. When my wife comes home, I would have dinner ready, I would massage her feet and put her down to relax. When she wakes up in the morning, I would make her coffee and send her on her way to work. At lunch time, I would send her roses. In the evening time, I would take her for long strolls around the Savannah to breathe in the pure oxygen.” These were his plans. He did not do it and when he came home one day, a People’s Partnership was liming there eating lunch. The point being, please, “if yuh was going to do dat, yuh had nine years and \$300 billion. Yuh shudda do it. Wouldda, couldda, shouldda”, did not. We will do it. Done!

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Now we have reached the pension. I have been waiting for this moment for a long time. I sat here and listened to the Member for Diego Martin Central who is absent again. He was absent for the election, where they had three seats and lost the corporation. He is absent again. I would not say where he went. The Member for Diego Martin Central stood there and held one advertisement twice, and said: “Look here, you all are a bunch of miscreants. Look at this.” You all are telling untruths. Look, pension 60; even though it is pensionable age in the laws. You could check the laws; it is 65. Anyway give them that. They found one ad that said what they are saying. It was one ad and you showed it twice. “If yuh show it five times, it doh mean it is five ads. Is one ad, nice.” But, if they want to convince me, I would be the first one to apologize, because I am not arrogant like you all. “If we wrong we wrong.” We are only human to err is human. To be always right is PNM. If you want to prove to me, I am a simple person—let me tell you how to do it, the hon. Prime Minister, during two election campaigns, spoke nearly every night on four or five different platforms. All of these were recorded. He did not look at the media. Come and play a recording of the Prime Minister saying what you all have said. Show me that. What I see is a manifesto, which is the contract with the people. The manifesto says quite clearly age 65, \$3,000, “but no, dey doh take dat”. They cannot produce any record. Read it: “Life begins at 60”. Read underneath, are you seeing it? [*Interruption*] Thanks, I am glad you can read. Were you reading in the green pick-up while you were hiding from the smelter protestors?

Mr. Speaker, there were many other speeches. We had the Chairman of the United National Congress talking until he got blue. “Dey have nothing wid him saying”—there were other people. All of us spoke. They have no recording of anyone saying that.

Over the election campaign, there were 15,000 radio ads on 20 different frequencies. There is no ad on the radio that said what they are trying to say. There were 6,000 television ads and none of them could produce one and say: “Look, that is what you said.” All they have is one ad with one print. There were over 1,000 different newspaper ads, they get one. “Dey have two other leaders, the Member for Tunapuna, Pointe-a-Pierre and the leader of the ToP in Tobago. Dey have nothing, but yuh come with one ad and show meh it five times.” There were 45 two-hour live broadcasts on every media. “Yuh eh bring ah tape, ah DVD; nothing. Yuh eh even bring ah VHS or a Betamax, but yuh come and show meh one ad.” When I put it to you if that, one newspaper ad printed twice, is the reason the PNM lost 29/12 from 26/15 and “if dat one ad is de reason de PNM

lost”, I say bring back “San Do East. Whey alyuh move him for? Or, he gone?” All right. It was not. “Is dat one ad dat got rid of de PNM”, not Calder Hart, UDeCott, Nipdec and Home Mortgage Bank.

2.00 p.m.

Mr. Speaker, not Ken Julien with eTeck and UTT. That did not get rid of them! Member for Port of Spain North/St. Ann's West, do you know who is Uthara Rao? Who is he? I will sit. Tell me! I have to tell you, because you do not know. Uthara Rao is the former chairman of the EMBD, who was given charge of 13,000 acres of Caroni (1975) Limited Lands, but it somehow moved to 33,000 acres. He was renting cars from ghost companies that did not exist to himself. That is EMBD Rao. He was put there by the PNM. The people did not know about that—six charges! He was like hanky-panky. Do you understand?

Conrad Enill paid \$410,000 and said in the *Business Guardian* that he will have to pay that to get rid of the hanky-panky charges, because Uthara Rao was a bit “touchy-watchy”. When they interviewed him and said, why you all paid off that, he said Uthara Rao presents so much skill and intelligence that you have to accept the good with the bad. That is one of the former Ministers of Finance. You would not know that, because you have just reached. So, relax, you are looking good.

It is not the fact that Arthur Lok Jack built a hotel in Tobago with his company in the wrong place ignoring everybody. The Tobago House of Assembly say that it is going to give \$213 million, and the Member for Diego Martin West say, “Do not do that. If you do that you will have to pay it back.” Now, he is coming here to say, why we do not give. He is brilliant; he is a nice fellow. He must remember what he says. It was not Lok Jack telling the population: “If ah give yuh back the \$400 million yuh feel yuh go geh hospital bed.” That is not why the PNM lost; it is one ad out of 25,000; congratulations, bring back the Member for San Fernando East. He should not be there; the Member for San Fernando East should still be there.

It was not the fact that the former Minister of Finance, who read the budget last year, and who was somewhere close to this seat—D’Abadie/O’Meara. It was not the fact that she came in this House after purporting to represent all of us, and she negotiated on our behalf to save us from the Clico fiasco. She did not tell us that she had 10,500 shares in Clico. She was negotiating to save herself. She did not tell us that. That is not the reason you all are over there, is that one ad printed twice.

Then she came here and said in this House, she did not break any deposit after

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she took out her money and left all of us to ketch. I believe it was the *Newsday* that printed the slip, signed by the Minister of Finance, Karen Nunez-Tesheira, who wrote a book on ethics. I read it. I do not know if she read it. It was not that.

She happen to take out a \$2 million policy on one of her parents' life just before, and all this time purporting to negotiate on our behalf. So hear what happen to the poor Central Bank Governor! The poor Central Bank Governor, he went to a meeting—Mr. Monteil, Clico shareholder; Mr. Duprey, Clico shareholder; Mrs. Karen Nunez-Tesheira, Clico shareholder and the poor Governor of the Central Bank—and now they have the audacity to say that Minister Dookeran's plan to save people is inhumane, after spending \$7.2 billion for nothing! Please, come with facts. This is a debate; this is a serious thing. You all are coming here to play games; no games. I am feeling sorry for you all. You just come in this thing, poor you! So it is not the property tax.

After the Minister of Finance take out her money—\$2 million by so, and not only that, paid penalties of 37 per cent—let me tell you something. If you are getting \$100,000, to break it you have to give away \$37,000. She gave away \$37,000; 37 per cent, and take her money and leave the whole country, and you are telling me about morality, trust and confidence.

The same lady, after doing that come and say people who take mortgages and build up their houses nice; take property tax! After Calder Hart spend \$800 million extra on a stadium that cannot even finish; property tax for \$325 million; the same lady.

You know, as I walked around D'Abadie/O'Meara in her safe seat—I saw Mr. Andy Johnson here yesterday—safe seat. It was so safe she is not here anymore—I noticed that over 72 per cent of the households in D'Abadie/O'Meara have done some form of renovation; whether it is low-income housing, they are adding on a little piece of tile on a car garage; middle-class housing or rich people; 72 per cent are doing renovations. The former Member for D'Abadie/O'Meara is the one who piloted the property tax. If that is not wickedness, "I eh know what is." She should have been the one person—because I live in Diego Martin and down there you might get 7 per cent or 10 per cent of the people doing renovations. She should have been the one person shouting: No property tax! But no, she brought it. That is not the reason you all got beaten 29/12, but because of an ad printed twice. I want to hire whoever did that ad. That ad is really good. It is not about Petrotrin and \$9 billion extra with Mr. Malcolm Jones and the GTL. "It is not that why all yuh lost!" Is one ad printed twice!

Well, let us move on now to the Member for Laventille East/Morvant. I did

not really have time, but let me deal with her quickly. I would like to thank her for dealing with sport at the top of her contribution. It shows your love for sport, and being a former netballer and sponsoring teams and so on, it was made clear to me—and I said it before. In November, 2007, the Member for San Fernando East erred, because he had someone like yourself who plays sport and loves sport and he put you as a Junior Minister in the Ministry of National Security, and put a seamstress as the Minister of Sport and Youth Affairs. So, do you agree with me that he erred? Do you agree? Okay, you do not agree. I am batting for you.

The pathway model of the PNM: Let me assure you that while not everything that the PNM did was bad—Dr. Williams was good for a while—about 94 per cent of it was bad, but there is a 6 per cent. I am not sure if you understand, but the pathway model is just a document that you take off the Internet and you call it “pathway model”. So, it is nothing really big. The interesting thing is that they spent \$13 million to get a pathway model that you could have picked up on the laptop of the “duncy” children and get it for free. So, rest assured that nothing this Minister of Sport and Youth Affairs does will replicate, in any form or fashion, the former seamstress. Nothing, so feel free!

The National Sport Policy: Again, you are misguided. The national sport policy consultation began in 1997 under the former Minister Manohar Ramsaran, not in 1993 or 1991, no. Whoever gave you that information misled you. I know you would not mislead this House, you were just misinformed. It began with Manohar Ramsaran. Over 10,000 persons were consulted, and the document that came to the Ministry after the December 24, 2001—18/18.

I went into the Ministry of Sport and Youth Affairs as an advisor to the former Minister, Roger Boynes. The National Sport Policy was there. He then created a committee that included chairman, Gerald Ferreira, who was then fired three years later; Ken Butcher, who is at UTT now and sundry others. I was privileged to sit at one meeting of that committee that revised and changed totally the entire sport policy. I sat there, and after they were finished, I said, Lady—because there was one lady out of 11 gentlemen—do we have the moral authority to change this document after so many years of consultation? “I put it to you, Mr. Gerald Ferreira, chairman, that this new document that you all have created needs to go back to the people to see if they agree with it” and they did not do that. I was not invited to another meeting; no problem. [*Desk thumping*]

Miss Cox: You talk too much!

Hon. A. Roberts: I talk too much, but that is what I would always do when

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the wrong thing is going on. You all keep to quiet and that is why you are on that side. [*Desk thumping*] That transformation by the Sport Company of the sport policy led to the Sport Company \$2 million flag; \$55 million Caribbean Games that never came off and which is presently the subject of a forensic audit; the sport commission that is supposed to come; and the \$2 million flag which is national pride. Do you like that flag? That is what came out of that meeting. So, please, when you are talking about the National Sport Policy, I would tell you a little about it.

The Member for San Fernando East has left, but one of the main reasons I did not renew my contract with the former PNM Minister of Sport and Youth Affairs from January, 2002—January, 2004, was that in November 2003, I saw a document on his desk, and normally he shared everything with me. In fact, he was looking good for a time. When they did a MORI poll, he was the best performing PNM minister. I saw this Tarouba Sporting Facility—not Brian Lara Stadium which was budgeted at \$50 million. What was planned was a cricket stadium; three swimming pools—“well yuh know yuh boy like swimming pools”; four astro turf pitches; six football fields; a sport medicine centre; a dormitory area; a cafeteria; all of that for \$850 million. I looked at the former Minister, Roger Boynes, and told him, and I quote: "Sir when you going to jail I not following you!" Well, the rest is history. That was the Tarouba facility.

Now, eight years later \$1.1 billion—when you check the yellow book that the Member for Diego Martin West went and found \$100 million in property tax—but he cannot read English. You will see that the Ministry of Sport and Youth Affairs now has to pay \$57 million a year for the next six years for a loan taken by your Cabinet on November 19, 2009 for \$497 million to finish the Brian Lara Stadium that was budgeted at \$272 million. You all sit there and tell me about morality! [*Interruption*] "Doh rush meh nah. How much time ah ha dey?" [*Laughter*] Do not rush me, I am coming to you. So, that is Tarouba.

The National Sport Policy also—the Member for San Fernando East now concocted something. Let me take you through it. So they had that thing there, and then suddenly the World Cup came for 2007. The West Indies won the bid—I believe in 2004 or 2003 late, and your then Prime Minister, the Member for San Fernando East, said that he is not bidding for anything, so he took the brown package. He then stated to this population that it was a requirement of the brown package that the stadium must be built. That was totally false! World Cup come, and World Cup gone and the stadium did not finish. This was not a requirement.

When we criticized, discussed and analyzed the National Sport Policy, I wrote seven articles in the *Trinidad Guardian*, calling it “Tarouba Madness—Piarco 2”.

This was before a spade even “dig a piece ah “zapatay” mud.” When I did that, the Member for San Fernando East said it is a tsunami shelter and any Tom, Dick or Harrilal could talk what they want; it will be built. That is why you all are on that side. Not one ad printed twice. [*Desk thumping*]

Now to the community programmes. If you are following my argument, you would see that the Tarouba thing which is a PNM thing, is a centralized thing for sport; \$850 million in one area. The reason I left the PNM is that they are so harden. You had a geologist telling me about sport, having been the highest certified coach in the western hemisphere at level five senior; winning countless Commonwealth medals—Pan Am Gold, Commonwealth record, Olympic finalists and eventually Olympic bronze medal. A geologist told me that he is not listening to me. [*Desk thumping*] I do not have time for that. So, what I did? I burnt that PNM card. You should try it when you go home. Burn it! It frees you; it takes a weight off your shoulder, and you feel flexible; you feel ready to play netball in those community programmes. So, the policy of the PNM was centralized.

I told Roger Boynes and the Sport Commission at that time: "Listen, you want to spend \$850 million on sport, let's go in the communities; let's carry sport to the people; let's develop their facilities." So, for you to stand and tell me that I will stop community programmes, I will give you time to apologize. [*Interruption*]

Miss Cox: Did you stop the community sporting projects?

Hon. A. Roberts: Absolutely not, but you did not say sorry.

Miss Cox: I did not say you stop it. I told you that I was informed, so I want to know for sure if that is so.

2.15 p.m.

Hon. A. Roberts: So you are misinformed. All right, I forgive you. "Now, if it was the Member for Diego Martin West, I would ah deal wit him. But you see lovely ladies, I's go sorf, you understand. I does relax on all yuh."

Mrs. Mc Intosh: That is a bad thing to go soft.

Hon. A. Roberts: That is an untruth. [*Laughter*] Let just say, "Mam, yuh looking good." Let we go now—[*Interruption*] That is all right. I am not frightened yet, you know. "I go deal with you after." I might be soft, but you run. You run from a soft man. [*Desk thumping*] Imagine that! So you better read your papers and cool yourself.

Time? Let me go quickly. Ten minutes? Eight minutes. All right! Now, ladies and gentlemen, this People's Partnership Government is fundamentally

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different in sport on anything that came before on that side. Number one: From May 27 onwards—when I was chosen thankfully by the hon. Prime Minister to become Minister of Sport and Youth Affairs, culture and sport shall be linked from now to time a memorial in all stadia, in all facilities—under the Ministry of Sport and Youth Affairs, our local culture, calypso, pan and soca, anyone can come in and use the facilities, unlike them. The seamstress says no culture, no soca. So that is one big difference. It is ironic that our football team is called "Soca Warriors."

You see how the PNM does not make sense. You had a "Minister of Cloth", who said culture and sport must be separate. All over the world there are stadia built. You have a rock concert, you have a football match. You have American football game, you have baseball, you have car rallying, you come back with tassa drumming and dance. That is normal; the thing. No, not with the PNM, but we are different. We have Soca Warriors. Soca is not culture? We play soca soccer, but the former Minister says no calypso in the soccer. We have Soca Princesses.

Miss Hospedales: He did not say that.

Hon. A. Roberts: He did not say that? What did he say? I would like to ask this honourable House—the PNM did something calling MSYA. Mr. Speaker, do you know what MSYA is? Does anybody know what MSYA is? The former Minister of Sport and Youth Affairs decided to rebrand the Ministry of Sport and Youth Affairs. From the Trinidad and Tobago flag and the Coat of Arms with Trinidad and Tobago, the Minister of Sport and Youth Affairs of Trinidad and Tobago decided to rebrand it, MSYA .

Miss Cox: The Ministry of Sport and Youth Affairs.

Hon. A. Roberts: Right! Great! You now know what it is. Good! So here we have a World Cup—let me take you through the scenario to show you how illogical they are when talking about sport tourism. We are hosting a World Cup and the benefit for Trinidad and Tobago, is that people all over the world will be viewing the World Cup in Trinidad and Tobago. So Germany is playing against Nigeria, you have a camera filming the nice field—and I must commend all the local contractors who in 10 days, transformed the PNM's stadium that was totally dilapidated to what you all saw on television, which made Trinidad and Tobago proud. [*Desk thumping*] I want to thank all the officials from the Ministry of Sport and Youth Affairs, local contractors and the Sport Company.

Mr. Speaker, think about it. You are in Germany, you see the camera man and you see MSYA, are you going to buy a ticket to MSYA? Are you going to google MSYA? Where are you coming? So, Mr. Speaker, ladies and gentlemen, from this day onward,

the Ministry of Sport and Youth Affairs had a brand and we shall return to that brand. It is the national flag of Trinidad and Tobago with the words "Trinidad and Tobago". So if anybody sees us, they will come and "lime" with us, spend money and increase revenue and tourist arrivals, especially in Tobago. [*Desk thumping*]

Dr. Baker: That is what we want.

Hon. A. Roberts: The former Minister put a flag and says we should be proud, and there is no pride on national pride. We decided on this side that we are going to localize it. We are going to promote the local culture, local athletes, local manufacturers, local contractors, local consultants, to run the show, respecting our people and creating them, spending money domestically so that we can take advantage of the multiplier effect without laptops. That is the difference. We are going to instill pride in our people because we love the people. We do not stand, sit and eat by ourselves. We walk with the people, listen to them and that is the difference. We shall implement a facilities management plan so that we would never have to spend that kind of money to upgrade our stadia again. It will be an ongoing process to maintain the facilities. [*Desk thumping*]

In maintaining those facilities, we will then have a marketing programme. We have already made Daren Ganga a Sports Ambassador with a specific function for creating markets and advertising Trinidad and Tobago. We shall invite university teams from the USA in volleyball, swimming and football. We will go to the professional teams and the high school teams. Let them come here for the winter, pay money and use our facilities, thereby allowing us to allow all citizens to use our facilities for free. [*Desk thumping*] Your government is so wicked. For a college league game you are charging the school that you are subsidizing, \$5,000 to rent their own stadium. That is the difference between you all and us. This is why you are over there. Not one ad printed twice. We have also developed a life-sport programme. There are a lot of people who are unemployed and so on, who love sport, but do not want to get involved in URP, CEPEP and so on. We shall put a system in place that we pay them a stipend, to not only train their sport, but learn and get coach certification so that they could be gainfully employed in the swelling industry of sport.

We shall focus on a national hero pension plan. So like Hasely Crawford—Hasely Crawford who won our only gold medal in 1976, UNC had to give him a house in 1998. "All yuh ain't give de boy nothing for 20 years." Now when we came back as the People's Partnership, we had to make him a Sport Ambassador. "A yuh left him there doing nothing." He is still PNM, but it is all right. You see,

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we are the Government for all. He is a PNM, so what! He is our boy, he is our hero and we will treat him as such. We will treat other heroes like that, and put up an independent committee to analyze the achievements of national heroes and they will be paid a pension separate and apart from anything else they have.

We will also implement talent identification from primary schools. So we will put coaches and trained teachers who have an interest—you have that too?

Miss Hospedales: We had that.

Hon. A. Roberts: You had the same plan? That is why you are there. Relax. Brazil 2014 shall be a national priority qualification with full funding. [*Desk thumping*] The Member for San Fernando East, the former Prime Minister, on the arrival of the team from Germany in the Hasely Crawford Stadium he stated, South Africa 2010 will be our national priority, and they did not get any money. We will not do that. We will not do that in 2014.

Finally, netball shall be a priority of this Government. Netball is a sport that we were once world champions. Netball is a sport that promotes our girls and teaches them self-confidence and self-esteem. Trinidad and Tobago must not be tenth in the world—tenth in the world under the PNM. We will institute a professional pro-netball league to pay these girls to play netball and put them in special netball academies while improving all the facilities across the country. Identifying talent so that we can win a world championship again, not come tenth and tell then tell me you all did good.

Hon. Minister: Shame!

Hon. A. Roberts: Shame man! In bricks and mortar, we shall build the cycling velodrome, national tennis centre, the swimming pool, finally. George Bovell III met with me today. The poor boy had to train in the pond. He could train in the palace. The palace has a bigger pool than what he gets to swim in. Six communities' artificial turfs will be placed strategically. Six a year, so that these facilities would be used all the time, year round, rain, sun, so that people could play their sport, midnight if they want, without damaging the field. We will upgrade golf courses to 18-hole, recreational grounds. Then hon. Winston Dookeran stated that on this side, the People's Partnership—we are showing the difference between us and you. No plan. The Prime Minister said no Coat of Arms on the Prime Minister's car. Done! [*Desk thumping*] Laptops for kids. Done! [*Desk thumping*] Pension, 3,000. Done! [*Desk thumping*] Life fund to save children's life. Done! No smelter. Done! No rapid rail. Done! Forensic

audit in UTT, Petrotrin. Done! Call local government elections. Done! No property tax, et cetera, et cetera. Done! The final one the People's Partnership said: No more PNM. Done! [*Desk thumping*] Now, I done! Thank you very much. [*Desk thumping*]

The Minister in the Ministry of Works and Transport (Hon. Rudranath Indarsingh): Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As I rise to make my contribution to the 2010/2011 budget debate, I crave your indulgence to be afforded the latitude to firstly extend my congratulations and that of the entire constituency of Couva South, to the hon. Prime Minister of Trinidad and Tobago, the Member for Siparia, on being elected to the position of being the first female Prime Minister of Trinidad and Tobago [*Desk thumping*] and for her successfully leading the People's Partnership party into the Government of Trinidad and Tobago.

This act of confidence on behalf of the people of Trinidad and Tobago, in the leadership of the Member for Siparia, since May 25, 2010, has seen decisive leadership, tenacity, visionary leadership, patience, and a Prime Minister who understands the pain and suffering of the people of Trinidad and Tobago and who has brought leadership to this country at a time when the records will reflect that Trinidad and Tobago was on the verge of being declared a failed state under the People's National Movement. [*Desk thumping*] As a result of changing the political landscape of Trinidad and Tobago, the atmosphere of doom and gloom has been removed over Trinidad and Tobago. There is now hope in this land, and that hope is reflected in the leadership of the Prime Minister and the distinguished Member for Siparia and the People's Partnership Government of Trinidad and Tobago. As such, I am proud to say that I am indeed privileged to serve the people of Trinidad and Tobago as part of this Government who will deliver the people of Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Speaker, do you know what was even more comforting about this new era of leadership? In less than three months in her being in office, our leader, and that of all the citizens of this country, was recognized by *Time Magazine* for her sterling contribution. Not only to her personal family life, but on her sterling contribution and leadership to the family of Trinidad and Tobago, and for this, the Member for Siparia was recognized amongst the 10 leading female leaders in the world.

2.30 p.m.

Mr. Speaker, it is a pity that I cannot say or give such accolade to any Member on the other side. After two billion-dollar summits, declarations, trips to Copenhagen and diplomacy, moving from one continent to another and so on, we were never recognized on the global stage and probably the Member for San Fernando East can provide the

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answers as they relate to that.

Secondly, Mr. Speaker, I take the opportunity to congratulate you on your elevation to the distinguished and esteemed position of Speaker of this honourable House. [*Desk thumping*] I know from our relationship in another place that you will do yeoman service to this House and for all its Members and you will play a critical role in upholding the rich democracy of Trinidad and Tobago.

Thirdly, Mr. Speaker, I congratulate the hon. Minister of Finance and the Member for Tunapuna for the most progressive and enlightening budget presentation [*Desk thumping*] this country has ever seen since being an independent nation.

Mr. Speaker, the PNM administration was reckless and obscene in its spending, and my colleagues have touched on this particular issue and, in fact, a sigh of relief was expressed on the morning of the 25th of May [*Desk thumping*] in this twin island Republic, my brothers and—my, my—Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, it is without a doubt that public confidence in the management of this country first and the economy has been regained and this will be realized through this budget presentation “Facing the Issues” and “Partnering With All Our People”, now and for the future of Trinidad and Tobago.

Mr. Speaker, this first budget presentation by the hon. Member for Tunapuna was based on true dialogue and consultation with the people, a stark contradiction to the PNM’s policy of arrogance, lack of consultation and, I am forced to say, if there was any consultation on that side, it was through—it was facilitated for those who facilitated the plundering and pilferage of the Treasury of Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*]

You know, Mr. Speaker, I get a feeling of déjà vu in the sense that the previous administrations of the PNM have made numerous mistakes which have resulted in the underdevelopment of Trinidad and Tobago and it seems as though there is a school in the PNM that teaches its leaders how to mismanage this country’s resources and also to ensure that it disappears and that it does not trickle down to the benefit of all the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago. [*Interruption*] San Fernando East.

Mr. Speaker, for the benefit of those on the other side, because since the 8th of September they seem to have not understood this particular budget presentation, and, in fact, all of Trinidad and Tobago seems to be in total agreement with this particular budget presentation. The stakeholders have spoken out and have done so vociferously, saying that this budget presentation will indeed turn around the economy of Trinidad and Tobago.

For the benefit of those on the other side, I want to take the opportunity to remind them and provide a brief snapshot of the reaction, not of the People's Partnership but of the stakeholders in the society as it relates to the fiscal package for the year 2010/2011. It has gotten an A grade rating not only from my colleagues but an A grade rating from Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*] Indeed, I want to quote from the following articles in the print media. The *Guardian* of Friday the 10th of September, page 23 the headline read:

“Budget attractive to man on the street”

And I go on to read by saying to those on the other side:

“By all appearances, Budget 2010/11 is attractive to the man on the street, says economist Dr. Dhanayshar Mahabir.”

Senior Economist attached to the University of the West Indies, St. Augustine.

“‘They have faced no new taxes, concessions and allowances have remained in place and the property tax is no more,’ he outlined, during a post-budget discussion on CNC3.”

In the *Express* of Saturday the 11th of September, 2010 on page 14, in a letter to the editor, the letter of the day which was sent by email by a former executive officer of the Police Social and Welfare Association, that is, Mr. Thomas Cunningham, the article is entitled, “Full Marks for Govt on ‘police budget’”. And it reads:

“Allow me to express my joy on hearing that the office of the Commissioner of Police will receive its own budget.”

He says:

“We...”

That is the Police Service Social and Welfare Association:

“...had advocated that such a move would increase efficiency and build morale in the Police Service.”

I want to also quote from *Newsday* section A Friday the 10th of September, page 10 of the *Newsday* editorial.

“Goodbye ‘dread tax’”

I want the Members on the other side to listen carefully in relation to how the media, especially the media, viewed the property tax that was inflicted upon the citizens of this country by the PNM.

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“The property tax...”

I quote:

“The property Tax...was arguably the last callous act of an administration indifferent toward a people whose funds it had spent without discrimination and who it then expected to foot the cost of its wild spending spree.

Thankfully Finance Minister Winston Dookeran laid it...to rest in his budget presentation...”

Mr. Speaker, it goes on to read:

“Come hell or high water, the Patrick Manning PNM would have their way and raise property taxes.”

As 2009 cleared, we must never forget—we must never forget—the citizens of this country must never forget that the end, as 2009 cleared:

“...it forced the Tax Bill through the legislature with its Minister in the Ministry of Finance...once again attempting to allay panic over the new proposed harsh tax structure.”

The editorial went on to say the People’s Partnership:

“...is setting the tone, sending a message: land and property prices must drop to reasonable values and the people must stop being made to pay for the excesses of a runaway administration.”

We thank again the People’s Partnership for lifting this unnecessary and hard hearted property tax burden and for reversing the PNM’s ultimate act of legislative, political and economic oppression, Mr. Speaker. [*Desk thumping*] That is the *Newsday* editorial in relation to the property tax.

Without dilly-dallying, beating around the bush, Mr. Speaker, the People’s Partnership committed itself to rescinding the property tax and as part of our contract with the people of Trinidad and Tobago which was enunciated in our manifesto, “Prosperity for All” we said simply, and straight to the point, we will rescind the property tax and this was done in the fiscal package of 2010-2011, Mr. Speaker, and this is indeed an indication that this People’s Partnership Government has indeed listened to the pains and cries of the people and the very act on the part of the Minister of Finance has indeed showed that there was true dialogue and the consultation was taken into consideration in relation to the stakeholders of Trinidad and Tobago.

Finally, I want to simply state what was stated by the Couva/Point Lisas Chamber of Commerce when it stated that the con—in *Newsday*, Friday the 10th of September at page 16, that the Couva/Point Lisas Chamber of Commerce supports the budget and the fiscal package for 2010-2011 provided a clear and good picture of the Government's vision for the economy. The Chamber was pleased with the plans to preserve the history of the sugar industry with the establishment of a museum at Sevilla House, Brechin Castle, Couva [*Desk thumping*] and this will also improve tourist attraction to the area.

2.45 p.m.

You see, Mr. Speaker, those on the other side wanted to ensure that there was no history to the sugar industry of Trinidad and Tobago; and, in fact, when they took such a decision in 2003, it was never one for revitalization and expansion of the sugar industry, which was their policy position at that point in time. And from the point of view of where I sit in the constituency of Couva South, this establishment of this museum at Brechin Castle, Couva, will surely be in harmony and in sync with one of the growth poles as enunciated by the Minister of Finance for Couva, Carapichaima, Chaguanas, and in relation to Central Trinidad; because the tourism and the thrust of this venture could also be linked to the Temple in the Sea at Waterloo, and also, the Indian museum which exists in Waterloo in Central Trinidad, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, this budget presentation on the part of the hon. Minister of Finance has its linkages again in a very precise, deep, and crisp way with the manifesto of the People's Partnership. And the People's Partnership, when we campaigned and went to the people of Trinidad and Tobago, we made it very clear that our policy position, one of the main platforms that we will seek to deal with was the economic transformation of Trinidad and Tobago. We stated very clearly that we will pursue initiatives to transform our economy and ensure that fiscal sanity returns to Trinidad and Tobago.

We made it very clear, and it is clearly spelt out, Mr. Speaker, in our manifesto, that the economic monetary and fiscal policies that we would be committed to would ensure that there would be fiscal probity at certain state enterprises. We will also ensure that the investment environment is transformed. We committed ourselves to equitable distribution and diversification of the economy, and we committed ourselves to taking a very thorough look—a very critical look—at the financial system of Trinidad and Tobago and the financial crisis as it relates, or as it related, to the Hindu Credit Union Cooperative Society Limited, and CL Financial. We said very clearly, Mr. Speaker, that we will take

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action as required to address issues such as the financial crisis in CL Financial and the HCU, in the best interest of the people, in a timely and transparent manner; and this we have done, Mr. Speaker. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Speaker, as Minister in the Ministry of Works, and Member of Parliament for Couva South; and after nine years of hearing the other side, and the fact that they led the Government of Trinidad and Tobago; and \$400 billion passed through this country like a dose of salts, I thought that during their respective contributions, those on the other side would have been able to report to this House of the level of development and growth that they had achieved over the last nine years.

But it is sad to say, Mr. Speaker, that Trinidad and Tobago was in a state of infrastructural collapse; and the neglect that my Minister and I, the hon. Member for Chaguanas West, had seen, is unbelievable. In fact, I thought that after \$400 billion was spent by those on the other side, I could report that roads have been paved in Calcutta No. 1, 2 and 3. [*Desk thumping*] Basta Hall, Indian Trail, Carolina, Milton and Dow Village. Bridges at Lucky Lane in Milton and at Diamond would not have collapsed, Mr. Speaker, after \$400 billion was spent by the PNM.

Recreation grounds in Couva South would have been properly lit; walking tracks would have been established; toilet facilities would have been up in these recreation grounds, and the proper drainage system would have been there, Mr. Speaker, and there would have been a regular water supply for the residents of Indian Trail, Phoenix Park and Basta Hall. But the truth that currently exists is a state of rural neglect. That is the only thing that was achieved by the PNM over the last eight years. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Speaker, the hon. Member for Chaguanas West can testify that the worst road I think he saw in the entire of Trinidad and Tobago was Calcutta No. 1 Road, which was never paved for more than 40 years in Trinidad and Tobago.

Hon. Members: Shame.

Mrs. Mc Intosh: UNC never paved that?

Hon. R. Indarsingh: Mr. Speaker, I will not listen to what the Member for Port of Spain North/St. Ann's West has to say at this point in time, and all attempts to distract me will not succeed. [*Laughter*] The level of neglect was transformed, as I said, into a virtual state of collapse. That is why you have to conclude that under the PNM, we were on the verge of being declared a failed state. It was flooding; it was collapse of culvert crossings on the highways and byways. The box drains—the drainage system in a state of chaos, Mr. Speaker; and landslides through the length and breadth of this country, because it is you all

who failed to pay attention to the development of the environment.

Mr. Speaker, as a result of all that came before us, we dealt with it in a very decisive manner, through the exemplary and decisive leadership of our hon. Prime Minister. Like an army ready for battle, she led from the front, and as true troops, we fulfilled her directions and her sense of commitment in relation to serving the people of Trinidad and Tobago.

Mr. Speaker, those on the other side will continue to attempt to criticize all of the positives of this Government, and what they will not tell you is that they wasted in excess of \$556 million on feasibility studies for a rapid rail, and to conceptualize some pie in the sky project as it relates to the transportation system. But what they will not tell you is that we on this side are concerned about the development of Trinidad and Tobago as a country and as a society.

What they will not tell you is that to tackle that level of development, you have to focus on our children in the education system, and that is why this People's Partnership Government will not waste such large sums of money on a pie in the sky project, but we will go full steam ahead with ensuring that our children in the primary school system will be equipped with the necessary skills and tools to ensure that there is the development of our education system in such a way and manner, that in 5, 10, 15 years from today, we will certainly take our place on the world stage from an educational point of view, in addition to all spheres of life. We, as citizens of this country, have been contributing at the level of the global stage, Mr. Speaker.

I am forced to say that after \$400 billion, too, I thought by now that the Estate Business Management Development Company would have delivered all the lands to the ex-employees of Caroni (1975) Limited. In fact, those on the other side, and more so, those that they put to run the affairs of the Estate Business Management Development Company, had no clue or idea as it relates to the agricultural sector.

In fact, they owe this country an explanation as it relates to the strange circumstances that the former Executive Chairman of the EMBD left Trinidad and Tobago in the person of Mr. Utara Rao. After hundreds of millions of dollars being spent at the Estate Business Management Development Company, not one single plot of land for the ex-employees of Caroni (1975) Limited from a residential point of view has been delivered, and the development of the lands from an agricultural point of view have led to wide scale flooding in Central Trinidad, in areas such as Dow Village, California, Windsor Park, Perseverance and Felicity; and the list goes on and on, Mr. Speaker.

That is the track record of those on the other side as it relates to the

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development, also, of the agricultural sector in Trinidad and Tobago, and the whole question of urban and rural planning, and Town and Country Planning. That is the track record of those on the other side, Mr. Speaker.

3.00 p.m.

Mr. Speaker, at the level of the Ministry of Works and Transport, the people of Trinidad and Tobago are, indeed, blessed to have at the helm someone who has a sense of direction, who has a sense of empathy for all the people and who has a vision for the development of the Ministry of Works and Transport, in the distinguished hon. Member for Chaguanas West. [*Desk thumping*]

In fact, the legacy of those on the other side was one of inaction and promises as it related to the Ministry of Works and Transport. Upon taking office, the Member for Chaguanas West and myself found an entire workforce, at all levels and divisions in the Ministry, where self-esteem, morale, dedication and commitment to duty were at an all time low. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Warner: True.

Hon. R. Indarsingh: There was no direction in the Ministry of Works and Transport. As usual, what was being done at the Ministry was in keeping with the PNM's philosophy of non-delivery and its legacy of nonperformance and promises that never materialized. Just to reinforce what I am saying, I want to quote from and refer to the Appropriation Bill debate which took place on Thursday, October 06, 2005. I quote the hon. Member for Diego Martin North/East who said:

"Let me deal with the other vexed problem which is flooding."

Dr. Moonilal: Who said that?

Hon. R. Indarsingh: The Member for Diego Martin North/East. [*Laughter*]

"Let me deal with the other vexed problem which is flooding. The Member for Couva North pooh-poohed the idea of the commencement of the construction of the idea of the Mamoral Dam in 2006. Unless we are stopped by some power higher than ourselves, the Mamoral Dam will begin in fiscal 2006."

I want to reiterate that:

"Unless we are stopped by some power higher than ourselves, the Mamoral Dam will begin in fiscal 2006. You could jump high, jump low and put that in "yuh" pipe and smoke it. It will begin." [*Laughter*] The designs are complete. Just this morning I took a submission to Cabinet to tidy up the finalization of the payments for the final designs for that project. The designs are complete.

Discussions are already in progress and negotiations would commence shortly for relocation of the residents in the Caparo basin that would be affected by the construction of the Mamoral Dam and reservoir."

Those were the utterances of the Member for Diego Martin North/East in 2006, in the 2005/2006 budget debate.

He goes on further to say that:

"You are complaining that the Government is not doing anything and when we come to do something, you mobilize people to protest and obstruct the project. We are not going to tolerate that! The construction of the Mamoral Dam and reservoir which would solve the problem of flooding in the Caparo River basin will commence in 2006. I would be happy to return to this seat for the next budget presentation of the Minister of Finance to hear him say that the construction of the dam and reservoir has commenced. It will be just like the interchange and the highway to Princes Town. They would all begin in this fiscal year." *[Laughter]*

I just want to repeat that for the benefit, not only of those on the other side, but for the national community:

"I would be happy to return to this seat for the next budget presentation of the Minister of Finance to hear him say that the construction of the dam and reservoir has commenced. It will be just like the interchange and the highway to Princes Town. They would all begin in this fiscal year."

Mr. Speaker, they built a ramp in the vicinity of Grand Bazaar and they have been telling the people of Trinidad and Tobago that they built an interchange. *[Laughter]* *[Crosstalk]* They spent in excess of \$1.6 million to have the opening of this ramp; imagine if they had completed the interchange, that opening ceremony might have cost this country in excess of \$11 million. That is the legacy of the PNM. I am sure the hon. Minister of Works and Transport will have much more to say about the issue of flooding and the issue of the Mamoral Dam, because the People's Partnership Government is about service and delivery to the people of Trinidad and Tobago. *[Desk thumping]*

In the past, the Ministry of Works and Transport was one of inaction and a lack of direction; that is a thing of the past. You have heard it. My colleagues on this side have stood up consistently during their respective contributions in this debate and said that requests to the Minister of Works and Transport in relation to the issues confronting and affecting the people, whenever calls, letters or emails

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are sent, they could consider it done in terms of delivery to the people of Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*]

The Member for Arima said last night that for 27 years a bridge and a road which collapsed and separated communities inconvenienced thousands of people in terms of the delivery of goods and services. The PNM did not have the vision to rebuild this particular bridge and reconnect persons who would have been supporting them consistently over the years. [*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. Dr. R. Moonilal*]

Question put and agreed to.

Hon. R. Indarsingh: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and my colleagues on either side.

Mr. Peters: "Dem eh say nothing."

Hon. R. Indarsingh: For 27 years and in less than three months today, that bridge and road are more or less 50 per cent complete in relation to delivering to the people of Arima. For other requests we have been seeing consistently for the last three months, delivery has been the order of the day, whether it is the culvert crossings at the Solomon Hochoy Highway or in the vicinity of the Ato Bolden Stadium, they have been completed in record time. [*Desk thumping*] That in itself speaks volumes in terms of the focus and direction of the Minister of Works and Transport, in relation to the business of works and transport.

Roads are being rehabilitated with the appropriate drainage and the support drainage systems in record time and within budget, whether it is at Scott Road in Penal, Papourie Road in Barrackpore, Mandingo Road in Princes Town, Pierre Road in Felicity or Calcutta Road No. 1. I could go on and on, in terms of the roads that have been rehabilitated under the People's Partnership Government for the last three months.

Hon. Member: Three months?

Hon. R. Indarsingh: Three months. Imagine it took only less than three months, if my memory serves me right. In the first month Calcutta Road No. 1 was on the road to rehabilitation and it was never dealt with for 14 years. That is the curse of the PNM, [*Crosstalk*] in relation to dealing with the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago. Wicked, wicked; if I could only conclude in relation to the level of rural neglect, the level of discrimination and the level of alienation that was carried out by those on the other side as it relates to servicing the people of

Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*]

It would be foolhardy of me, as I speak about all the achievements of the Ministry of Works and Transport, to not pay my sense of appreciation and commendation to the employees of that Ministry at all levels, who have been going beyond the call of duty and responding to the directional and visionary leadership of the Minister of Works and Transport, but also answering the clarion call of the hon. Prime Minister in relation to serving the people of Trinidad and Tobago.

As I pay my sense of appreciation to the employees of the Ministry of Works and Transport, I also want to extend it in terms of paying similar tribute to employees of the various contractors who have been engaged by the Ministry and have been bringing in projects within time and also within budget.

3.15 p.m.

Mr. Roberts: Are they local people?

Hon. R. Indarsingh: So far. And I could say, without contradicting myself, that we are committed to the people of Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*]

To further highlight this, could you imagine two bridges, one which borders Couva South and the constituency of Pointe-a-Pierre, which collapsed in the area of Diamond and one—I do not know if those on the other side would ever have a clue or an idea where Lucky Lane is in Milton Village in Couva. A bridge collapsed and in less than 48 hours two Bailey bridges, one in Milton and one in Diamond have been constructed by employees of the Ministry of Works and Transport. Do you think that that would have gained the attention of the Member for Diego Martin North/East during his tenure as the Minister of Works and Transport? That is service to the people and that is, indeed, dealing with the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago.

Therefore, in the ensuing year, that is the fiscal year, the Ministry of Works and Transport will be committed to the development and maintenance of a sound and efficient road network. It would strengthen systems and reduce congestion throughout the road network. It would expand and improve public transport systems. As we talk about public transport systems and so on, I know that from where we stand there will be the development of bus routes for places such as Phoenix Park and Esperanza in Couva South, which the residents would have never envisaged of seeing a PTSC bus coming within their jurisdiction for public transportation. That will be achieved in the ensuing year, not only for Couva South, but it is the vision to ensure that the public transport is extended in such a

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way that all citizens of Trinidad and Tobago will be proud of the operations of the Public Transport Service Corporation.

I wish the Member for Diego Martin North/East would have been here, because the hon. Member has been attempting to cast aspersions on the leadership of the Member for Chaguanas West and writing emails and letters to the editors and so on, saying that the Member for Chaguanas West is only carrying out policies that he initiated and so on. He bought a number of buses; if my memory serves me right, 85 buses, and following the two summits they remained parked. Not a vision; not an act of attempting to put them into service. But when we do it, all you could hear from the other side, "It was our position; it was our policy; we had a paper; it was our policy position." No implementation at all and then they will come and attempt to hoodwink the population of Trinidad and Tobago by saying it is the Member for Chaguanas West and the hon. Minister of Works and Transport who is stealing their ideas and carrying out their plans and policies. What arrant nonsense! [*Desk thumping*]

We would also be focusing on modernizing and expanding the seaport facilities; we would be concentrating on a first class air transportation sector with modern and secure airport facilities. We are committed to building institutional capacity to manage and operate the transport infrastructure and also to provide adequate drainage and irrigation infrastructure.

A major thrust will be in the area of traffic alleviation. It is recognized that traffic congestion impacts upon productivity and the mental balance of citizens and so on, in relation to day-to-day operations on their respective daily lives. We know the debilitating effect that traffic congestion has on citizens in relation to their quality of life and it is the intention of this Government to ensure that the general population's ability to access effective modes of transportation be given high priority.

Two major initiatives have already been launched, more or less. One is the Priority Bus Route Traffic Scheme which is geared towards better utilization of the existing capacity, as well as a shift in practice towards car pooling. This scheme is being monitored and is being reviewed. Another initiative is the development of a traffic warden system to address the issue of traffic within the inner cities. This is the implementation of the traffic warden system.

I know that they will tell me that, again, it is their policy and their programmes. Since 1993 they were trying to implement the traffic warden system. [*Interruption*] Under section 10(a) of the Motor Vehicles and Road Traffic Act, Chap. 48:50, the Commissioner of Police is given the power to appoint persons as

traffic wardens for the sole purpose of assisting the police in connection with the control and regulation of road traffic and with the enforcement of the law.

The main objective of this traffic warden system will be to keep the roads clear of illegally parked vehicles and to enforce traffic regulations and with the efficient implementation of this programme, it will promote and ensure road safety for both vehicles and pedestrians by contributing to effective management; ensure compliance and enforcement of the laws of Trinidad and Tobago in respect of the Motor Vehicles and Road Traffic Act and assist with the members of the Police Service of Trinidad and Tobago as it relates to the control and regulation of road traffic. It is expected that it would be rolled out in seven geographic regions beginning with phase one in Port of Spain, Chaguanas and San Fernando; phase two, Tunapuna, Arima, Point Fortin and Princes Town.

So from the point of view of where I stand, we are indeed committed to ensuring that Trinidad and Tobago continue on a pathway of positive economic growth and development. We are committed to a number of programmes and initiatives which are clearly spelt out in the Public Sector Investment Programme of 2011 as they relate to transport and communication, roads and bridges, drainage and so on, and the list goes on and on.

With respect to the ensuing months in the financial year, it is important that we understand the people's pain and we face the issues on a frontal basis. This package, this presentation of the hon. Minister of Finance, which is built around the seven pillars of the People's Partnership manifesto that deals clearly with the issues of fostering people-centered development; national and personal security; good governance; steering the country towards a diversified and knowledge intensive economy; moving towards eradicating poverty and promoting greater social justice; to promote and accommodate foreign policy and expand the use and availability of information and communication technology, can only mean that Trinidad and Tobago will continue to have a Prime Minister in the hon. Member for Siparia and a government in relation to the People's Partnership for years to come. My friends on the other side should get accustomed to the seats that they are occupying in terms of the length of time that they would be on the other side.

The 2011 budget presentation has dealt squarely with the issues plaguing the people. It has set an aggressive agenda at reducing uncertainty and restoring confidence in a bid to regaining competitiveness as a country, in terms of our economic indicators. Coming on the heels of two years of negative economic growth, the hon. Minister of Finance has taken the bull by the horns and as a result of the measures he has

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enunciated, will return Trinidad and Tobago to positive economic growth, a pathway of continued development and the only hope for Trinidad and Tobago is the People's Partnership Government.

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

3.30 p.m.

Mr. Fitzgerald Jeffrey (*La Brea*): Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, I congratulate my political leader and the next Prime Minister of Trinidad and Tobago for his very analytical contribution in response to the budget.

Mr. Speaker, we all know of an Australian bowler by the name of Shane Warne. On numerous occasions he dismissed Mike Gatting. One of the balls that he bowled to Mike Gatting was described as the ball of the century because it mesmerized not only Mike Gatting, but also the spectators and even the viewers who were on television.

The opening political statement by the Minister of Finance is the most disdainful and brazen political statement of the 21st Century. He had the gall to say that the people overwhelmingly voted for a new mandate and that they placed their faith, their future and their hands in the People's Partnership. They know quite well what they did. They conned the population. They conned the working class. They conned the pensioners. It is a sad day indeed. You see, Trinidad and Tobago is blessed with a very educated population and you must never try to make our population feel foolish.

Let us go to this document. I came here today not to talk about this thing, but there was so much nonsense on the other side, I must respond. Listen to this:

“Remove all restrictions and qualifications for people to receive an old age pension and thus every citizen will automatically receive a state-funded old age pension upon the attainment of pensionable age.”

[*Interruption*] Forget the 60, we have gone to 65. There are many people in this country who are over the age of 65, who are not entitled to this pension.

[*Interruption*] You would not sidetrack me at all. I am saying that we have to understand what is at work here.

First and foremost, there was an advertisement in the newspaper three days. They ran the advertisement just before the elections. I am asking the national community: How do you explain an advertisement that is very expensive—

Mr. Roberts: Intelligent.

Mr. F. Jeffrey: You want to call it “intelligent”? Okay. You run an advertisement that is “very intelligent”; that says that there would be \$3,000 for old age pension once you reach the age of 60.

Mr. Roberts: It did not say that; it said “pensionable age”.

Mr. F. Jeffrey: Mr. Speaker, for the record, Friday, May 21, 2010 in the *Guardian*:

“Upon reaching pensionable age (60), every citizen will automatically qualify for a state-funded old age pension.”

That is on Friday, May 21. Mr. Speaker, on Saturday, May 22, the same thing is repeated. It is high time they level with the population. Say: Sorry, we did a bad thing. That was not really true. Let us put it aside.

They tried to hoodwink the population. They went a step further and they told us we did not really see the advertisement. These things are not cheap. They are different ads and you are telling me that it is a misprint? Come on! The People’s National Movement went a step further.

When we went to the television station, the radio and the newspapers, they bought out all the prime time on radio, the TV and the space in the newspapers. That meant that the People’s National Movement could not have responded in the way it wanted. That was a FIFA-inspired initiative. [*Desk thumping and laughter*]

It was an expensive ad and they say they did not look at it; then they tell us they did not say that. They went further and said it is not 60, it is 65, but I have shown here this evening—

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, this is about the third time we have had cellphones ringing. I kindly ask Members and those in the Public Gallery to switch off your phones or put them on vibrate.

Mr. F. Jeffrey: Mr. Speaker, the PNM used the platform to draw the attention of the national community, but the People's Partnership did not once tell the population that the ad was a mistake; it is not 60; it is 65 we mean. As a matter of fact, up to the night before the election, they were talking about 60-year-olds getting \$3,000. How dishonest can you be!

I go a step further that even when we look at the minimum wage, they told the population they were going to get a \$20 minimum wage.

Hon. Member: Who say that?

Hon. Member: All of you.

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Mr. F. Jeffrey: Mr. Speaker, we do not have the media in our pockets. *Newsday*, June 03, 2010:

“While on the campaign trail last month, the People's Partnership pledged to increase the minimum wage from the current \$9 to \$20 if they were elected.”

Hon. Members: Who wrote that?

Mr. F. Jeffrey: All your friends. I will tell you something. There were three main reasons why people voted for the People's Partnership. Let me tell you the three. They looked at them and said: In that line-up, you have a gentleman who was a Cabinet Minister from 1986 to 1991, who later became Governor of the Central Bank, so he should know. You have a leader who was a Cabinet Minister from 1995 to 2001, so she should know. You have a labour leader of some repute. The *OWTU Speaks Out* is a programme I followed when you were on it.

Mr. McLeod: So you got some education.

Mr. F. Jeffrey: Of course. Hear the education. On August 28, 2006, hear what the hon. Member for Pointe-a-Pierre said:

“We are also demanding a more livable minimum wage of \$14 per hour.”

And up to now you cannot raise the minimum wage yet?

Mr. Peters: Why you did not raise it?

Mr. F. Jeffrey: You know me very well.

Mr. Speaker: Order! Order! Member for La Brea, I would like you to address the Chair to avoid the crosstalk. Hon. Members, I would like to hear the Member for La Brea and I am sure you would want to hear him, so give him your undivided attention.

Mr. F. Jeffrey: Mr. Speaker, to put a lid on this pension, I remembered a song by a gentleman named Ben E. King. I would like to make a little conversion. "Don't play it no more". I say: "Don't say it no more. You know that you lied, you lied, you lied, lied, lied, lied, lied."

It was their former leader [*Cellphone rings*] Mr. Basdeo Panday, who said that there were three lessons in politics and the first lesson was to dangle goodies before the supporters. You do not have to give it to them; you only have to make them feel they will get it.

That is what happened. You promised them \$20 minimum wage; you make them feel they would get it and they did not get it. You promised people, 60 years

and over \$3,000 and other.

Mr. Speaker: Member, address the Chair to avoid the crosstalk, please!

Mr. F. Jeffrey: You promised the \$3,000 for those 60 years and over and you did not give it to them, so you have them.

On Tuesday, September 07, there is an article that is very instructive, written by one of their supporters, E. David from Marabella. This is what he had to say:

“This people's Partnership Government has finally succeeded in deceiving all seniors including many of their own supporters with their reckless election campaign promises and putting their trustworthiness into question.”

Pensioners are considered old, but certainly they are not stupid as some politicians may wish to have us believe. Therefore, Mr. Speaker—

Miss Mc Donald: I would like to draw the House's attention to Standing Order 40:

“Rules for Members not Speaking.

A Member present in the House during a debate—

(b) shall maintain silence while another Member is speaking, and shall not interrupt, except in accordance, with these Standing Orders; and

(c) shall otherwise conduct himself in a fit and proper manner.”

Mr. Speaker: Members, I would like you to also make reference to Standing Order 40. You should pull out your book and be guided.

Mr. F. Jeffrey: Therefore, most of us old people who voted would have done so on the basis of that promise, expecting to receive the entitlement of \$3,000 as promised on the attainment of a pensionable age, in addition to our NIS benefits.

Mr. Speaker, I do not make idle boasts. This afternoon, I lay down the gauntlet. I challenge this Government to call a general election now. [*Laughter*]

3.45 p.m.

I am certain that they will not get as many as the 29 seats that they now enjoy. I also make the statement that if they got 29 or more seats, I will resign and never enter the corridors of politics.

Mr. Speaker, if this budget is driven by the People's Partnership manifesto, which they say is Government policy, then we cannot believe anything that they say. If they can be strangers to the truth on the senior citizens' pension, then I

cannot trust them with our training programmes.

We remember well in that period 1995—2001, I have the budget presentation for 2001—they never said anything about the OJT programme and the Civilian Conservation Corps. Do you know what? They gave them slow poison. They killed the Civilian Conversation Corps, the OJT programme and the youth camps.

Now we are hearing a talk that they are going to extend GATE. The same figure that they had from the last time, \$625 million, is the same figure they have for this year, but they are expanding it.

They will be restructuring the OJT programme and they would re-evaluate the MuST programme and the Helping You Prepare for Employment (HYPE) programme. What they are saying is a slow death for those programmes. They will suffocate those programmes as they did in their last incarnation. The population is watching this Government with a lizard eye.

We heard about UTT being a feeder for UWI. I want to know what madness is going on across on the other side. UTT is a very reputable university. I wish to warn this Government not to tamper with that institution. You may have your problems with the individual, but the whole question is the institution is bigger than the man and the quicker we learn that the better.

I felt good somewhere in the presentation of the Minister of Finance when he said: “It is time to address the plight of the poor and the disadvantaged.” He said further that the choice is to reprioritize the spending to better serve the people. I said: “Yes Lord, um-huh.” When you look at his face with that wry and brazen look, he went on to say that Alutrint will cease. I wonder if something did not burn deep down inside of him about what he is doing to the people of La Brea.

When we look at how they function, it calls for concern. It seems as though the COP-led part of this organization seems to be influenced by some so-called environmentalists. I want to describe them to this honourable House. They are filthy rich. Some of them have acquired their wealth by questionable means. They are well-to-do professionals who do not live anywhere close to La Brea. Their children attend the best schools and they send their children abroad to study in the best universities. They want their children to study engineering, medicine, et cetera, and come back and enjoy the best in this country. Some of the biggest condominiums and mansions can be found on the mountainside. We know the problem in Trinidad and Tobago with flooding. They denude the hillsides, removed all the vegetation and what we have is the ecological embarrassment in this country.

In La Brea, before the advent of Alutrint, this is the picture. There were many people in La Brea whose homes had rotting galvanize. Every time the rain fell, their clothes in the house would get wet and many of those children could not have gone to school because their clothes were wet. They had no beds or mattresses. They slept on the floor on newspapers. Many times they drank bush tea without sugar, not because of choice, but by design. In came the Alutrint and they started a social programme in the community. They created employment and what a transformation took place in La Brea. When you look at the results in the schools in and around La Brea, what we have seen is a dramatic improvement in the results of the children in those schools.

Up till 2009, there were 1,982 persons in the La Brea constituency who were pursuing tertiary education. Thanks to a People's National Movement government with the GATE and HELP programmes. Now, you are telling me that you want to stop the smelter.

Let me tell you a bit about the so-called environmentalists. They have a history in wanting the poor to remain poor and the rich to get richer. I will demonstrate that to you. Many years ago, the late Dr. Eric Williams' government wanted to link Matelot with Blanchisseuse; two poor communities. He wanted to build a road. The environmentalists came and they protested and talked about ecology. No road was built. Today, the people in Matelot and Blanchisseuse remain in abject poverty. Where are the so-called environmentalists to improve the quality of life of those people?

In the period 1986—1991, a poor, humble but ambitious entrepreneur by the name of William Munroe wanted to build the cultural centre called the Spectrum on the Mucurapo foreshore. Do you know what happened? The environmentalists came up again stating that they are going to destroy the ecology, the spawning grounds for the fish would be destroyed and that the aesthetics from the mangrove will be tarnished, so "yuh cyah do dat". They blanked William Munroe. Not many years later, they cleared an acreage of land, about three or four acres. More mangrove was gone, in order to build Movie Towne and Marriott Hotel. Not a sound was heard from the environmentalists. No longer was the ecology being destroyed. No longer was the spawning ground under threat. This is the thing that hurts the poor people in this country.

We come to La Brea. Before they started to think about smelter, they were just clearing the site for industrialization. Do you know what happened? The environmentalists came up again and said: "The ecology, the Manicou, the Agouti" and so on. That could be a real disaster for hunters who use it for an

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income. The people of La Brea are not hunters. We have a history. The first industrialized town in the Caribbean was La Brea. For over 100 years, we carried this country on the backs of the people of La Brea. Now you are saying that La Brea must not enjoy part of the patrimony of this country.

I want to deal with this talk about cancer, because we must be careful. They are talking about smelter and cancer. I want to look at Norway. This is the smelter plant here. [*Photographs shown*] People are living across here. I would go to Hoyanger. Here again is a smelter plant and people are living there. Mosjun, look at the smelter here and look at the residency. We know for a fact that in Norway the quality of life is extremely high. If we know for fact that smelting was cancerous, those plants would have been closed a long time. As a matter of fact, there is tourism in Norway. People would visit the sites just to enjoy the beauty of the environment.

I want to go a step further. I want us to look at—they said that Norway is cold, so that is a bad example—Bahrain. Bahrain has an area of 290 square miles. Trinidad and Tobago has an area of 1,980 square miles. [*Interruption*]

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, please, let us have a very civilized debate. The crosstalk is disturbing the *Hansard* people. Kindly tone down, please.

Mr. F. Jeffrey: The average length of Bahrain is 30 miles. The average width is 14 miles. Trinidad is 15 miles average length and 37 miles average width. Bahrain has an aluminium smelter producing over of 870,000 metric tonnes every year. It stands to reason that if it is so—I would go back a little bit. The plant in Bahrain started in 1971. We are in 2010. It means if cancer is what is associated with smelting, then in Bahrain they should have real problems.

4.00 p.m.

Let us look at some things. The death rate up to July 2009 in Bahrain is 4.29 deaths per thousand. Do you know what it is in Trinidad? It is 8.11 deaths per thousand. [*Desk thumping*] The birth rate in Bahrain is 17.01 per thousand and in Trinidad it is 14.36.

Mr. Speaker, the infant mortality rate is 29.3 per thousand in Trinidad and Tobago; in Bahrain it is 15.09 per thousand, which is much more.

Life expectancy: Males in Trinidad and Tobago, 67.98; in Bahrain, 72.67; females in Trinidad and Tobago, 73.82; in Bahrain, 77.78. Mr. Speaker, what this is really telling us here is that this thing about this smelter thing is baloney. [*Desk thumping*]

Bahrain Aluminium Smelter: In 1997, the United Nations Environmental

Programme presented an award to Alba, the Aluminium Plant in Bahrain, for its environmental programme and so on. In 2000, they won the Millennium Business Award for Environmental Achievement. Alba was one of only twelve companies in the world to win this prestigious award presented by the United Nations Environmental Programme.

Mr. Speaker, I go a step further. In Trinidad, a team of reputable scientists; Mukesh Khare, Prof. Clement K. Sankat, Gyan S. Shrivastava and Chintanapalli Venkobachar, hear what they said:

“Over the last decade, the damage from fluoride emissions to surrounding flora and fauna has largely been eliminated through prevalent use of modern and efficient fluoride control devices in potrooms—hence the reduction in PFC compound emissions to the atmosphere. The surveys show that smelters in the developing world are performing as well as, if not better than, some plants in Europe or North America...”

Mr. Speaker, they have another agenda. They do not want La Brea to develop.
[*Laughter and desk thumping*]

Mr. Speaker, in 1995, the PNM government signed an agreement to put down Mississippi chemicals. They came and turned the sod, and election came and it changed. [*Desk thumping*] In came the UNC Government, and they switched the plant from La Brea to Couva. During that entire period, from 1996—2001, not a single plant was placed in La Brea. I ask the question—we know Couva is UNC territory or the People's Partnership territory; La Brea is PNM country; and Point Fortin is PNM country.

Mr. Roberts: Marginal! [*Interruption*]

Mr. F. Jeffery: Mr. Speaker, the people in La Brea are asking the question. What is the difference between Couva and La Brea? The question is being asked: What is the difference? Mr. Speaker, it seems as though that it is all right for certain things to happen in Couva, but it is bad for La Brea.

On Thursday, November 12, 1998 at the Trinidad Hilton—in 1998 the party in power was the United National Congress. The persons in the Cabinet was Basdeo Panday, the then Prime Minister of Trinidad and Tobago—now come anti-smelter, but pro-smelter in 1998—Attorney General, Ramesh Lawrence Maharaj; and the Prime Minister, the Member for Siparia, was a Member of the Cabinet then, and they agreed for the smelter in Couva.

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Mr. Speaker, let me read what the agreement says.

Miss Hospedales: Read it! Read it!

Mr. F. Jeffrey: It is expected that the plant will directly employ over 550 persons in permanent jobs. During the construction period, it is estimated that over 2,500 jobs would also be created. Relative to other energy industries in the natural gas based sector an aluminium project would generate—

Mr. Speaker: Member for La Brea, could you just quote the name of the document and the page number? Once you are reading, you should quote. Give us the name of the document.

Mr. F. Jeffery: It is an address by the hon. Basdeo Panday, Prime Minister of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago, on the occasion of the signing ceremony for the project agreement for an aluminium smelter in Trinidad and Tobago; November 12, 1998. [*Interruption*]

Mr. Speaker, they were going to build two smelters; each consisting of 237,000 tonnes. It was good then to put it in Couva, but for La Brea to get a modern-day aluminium smelter, 125,000 tonnes, it is bad. I am asking the question: Do you believe that Ramesh Lawrence Maharaj and company love La Brea more than they love Couva? Do you think they prefer the people in Couva to die and the people in La Brea to survive? No! Mr. Speaker, it is wickedness, deceitfulness and vindictiveness at work. [*Desk thumping*] But, Mr. Speaker, the longest rope has an end. [*Interruption*]

Mr. Speaker, what is bad is that we hear the Minister of Finance say no Smelter, but nothing in place. This means that just what happened in 1995—2001, is the same thing that is going to happen in 2010—2015. Nothing is going to happen at that site in La Brea.

I am heartened by what we hear from people who are saying that it is not looking like this Government is going to last five years. Mr. Speaker, I hope the Member for D'Abadie/O'Meara apologizes to the woman in Tobago—the artiste in Tobago—for his raucous behaviour in Tobago, and I hope he paid her as well. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Speaker, under the whole question of the smelter, almost US \$1 billion had been spent on the port, the estate as well as the power plant, and it is just 1 per cent gas consumption rate. Mr. Speaker, you would remember that in 2008, the Capex for the smelter was US \$590 million of which US \$400 million was going to be financed through a soft loan with the Exim Bank from China. The remaining US \$190 million represents shareholders' equity with 60 per cent by the

Government of Trinidad and Tobago and 40 per cent by Sural of Venezuela.

The Government of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago invested a total of US \$74.1 million. Mr. Speaker, the balance remaining is \$39.9 million. This means that is only four per cent of the US \$1 million that is invested by the Government in the Alutrint project. How could a government reach so far or near to fruition and then cancel and say no smelter? This has to be madness to the highest degree. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Speaker, we know that as far as the smelter is concerned, there are a number of advantages. At the completion of the plant, over 775 permanent high-paying jobs will become available; and approximately 3,000 jobs from downstream activities from the smelter. During the construction, 2,000 jobs will be created. I want this honourable House to know that over 1,982 persons in La Brea are pursuing tertiary education. People are getting ready and making themselves marketable for the completion of the smelter.

Mr. Speaker, we need to understand as well that when you compare the smelter with other energy-based industries, it will take Alutrint 50 thousand cubic feet of gas for each job created. Mr. Speaker, do you know what is the case with the other energy-based industries? It is seven million cubic feet of gas. Mr. Speaker, I do not know if the other side believe talk that because 50 is more than seven—but we are talking now about \$50 thousand on one hand and \$7 million on the other. Mr. Speaker, if we are talking about economics, it makes sense to continue with the smelter. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Speaker, in terms of net foreign exchange, you have over US \$100 million per annum, plus when you think about the rental of the port and the use of the port—you are talking about electricity generation from TGU and T&TEC and the rental from NEC—over US \$65 million will be obtained each year.

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. A. Roberts*]

Question put and agreed to.

4.15 p.m.

Mr. F. Jeffrey: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Let us go on with this thing, hydrogen fluoride emission. Mr. Speaker, we know that there are smelters around the world that are toxic, particularly those smelters from the 1940s and '50s. Their rates

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of emission were very high, but we have gone a long way since then. We have reached the stage that the international benchmark for hydrogen fluoride emission was three microns per cubic metre. Through the stringent measures by the EMA, they brought it down to one—one micron per cubic centimetre and Alutrint has reached that. So in terms of hydrogen fluoride emission, Alutrint is on solid ground.

Mr. Speaker, we are talking about the technology. We have two types of technology involved in smelting. We have the Söderburg and we have the prebake, and nobody is taking the time to say, "Listen, what is the difference between the two?" In the Söderburg type is an open pot and this one has more emissions and we have the close pot or the prebake, which is the one that Alutrint was going to build.

In 1998, they did not even know what kind of pot; whether it was open pot or close pot they were going to put in Couva. But it is all right. You all love La Brea so much that they must not get it.

I have already spoken about the question of employment, and I want to talk about spent pot liner. I spoke about Bahrain, 290 square kilometres, and they got United Nations awards, what happens to the spent pot liner. Mr. Speaker, it is the same thing. It goes to Arkansas in the United States. That is a global network arrangement. It goes to Arkansas in America and they do their own processing and so on. The spent pot liner after about five or six years in the plant is taken out, put in a sealed container as a tool by the International Maritime Organization, and under the Basel Convention it is transported to Arkansas in America. So that pot liner has no problem as far as Trinidad and Tobago is concerned.

In terms of the downstream activities, there is a multiplying effect of almost 10 as far as it is concerned. We have not talked about the photovoltaic type plants. We heard about shipbuilding, but do you know what they use to make those things? Aluminum! It would be a good thing to build the aluminum smelter. You have the output from the aluminum smelter to put your photovoltaic type plant for your shipbuilding on whatever industry you want to put down. Again, you have the output from the aluminum smelter to continue. Mr. Speaker, the problem has nothing to do with the smelter per se. In Trinidad and Tobago, we have a serious drug problem, and it pays to leave places like Matelot, Blanchisseuse, La Brea, Cap-de-ville, Iacos, undeveloped. Do you know what happened? That is where things come in. So it is good business to squeeze the people of La Brea. Keep them poor so that your trade will flourish, but there is a real awaking in La Brea.

Right now, the number of people in La Brea on drugs has been decreasing rapidly. People understood the opportunities opened by Alutrint. We look at people like Kadisha and Khadidra Debessette, Patrice Vincent and Camille Charles, who played for Trinidad and Tobago in the recent World Cup Under 17. They come from La Brea. They carry the dreams, the aspirations and hope of our people.

Mr. Speaker, we cannot play with the future of people. I want to draw your attention to what D. Wiltshire says: "How come no one has asked for the cumulative impacts of the several ammonia, urea, and petrochemical plants in Point Lisas, or is it that Central Trinidad is too busy enjoying the wealth and economic benefits from Point Lisas Industrial Estate to care about the environment?" La Brea will rise. [*Desk thumping*] I want this national community to know that the first oil well to be drilled in the world was in 1857 in La Brea.

Mr. Peters: No.

Mr. F. Jeffrey: Mr. Speaker, I also want this community to know that the only place in the Caribbean that is making offshore platform is in La Brea, with La Brea labour. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Peters: You are contradicting yourself.

Mr. F. Jeffrey: I also want to make the statement that the youngest island scholar to win the Jermingham Gold Medal at age 14 and a half was born and bred in La Brea. [*Desk thumping*] For those who believe that La Brea people are "dottish" or stupid, you have something else coming.

Dr. Moonilal: What about "duncy"?

Mr. F. Jeffrey: I want you to realize, Mr. Speaker, that there are consequences for our action. We signed the agreement with Votorantim Metais in Brazil—the largest vertically integrated smelter in the world. That is Brazil's pet plant—and Votorantim was interested in investing 60 per cent in the plant. What is the problem? So market is not a problem. Additional to that, even the internal downstream, we have opportunities for local entrepreneurs to benefit from the plant. We also have indications as well from—Mr. Speaker, I am being disturbed here; I ask for your protection.

Mr. Speaker: You have my protection.

Mr. F. Jeffrey: The Chinese government—and China is the second largest economy in the world—helped us with this loan of US \$400 million for the plant, as well as their technology. We are turning our backs on the Chinese. We know

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the influence of the Chinese government on the international money market. We are saying, no. We are also telling the international community that these agreements that we have signed, we are not to keep them. There is a price to pay. It will damage our geopolitical relationship with the outside world. It is not too late to recover from the damage that is being done to our international reputation.

Mr. Speaker, in haste, we made the statement against the smelter without considering or talking to the Chinese or the Brazilians. Now is the time for us to make some sort of arrangement to meet with the Chinese government or Votorantim Matais from Brazil. If you want to make greater demands for more activities downstream, do so, but do not close down the smelter. The same way they turned back from the 60 years and gone to 65, is the same way they could turn back and build the smelter. [*Desk thumping*]

We talk about the photovoltaic plant and the recycling plant will only yield about 140 jobs, and about 900 jobs under the construction phase. The Alutrint smelter will provide over 775 high paying jobs. Do you know what that means? If there is a traffic jam going into Port of Spain every day, what you are going to see happening is traffic coming down to La Brea and easing the pressure.. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Speaker, I recognized in the presentation that no mention was made of the HELP loan. They talked about GATE and they did not mention anything about HELP loan. Let me explain to you what this HELP loan is all about. There are people in this country who do not have the wherewithal to travel to the university. So for example, even though we have GATE and we have free tuition, you are living in Aripero and you have to go to UWI, how are you going to get there if your parents are not working anywhere? Where are they getting the money for transportation, books, food or rent? The HELP loan is there to assist. I can boast because in the La Brea constituency we have this year, 131 persons benefiting from the HELP loan in the Roussilac area which include Aripero. We have 20 of them. For example, parents who are working CEPEP or URP, their children will be able to go to university because of the HELP loan facility. I ask the Minister of Finance, if it is an omission on your part, please, reinstate the HELP loan to facilitate that. [*Desk thumping*]

I want to ask the Minister of Works and Transport: I understand that there is a water taxi coming down to Point Fortin and it is bypassing La Brea?

Mr. Warner: No

Mr. F. Jeffrey: It is not bypassing La Brea?

Mr. Warner: No!

Mr. F. Jeffrey: Very good. I just wanted to make sure. I am also asking you, Member for Chaguanas West, to consider La Brea roads. Our roads need paving too. [*Crosstalk*] We started to get some roads paved, but we just want the Minister—[*Laughter*] We had a number of roads paved, and we are just asking the Member for Chaguanas West to continue the good work, as well as drainage. We have a serious flooding problem in the Palo Seco area. We are asking, Mr. Speaker, for the Minister of Works and Transport to initiate some kind of work to help deal with the flooding in the Palo Seco area.

Mr. Speaker, as I am on my legs, I want to ask for two more favours. Petrotrin pensioners are the sore point. I saw the Minister of Labour, Small and Micro Enterprise Development—yes the Minister of Labour, Small and Micro Enterprise Development knows about it. There is a serious problem in terms of unification of the pension plan, and we do hope that after this budget, we would work on that to ensure that the people of Santa Flora and company and so on, feel a bit more at ease.

Clico. There are people in my constituency who took their gratuity from the oil company and invested it in Clico. Some of them are in their 70s, and if they have to wait 20 years to get their money, they would die. I am asking for some kind of heart—[*Interruption*]

Hon. Members: Calder Hart.

Mr. F. Jeffrey:—for these poor people. We could laugh here, but imagine you get your gratuity and put the whole thing in Clico, and then hear that for excess of \$75,000, you have to wait 20 years. No interest. That is the problem.

In closing, Mr. Speaker, I want to talk about two things. The future of the aluminum industry because—

Mr. Speaker: Member for La Brea, you have 14 more minutes to complete your 75 minutes. I do not know how many pages you have and if it will take you two minutes, the House will allow you to go two minutes, or do you want to come back after tea so that you can have even if it is five minutes you want.

Mr. F. Jeffrey: I will continue after tea.

Mr. Speaker: Okay. Hon. Members, it is now 4.30 p.m., this House is now suspended until 5.00 p.m.

4.30 p.m.: *Sitting suspended.*

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5.00 p.m.: *Sitting resumed.*

Mr. F. Jeffrey: [*Desk thumping*] Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. We wanted to concentrate, Mr. Speaker, on the future of the aluminium industry.

Mr. Speaker, at this point in time we know that there is a glut on the world markets. There is excess capacity but, Mr. Speaker, that is in keeping with what the global situation is at this point in time with the recession. However, Mr. Speaker, it is expected that by 2012 the situation in the aluminium industry should be bright again. The aluminium industry is like any other commodity, Mr. Speaker, you have rise and fall. At this point in time the price of aluminium is low but in about two years' time the price is supposed to be going back up, Mr. Speaker, and this puts us in an advantageous position in that the aluminium smelter cannot be built overnight. It would take another two or three years for the aluminium plant to be completed and, Mr. Speaker, it means that we would be finishing at the right time, if we continue from now, to benefit for the rising prices in 2012 and thereon.

Mr. Speaker, I want to quote from David Easten, a very respected person in the aluminium business and he had this to say.

“One thing that the experts all agree on however, is that given the current situation, the U.S. recession is not going to end anytime soon, so it may be at least a year or more before things begin to pick up in that area.

One bright spot on the future map for aluminum investors is the current trend in government regulators demanding higher fuel efficiency in new automobiles that is not going to go away. This will only lead to more aluminum being used by automobile manufacturers to maintain compliance.”

Mr. Speaker, the very highly respected authority on aluminium, CRU, had this to say. They forecast the demand to grow by almost 5 million tonnes this year and to nearly double over the next decade due to population growth and widespread globalization. Consumption is slated to be 68 million tonnes in 2020 up from 40 million tonnes this year.

Mr. Speaker, the Norwegian Minister of Trade and Industry, Trond Giske, says, “When 1.3 billion people go from a rural economy into the industrial economy this will require a lot of aluminium.” Mr. Speaker, China and India are both set to move from this rural to urbanization, Mr. Speaker, and, Mr. Speaker, mass transport clearly is about acceleration and the lighter you can make the train the better it is. Aluminium has a great role to play. And so, Mr. Speaker, I say, despite how gloomy the picture may be at this point in time, down the road, in

about two years' time, Mr. Speaker, we would see happy days again with the aluminium and Trinidad and Tobago stands to benefit if we let good sense prevail.

Mr. Speaker, I want to make this point that I invite the hon. Minister of Energy and Energy Affairs, the Member for San Fernando West, or the Prime Minister, Member for Siparia, to come down to La Brea and listen to the people of La Brea. Do not take my word for it. Do not take my word for it. Come down to La Brea and speak to the people. [*Desk thumping*] Mr. Speaker, it is an injustice to allow Kublalsingh and Vine to speak for the people of La Brea. They cannot. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Speaker, not too long ago David Sinclair, who was a COP candidate for Laventille West, came from Arima. He came down to La Brea, jumped on a van in which I was seated and “pong” the daylight out of that van. Mr. Speaker, up to this day neither the political leader of the COP nor the deputy has had the courtesy to apologize. Mr. Speaker, that sends a bad signal for this country. Mr. Speaker, I am certain that the Member for Chaguanas West will never condone such acts. I am certain about it. [*Desk thumping*] It is all well to protest, Mr. Speaker, but when you reach the point where you are going to try to damage somebody, that is where you must draw the line. [*Desk thumping*]

Ms. Cox: A COP candidate?

Mr. F. Jeffrey: Of course. Mr. Speaker, that should tell us something, that that small bunch of protestors that was outside the gate when the Prime Minister was turning the sod for the power plant on the 10th of June last year, Mr. Speaker, the majority of those people were not from La Brea, they were from outside, “all Arima, all Claxton Bay”, came down, Mr. Speaker, to protest, while the bulk of the people in La Brea were really obsessed, right, with that kind of action by those people, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, we are a forgiving people. Just as I forgive David Sinclair for his foolishness, Mr. Speaker, so too the people of La Brea would like to forgive those who would have had wrong notions about the smelter. And so we ask them to join with us to put La Brea back on the map where it rightfully belongs. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Speaker, I want to raise this question. Let me assume that La Brea was Couva, right? [*Interruption*] Let me assume La Brea was Couva and, Mr. Speaker, Alutrint wanted to put down a smelter in Couva and the people in Couva wanted the smelter but they had people like Vine and Kublalsingh “who against it”. Will the Government then have said no to the smelter? Mr. Speaker, I believe, let us try to understand the seriousness with which we are dealing. This is

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no joke. [*Interruption*] This is serious business we are talking about here. [*Interruption*]

Mr. Speaker, [*Interruption*] Mr. Speaker, we want the population of Trinidad and Tobago to understand what is at work. [*Interruption*] Mr. Speaker, let me reiterate, Mr. Speaker [*Interruption*]*—*Mr. Speaker, I am being disturbed by the Member for Fyzabad. I cannot concentrate, Mr. Speaker. I ask for your protection.

Mr. Speaker: Yes you have my protection. Continue. Member. Continue. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. F. Jeffrey: Mr. Speaker, in conclusion I just want to put back some salient points to leave with the national community. Mr. Speaker, the gas usage of the aluminium smelter is just 1 per cent of the 4.1 billion cubic feet of gas per day—1 per cent, Mr. Speaker. So that is minuscule and so on. If they are talking about high gas usage, then you have to talk about “them other plants” because aluminium smelter, the amount of gas that they are going to use per day is minuscule. That is the first point, Mr. Speaker.

The second point, Mr. Speaker, is the employment situation as far as gas is concerned. It will only take 50,000 cubic feet of gas to create one job in Alutrint, and, Mr. Speaker, that speaks volumes. In the other energy based industries, it is 7 million cubic feet of gas. So there and then, Mr. Speaker, that is another point. The third point, Mr. Speaker, employment. 775 permanent, high-paying jobs will become available; 3,000 downstream and indirect and 2,000 during the construction phase. Which other industry could come to Trinidad and generate that amount of employment?

Mr. Speaker, the return on assets would be 10 per cent, Mr. Speaker. The return on shareholders’ investment, 22 per cent and, Mr. Speaker, it is a 7.5 year payback period. Mr. Speaker, I make the point as well that the net earning from foreign exchange is US 100 million—over that. In terms of total foreign exchange, Mr. Speaker, it would be of the vicinity of US 400 million.

And so, Mr. Speaker, I say this evening, that we stand ready. People make mistakes, Mr. Speaker. People make mistakes, governments make mistakes and yes, you did not have all the facts, Mr. Speaker. When you made that decision, you were moved by emotion and we forgive that. Now that we have put the facts on the table, Mr. Speaker, I urge Members opposite, including the hon. Minister of Finance, Member of Parliament for Tunapuna, let good sense prevail, build the smelter and let La Brea be a part of Trinidad and Tobago in its rightful place. I thank you. [*Desk thumping*]

The Minister of Tobago Development (Hon. Vernella Alleyne-Toppin):
[Desk thumping] Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, please permit me to preface my contribution with a few congratulatory remarks. Mr. Speaker, I offer my sincerest congratulations to you on your elevation to the esteemed office of Speaker of the House of Representatives of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago. *[Desk thumping]* I embrace the opportunity also to congratulate our hon. Prime Minister, even in her absence, for the people-focused change leadership philosophy she has demonstrated in governance in Trinidad and Tobago.

Our Prime Minister has the signal honour of being the first female Attorney General of our country, the first female leader of a political party in Trinidad and Tobago, the first female Leader of the Opposition in the Parliament of Trinidad and Tobago, the first female Prime Minister of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago, the first mother of our nation *[Interruption]* and the first Prime Minister ever *[Interruption]* to visit sitting Chief Secretary in his office in 10 years.

It is indeed instructive that the *Time* magazine lauds her as one of the top 10 female leaders in the world. I am sure that I speak for all of my colleagues when I say it is a privilege and an honour to be selected by you as members of your Government, Madam Prime Minister. We thank you. We all agree that she is indeed royal.

I extend congratulations also to the hon. Minister of Finance for his pellucid presentation of the first budget of the People's Partnership Government. The budget statement has generated positive reviews from many quarters, including accounting and investment firms. Mr. Speaker, there is blinding brilliance on this side of the House. *[Desk thumping]* I praise also my colleagues in the People's Partnership for their unparalleled demonstration of positive attitudes, values and skills that translate naturally into good governance. I commend also the people of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago for their superior wisdom in investing confidence in the people's partnership. I assure you, Mr. Speaker, the people of Trinidad and Tobago will be well served. *[Desk thumping]*

Mr. Speaker, the revolutionary creation of a Ministry of Tobago Development by the Prime Minister is consistent with the ethos of innovation of the People's Partnership Government. Mr. Speaker, I beg your leave to thank our hon. Prime Minister for the privilege afforded me to serve the people of Trinidad and Tobago in the capacity of Minister of Tobago Development.

Mr. Speaker, let me now respond to some of the issues raised by the Member for Diego Martin West, but first, let me thank him profoundly for campaigning for us, for effecting an early election and for being a major operative in the removal of the past

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administration. [*Desk thumping*] Mr. Speaker, I invite the hon. Member for Diego Martin West to join us on this side to enjoy the fruits of his labour. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Speaker, the fact that the hon. Member for Diego Martin West asked what is the purpose of laptops signals that even the most able among our learners, even politicians, need to broaden our learning and thinking methodology lest we ourselves be classified as “duncy heads”. Twenty-first Century teaching and learning seek to place equal emphasis on the data driven measurement of quality first teaching, as much as it focuses on measurement of learning in an environment which closely resembles the workforce environment for which the students are being prepared.

Mr. Speaker, the Member for Diego Martin West also highlighted that the People’s Partnership Government has provided inadequately for fishing, the cassava industry and the Tobago Venture Capital Company. In the case of fishing, the THA received in 2010 \$2.6 million and this People’s Partnership has allocated for 2011 \$7.3 million.

5.15 p.m.

This, Mr. Speaker, represents more than a 300 per cent increase. In the case of the cassava industry, in 2009, the THA was allocated \$900,000. In 2010, the then Government reduced the figure to \$200,000, and in 2011, the People’s Partnership maintained the \$200,000. Perhaps, Mr. Speaker, the then Prime Minister, who was also Minister of Finance, did not see the wisdom of maintaining the sum of \$900,000. That equates to a percentage decline of 450 per cent, with which the Chief Secretary was comfortable.

In the village of Castara, there is a story about a fishing vessel purchased by the THA called the “Capital of Paradise”, run by a company called FIPCOTT, with ghost directors and no accountability for moneys allocated. Mr. Speaker, two years ago, when there was offshore drilling in Charlotteville, an oil company allegedly paid compensation to the THA for the loss of earnings for the fishermen there. To date, no fisherman in Charlotteville has been paid.

So much noise is being made about the Venture Capital Company. The Tobago Venture Capital Company was first mentioned in the 2010 budget, where \$10 million was sought. It did not fly with the Prime Minister of the day, so he gave them a mere \$1 million. They were comfortable with it. The People’s Partnership Government has maintained the same \$1 million, yet there is a big outcry about inadequate funding by this People’s Partnership Government for this item. I want to reassure the Tobago community that we have provided a total sum of \$7.5 million, directly to the THA, to

address the development of the small business sector, including the sum allocated to the Tobago Venture Capital Company.

Mr. Speaker, the Member of Parliament for Diego Martin West has told this honourable House that the highest ever allocation to the THA was in 2009, in the amount of \$1.993 billion. But, Mr. Speaker, I must emphasize here that in addition to the \$1.975 billion allocated in this fiscal year directly to the House of Assembly, additional amounts will be spent by other ministries in collaboration with the THA for the benefit of the people of Tobago.

Mr. Speaker, this amounts to a further \$593.2 million to be spent in Tobago by other ministries. Although this constitutes \$2.6 billion in respect of recurrent and development allocation for the people of Tobago, this represents 5.24 per cent of the national budget; the largest amount ever allocated to Tobago in the history of the union of Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*]

The Member for Diego Martin West raised questions about allocations for a desalination plant. I have searched the PSIP for the THA and have not found any request for a desalination plant. I call on the Member for Diego Martin West, as a good and well meaning Tobagonian, to join with the People's Partnership in the drive to bring autonomy to the people of Tobago.

Mr. Speaker, I will now turn to the core of my contribution to the debate. It is well known that the introduction of the Ministry of Tobago Development has caused some degree of discomfort in certain quarters, and mainly among the current leadership of the Tobago House of Assembly. It is against the backdrop of the foregoing, Mr. Speaker, that I consider it relevant and appropriate to state clearly the role of the Ministry of Tobago Development, for which I now have Cabinet responsibility.

In recognition and acknowledgment of the President's warrant for the Ministry of Tobago Development, let me state simply what has been mandated as the core role of the Ministry. That is, to coordinate all matters related to Tobago. The Ministry of Tobago Development will continue resolutely on its mission to coordinate and facilitate the implementation of programmes and services geared to the general advancement of Tobago's people and institutions, to the greater good of both Trinidad and Tobago.

Mr. Speaker, for emphasis, let me state again, the Ministry of Tobago Development holds responsibility for coordinating, facilitating and fostering meaningful development in Tobago. The Ministry of Tobago Development is committed, therefore, to the strengthening of the institution that is the Tobago House of Assembly; and this Minister

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will work tirelessly with the full blessing and support of the People's Partnership to bring full autonomy to Tobago within the legal framework of the sovereign, democratic State of Trinidad and Tobago. That is the level of respect afforded to the Tobago House of Assembly by the People's Partnership.

Let it be made crystal clear that the Ministry of Tobago Development will not, however, countenance malfeasance in public affairs; will not cover up wastage of public funds; will neither condone pilfering from the public purse nor the rampant lack of accountability. All elements of the bugbear that stymies the growth and development of our beloved country.

Mr. Speaker, some contentious elements in the leadership of the THA persist in creating confusion in the minds of the people of Tobago. But actions speak louder than words, and soon enough, Tobago will be dramatically transformed with thousands of decent jobs being created. Tobago will become a place where opportunities abound; where ideas will be transformed into viable entrepreneurial activity, and the people of Tobago will rise.

To this end, Mr. Speaker, I have been working in a facilitatory role at the level of Cabinet towards ensuring that adequate funding is made available to the Tobago House of Assembly to meet Tobago's development needs. This Minister continues to source funds to ensure the completion of the new Scarborough Hospital. Relatedly, this Minister led a strong lobby among colleagues in the Cabinet to ensure that the funding provided to the THA for fiscal 2011 outstrips the provisions of previous years.

Mr. Speaker, I am the only Minister in the Government of Trinidad and Tobago that the Tobago House of Assembly refuses to allow to carry out developmental projects in Tobago. Therefore, this Minister lobbied further, making requests of the line Ministers to share their precious allocations, and the expertise resident in their various ministries, to provide development funds for projects and programmes in Tobago, in order to fast-track the development of Tobago in our quest to bring Tobago side by side with Trinidad.

I wish to pause here to thank my colleagues, especially the Minister of Finance and our Prime Minister, profusely, for their selfless commitment to the development of the entire country, and for their genuine efforts to afford Tobago the best possible allocations ever. The Minister of Finance was able, therefore, through keen collaboration and prudent financial management, to allocate funds in the amount of \$133.1 million to the development of Tobago.

Key among these projects are Ministry of Health, an additional \$65 million

for the Scarborough Hospital; Ministry of Science, Technology and Tertiary Education; \$17 million for projects included in the first comprehensive technology centre, and the first integrated tertiary campus; Ministry of Trade and Industry, \$15 million for Vanguard Hotel upgrade; and Ministry of National Security, \$11 million for projects, including the fire service headquarters at LowLands. May I also submit, Mr. Speaker, the PSIP also lists \$5.7 million for the Ministry of Tobago Development for projects including draft amendments to the Tobago House of Assembly Act. The Ministry of Tobago Development will construct an office building to house its administrative duties, as well as a new met station in Tobago.

Mr. Speaker, all of this construction activity will result in more jobs and the better standard of living for all of the residents of Tobago. Mr. Speaker, in this period of economic downturn, the People's Partnership Government has made available directly to the THA, \$1.975 billion, which amounts to 4.03 per cent of the national budget. A further \$460.1 million will be spent in Tobago by other ministries; in addition to the \$133.1 million to which I referred earlier. Altogether, this constitutes \$2.6 billion for the development and the delivery of goods and services to the people of Tobago.

Tobago is very important to the People's Partnership. The pledge of our Prime Minister is this: The People's Partnership is a true partner. The People's Partnership will never neglect Tobago. Mr. Speaker, this \$2.6 billion is the largest allocation ever made to the people of Tobago, and it is consistent with the People's Partnership Manifesto pledge to bring Tobago side by side with Trinidad. Of course, the strictest accounting practices will be required. The time has come to rein in the runaway horse that is the Tobago House of Assembly. Whoever wishes to mismanage moneys allocated to Tobago railroads the interest and development of the people of Tobago and cheats our children of their patrimony.

Under the People's Partnership Government, the THA must, and I repeat, must account for every cent of taxpayers' money. If you understand that all of those projects in Tobago could have been completed long ago, thousands of jobs could have been created and your lives could have been easier, if our leaders in Tobago cared about Tobago's development and not their own.

Mr. Speaker, this is the facilitation, this is the coordination of which I speak; and yet, there is talk of discomfort with the Ministry of Tobago Development. The Honourable Chief Secretary has always been comfortable with previous years' allocations. I find it passing strange that this year, when he has received

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more money than ever, he has not clearly identified his position of comfort.

He says, “The more things change, the more they remain the same.” And he is right in respect of Tobago. The more things change in Trinidad, the more they remain the same in Tobago. The more power stations we have in Tobago, the more outages we have. The more money we get in Tobago, the less health care we get. The more things change, the more things remain the same.

How can one not be comfortable when one is afforded the best slice of the national pie ever? This is the business of the People’s Partnership Government, to bring comfort, even to those who see themselves as being on the other side. Mr. Speaker, it is said in Tobago that when the national pie arrives, it is put in cold storage, allowed to expand like Russian yeast, and then the cream is shaved off and spirited away before the pie is shared. No one has yet been able to find the cream. Mr. Speaker, the People’s Partnership will ensure that all Government public services are accessible in Tobago.

In keeping with the issues of service delivery, this Government is in the process of establishing a ways and means committee with the mandate of making available in Tobago, all services to be performed or delivered under the Seventh Schedule, including the granting of work permits, licences for trade, agriculture and telecommunications. Specified listings under the Sixth Schedule of the Tobago House of Assembly Act, No. 40 of 1996 include the services provided by the office of the Registrar General, meteorology and civil aviation. Mr. Speaker, the People’s Partnership will provide the resources for Tobago to undertake a sustainable development plan which seeks to achieve the full potential of the people of Tobago.

Mr. Speaker, now let me highlight some specific projects and programmes designed to bring about a turnaround in Tobago’s economy. Programmes that would address the social and economic challenges confronting the island and its people in keeping with the People’s Partnership Manifesto theme, and the theme of the budget, of facing the issues and turning the economy around.

5.30 p.m.

Mr. Speaker, education is a major driver of economic competitiveness and productivity in the global knowledge driven economy in which we live. Within the global and national context, Tobago is an educational district that is underperforming. In recognition of this reality and in its commitment to equal opportunity, the People's Partnership Government supports a renewed focus on accessibility to blended education programmes that promote lifelong learning, thereby building capacity throughout the communities.

[MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Distance learning as well as face to face tuition will be available in every village in Tobago. Included in these measures are construction of three early childhood care and education centres, construction of a new Scarborough Roman Catholic school, completion of a new technology centre and construction of the integrated tertiary education campus designed to house the University of the West Indies, the University of Trinidad and Tobago (UTT) and COSTAATT. Just as there were nine deep water harbours in Trinidad before Tobago got one, likewise there are over 15 UTT campuses in Trinidad, while Tobago has none. The People's Partnership Government will deliver a tertiary level campus in Tobago, beginning construction in this fiscal year. [*Desk thumping*] Some people do not understand the importance of things like these in Tobago. Since the John Donaldson Technical Institute was instituted in the early 1960s and the San Fernando Technical Institute was built, to this day Tobago has never had a tertiary technology centre. The Member for Diego Martin West knows what I am talking about, because he was my school mate.

Dr. Rowley: "You coming here to attack the THA."

Hon. V. Alleyne-Toppin: The total allocation for these projects amounts to \$17 million. [*Interruption*]

I do not think that he wants me to talk, because if I read I am safer.

It is projected that the presence of these facilities will narrow the gaps between the people of Tobago and Trinidad with respect to the social cost of accessing tertiary education, social dislocation and the accompanying costs included in separation from families, finding rental accommodation, additional travelling cost by sea, air and over land and taking time off from work. The People's Partnership Government will facilitate the establishment of institutions to deal with social issues such as juvenile delinquency, drug abuse and rehabilitation.

The safety and security of the residents of Tobago are of critical importance to the People's Partnership Government. The Government recognizes that Tobago is vulnerable also to the scourge of crime, which poses a serious threat to its tourism sector. In this regard, the Government will expend funds totalling \$12 million to improve security of people and property. The people on this side of the House are serious people; we cannot play the fool with Government funds. [*Laughter*]

The new Tobago Divisional Fire Headquarters will be constructed at Cove

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Industrial Estate. The coast guard facilities at Breeze Hall will be upgraded and provision of security services around our coastline will be undertaken. The regiment facilities at Signal Hill will be upgraded to include a dormitory and a detachment headquarters on the existing location at Signal Hill.

These specific projects for Tobago are in addition to the national programmes and projects designed to transform the police service, as enunciated by the Finance Minister and the Minister of National Security, aimed at alleviating the insecurity challenge confronting our country.

Our coastline, which is part of the coastline of Trinidad and Tobago, is free of surveillance by the coast guard or the police service. Ours is a holistic approach to crime management that includes the improvement in effectiveness and efficiency in the judicial services. To this end, the People's Partnership Government has allocated \$4.2 million for expenditure in Tobago on rehabilitation of the Scarborough High Court, continuation of work on the judicial housing complex and rental of office space for industrial courts. In Tobago we do not have a sitting judge; we have to wait months until a judge comes from Trinidad. When these projects are put together with the other national initiatives aimed at building an effective and efficient judicial system, the people will be more confident in their receipt of justice.

Mr. Speaker, I turn to the subject of health care for the people of Tobago. It is well known that the quality of health care delivered to the people of Tobago is totally unacceptable. For simple medical procedures that could be performed in Tobago, where the facilities are not available, patients have to be airlifted to Trinidad to receive treatment. There is no helicopter dedicated to this service. Patients have to wait until a helicopter is available, after it comes from the oil rigs. Some people pay up to \$60,000 to get a helicopter to bring a loved one over when one is sick. I am speaking from empiric. I speak of it because I live there and I know what happens. [*Desk thumping*]

The first PNM administration in 1956 identified the building of a new hospital for Scarborough as a priority project. The construction of a new Scarborough Hospital, which was seen as a symbol of hope by Tobagonians, has been tainted by allegations of corruption, controversy, delay after delay and massive cost overruns. I quote from the *Hansard* records of the past Member for Tobago West when he said:

“I was extremely happy sometime in March 2003 when I was invited to the sod turning ceremony for the construction of the Scarborough

Hospital.”

The contract was awarded to NHIC at a cost of somewhere in the vicinity of \$135.9 million for the construction of the Scarborough Hospital, with a completion date of two years.

Mr. Speaker, the people of Tobago are suffering. People are dying unnecessarily. Premature babies are being wrapped in foil and transported by Trinidad in a helicopter where there is no transport incubator. [*Crosstalk*] One particular baby was brought in June by helicopter to Trinidad in foil. [*Interruption*]

Dr. Rowley: Mr. Speaker, I never said any such thing. [*Crosstalk*] She was quoting me.

Hon. Member: She said Tobago West.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Member for Diego Martin West, there is a way to do things. You look for the Standing Order that she is breaching, you stand and—[*Crosstalk*]

Dr. Rowley: I thought she said Diego Martin West; my apologies. I thought you were ascribing those statements to me. [*Crosstalk*]

Hon. V. Alleyne-Toppin: The past Member for Tobago West in 2003, not the Member for Diego Martin West, said that:

"Premature babies are dying for the lack of simple things like incubators."

I supposed that may be deemed collateral damage in a developing country.

The initial cost of this project was \$135 million. I want you to understand in this honourable House that if you are in Tobago for two days or one day and you fall ill, you might very well fall into that helicopter trap. Because of the untenable situation surrounding this project, it is now projected to cost the taxpayers in excess of \$719 million, after five years delay and counting. The hospital is now earmarked for completion by December 2011.

The 100-bed hospital, where I was born, is now in a very dilapidated state and the new hospital will also have 100 beds. The new hospital is weighing in at \$7 million a bed, has no ICU unit, no intensive care unit and no laundry. Laundry comes from the Tobago hospital to Trinidad twice every week for washing, to San Fernando.

Mr. Warner: That is progress!

Hon. V. Alleyne-Toppin: The \$7 million bed hospital, after \$719 million, is

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still under construction, and the Member for Point Fortin is telling me that is not true. How many more must die before you set Tobago free?

Hon. Members: Oooh!

Hon. V. Alleyne-Toppin: How many more people must die in Tobago, because of the ravages of the PNM Government? [*Crosstalk*]

In the last 10 years of the Tobago House of Assembly rule, 10 years of PNM rule in Tobago, you would not believe how many people have gone blind because they cannot access glaucoma treatment, how many persons have died because they do not have dialysis treatment, how many persons have died because of simple things like strokes, heart attacks and motor vehicle accidents. Today, yesterday, the day before yesterday, last week, people died from these causes. Even today there are funerals because of these causes.

During Mr. Minority Leader in Tobago's birthday lime, when we were all in Tobago on our workshop, they were calling me to sing happy birthday for him, everybody asked, "Where did you disappear to?" I went out on the Tarmac to shepherd a mother with a paraplegic child in a helicopter coming to Trinidad for treatment. [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Speaker, today there is a funeral for a man who was brought down by helicopter. Tomorrow there are two more funerals for persons brought down by helicopter. What we say in Tobago is that you go in the helicopter, you come back in a box. No CT scan machines, no MIR machines, no specialist in many areas and yet over \$60,000 per month in salary for the advisor to the Secretary for Health.

Hon. Members: Oooh!

Hon. V. Alleyne-Toppin: Over \$60,000 and my advisor gets a meagre salary of \$18,500; over \$60,000 for the advisor to the Secretary for Health in Tobago and there is no health care. [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Sharma: "Where de PNM came from, Mars?"

Hon. V. Alleyne-Toppin: Over \$60,000 for the advisor and there is no intensive care unit. Over \$60,000 in pay per month for the advisor to the Secretary for Tourism and there is almost no tourism.

The Tobago House of Assembly in its present incarnation, with its present leadership, is a runaway horse. [*Crosstalk*] It is better that I read than I talk. This is the method by which those on the other side facilitate, promote, protect and care about the people of Tobago.

I want to give this honourable House, the people of Tobago and the people of Trinidad the commitment of the Minister of Finance, the Minister of Tobago Development and the Ministry of Health, that everything will be done to ensure that the new Scarborough Hospital will be completed and commissioned in the shortest possible time. [*Desk thumping*] The THA cannot deliver, yet they block every effort of this Minister to intervene and to provide goods and services to the Tobago Regional Health Authority (TRHA), while doctor after doctor calls on me daily. Up to last night, up to this morning, up to yesterday morning, up to the day before, doctor after doctor calls on me daily, begging me to intervene.

5.45 p.m.

Patients and loved ones call on me crying and groaning while men threaten me with high court matters if I intervene in the affairs of the Assembly. If I help with the provision of health care as representative for Tobago East, I am chastised.

It is evident that the PNM government has underdeveloped Tobago. The People's Partnership will change that. [*Desk thumping*] The People's Partnership has shown the most profound respect for the people of Tobago and for Tobagonians and it is evident in the allocations to the Assembly. What Tobago wants, Tobago gets. This is what we have been told for years and Tobago got very next to nothing. The turnaround of the Tobago's economy is unattainable with measures to address economic infrastructure as well as the existence of a healthy, educated and productive labour force.

I happened to be at some meetings when the top financial teams of the Tobago House of Assembly came to Trinidad and Tobago to discuss with the hon. Minister of Finance their priority list for Tobago. The negotiators asked for nothing. Their silence was profound. They complained about this new change in things: "How is it that you are calling us to talk?", as the People's Partnership called labour to talk; the Chamber of Commerce to talk; prison officers to talk; policemen to talk. The People's Partnership is about a sharing government, a government of the people, for the people and by the people. [*Desk thumping*] Yet the leadership of the Tobago House of Assembly could only articulate that "This is strange that you should call us to a meeting. We are not accustomed to this. We are accustomed to sending down our estimates and whatever we get we do what we can with it." My Minister could bear me out. The team from Tobago asked for nothing.

I want to give this honourable House and the people of Tobago the commitment, again, that the People's Partnership will serve the people, serve the people, serve the people and, perhaps you did not hear when I said early in my contribution that the first Prime Minister to visit the Chief Secretary in his office

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in the 10 years of his reign, was the present Prime Minister, Kamla Persad-Bissessar; no other Prime Minister. In all of the 10 years that the Chief Secretary sat in his office and in all of those 10 years or nine—nearly 10 years—that the Member for San Fernando East was the Prime Minister of Trinidad and Tobago, he never one day went to the office of the Chief Secretary, and I can tell you; I live opposite the office of the Chief Secretary.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I became a politician quite by chance. When the leader of the people on the other side made his sporting declaration I became a politician because I was sure that he would lose again. He made a sporting declaration for the second time, throwing his hand because the People's National Movement could not govern. I wish that the leadership of the Tobago House of Assembly could make a sporting declaration for the same reasons; he cannot manage the affairs of Tobago.

The first step in turning the Tobago economy around is an understanding of the structure and nature of the island's economy. I want to submit that the Member for Diego Martin West agrees; he concurs with all that I am saying, but sometimes where you stand depends on where you sit. [*Desk thumping*]

The Tobago economy can be best described as service/led, tourism driven and government powered. What this is telling us is that the two major planks of Tobago's economy are the trading in tourism services and the delivery of goods and services by the Tobago House of Assembly. My colleague, the Member of Parliament for Tobago West, has dealt adequately in his budget contribution with the programmes, projects and initiatives designed by this Government to stimulate the Tobago tourism sector. I will therefore concentrate on the economic policies and initiatives programmed to strengthen the economy of Tobago.

The People's Partnership will provide the resources for Tobago to undertake a sustainable development plan which seeks to achieve the full potential of the people of Tobago. The north-east region of Tobago which stretches from King's Bay on the Atlantic coast to Parlatuvier on the Caribbean coast is designated the fifth growth pole area, one of the new economic spaces identified for development by the People's Partnership Government. In the development of this economic zone special preference will be given to persons wishing to establish businesses in the services and agricultural sectors. The best way to become a “duncy head” is to stop listening. [*Desk thumping*]

Persons with agricultural smallholdings in this region will be encouraged to make productive use of them. A special financing facility will be established at the Agricultural Development Bank to augment financing options aimed at

supporting these, as well as other developmental initiatives.

Hermitage Village and Flagstaff are today without pipe-borne water. The hazards to health cannot be overstated. Hermitage Village is a part of the environs of Charlotteville. Hermitage Village is a tourist attraction. Hermitage Village is today without pipe-borne water and every home in Hermitage has a latrine outside. You can understand the hardship for those people. The caring PNM government in the last 10 years could not find a way to give Hermitage water.

When I went into the neighbouring village, Cambleton, I found there a home in which the daughter, a 36-year-old woman, had lost both her legs due to diabetes. Her father had lost one leg due to diabetes. For 10 years those people asked the caring PNM government to pave a road to their house. The road would have been, perhaps, 20 or 25 feet, so that when rain falls the young woman would not have to come down to the main road on her rear end, because this is the only way she can slide down to the main road.

When I highlighted this problem, a man came to me immediately on hearing it and offered to build the road. He was blocked by the people who are responsible for the road, in other words the Tobago House of Assembly. To date, since this happened in April—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The speaking time of the hon. Member for Tobago East has expired.

Motion made, That the hon. Member's speaking time be extended by 30 minutes. [*Hon. Dr. T. Gopeesingh*]

Question put and agreed to.

Hon. V. Alleyne-Toppin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To date the road has not been completed; the road has not been fixed and the young lady gets to the main road however she can.

The Ministry of Tobago Development does not have the funds to carry out such jobs and the Tobago House of Assembly made sure that if the Minister of Tobago Development who is also the Member of Parliament for Tobago East, tries to contact to Ministry of Works and Transport to get anything done, including moving of a landslide, nobody moves.

I am talking about the fifth growth pole area. In the development of this economic zone special preference will be given to persons wishing to establish businesses in the services and agricultural sectors. Persons with agricultural smallholdings in this region will be encouraged to make productive use of them.

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A special financing facility will be available at the Agricultural Development Bank to augment financing options aimed at supporting these, as well as other developmental initiatives.

Hermitage Village and Flagstaff remain without pipe-borne water but our hon. Minister or Senator who is responsible for public utilities has pledged that in the very near future, within this fiscal year, Hermitage and Flagstaff will be served with pipe-borne water. [*Desk thumping*]

On the basis of investment proposals that have been reviewed by my office, I am hopeful that new business enterprises in eco-tourism, agro processing and entertainment, among others, will come to fruition in this specially designated region of Tobago. This Minister also ensures that Tobago residents will be able to access the pioneer innovation fund for innovative businesses, as well as to access the Green Fund for environmentally-friendly business activities.

Additionally, special incentives, including the granting of free trade zone status to businesses wishing to set up operations in this region will be pursued. It is anticipated that this will attract new businesses and much needed foreign investments. This will be enhanced via business incubator projects in collaboration with the Ministry of Labour and Small and Micro Enterprise Development and I thank the Minister of Labour.

The importance of the role of Government as an enabler more so in the context of the Tobago economy, cannot be over-emphasized and latterly the present THA administration has been found wanting. We must therefore move swiftly to fix government in Tobago, both at the administrative and constitutional levels. It is well known that the current administration of the Tobago House of Assembly has been unable to deliver on several major public sector projects over the last 10 years. For example: the Scarborough library, not done; the Scarborough bus terminal, not done; the financial complex, not done, the Scarborough post office, not done; the Shaw Park Cultural Complex, not done; the Scarborough Health Centre, not done; the Charlotteville Health Centre, not done.

Let us take a look at the housing projects in Tobago over which the Member for Diego Martin West had some oversight. Location: Adventure in Plymouth. The number of units initially commissioned, 263; the number of units actually built, 77. How long ago were they built? Stalled. How many are occupied? Zero. Initial cost of project, \$46.9 million; actual cost of project, \$82.8 million.

6.00 p.m.

	Initial	Actual	How	No.	Initial	
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Location	No. of units	Units Built	Long Built	Occupied	Cost of Project	Actual Cost
Blenheim	114	61	2008	0	23.4M	30.9M
Castara	62	31	stalled	0	14.1M	20.8M
Roxborough	74	75	2008	Few	7.8M	38.4M

Reasons cited for non-distribution of units include:

- The site is awaiting electrification;
- Failure of UDeCott to complete construction of sewer treatment plants;
- Raw sewage runs like water in the streets of the Renaissance project at Roxborough;
- Poor infrastructural work which resulted in the inability of contractors to locate the sewer and water lines to the units;
- Vandalism to the units due to non-occupation;
- Errors in the surveying of the development;
- Squatting in some of the units;
- THA is waiting on the necessary acquisition approvals for people to occupy these places.

In respect of Blenheim, the hill is so steep that the Fire Services has designated it a “people should not live there”. So there is no approval from the Fire Services for Blenheim. There are challenges with the topography of the site and the high water table.

Mr. Speaker, the People’s Partnership Government will define the Housing and Land Settlement Programme, while taking into account the special preferences of the people of Tobago. The people of Tobago prefer to be assisted in getting land and then in getting houses to secure mortgages. The people of Tobago wish to have a piece of land around their house where they could “chook” something—if you understand what I mean—so that they would have something to eat.

Mr. Speaker, speculation is rife over the reasons for the non-completion of these projects, and allegations fly left, right and centre, but the fact remains that

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this lack of delivery is unacceptable by any standard, in any country, anywhere in the world.

Mr Speaker, the People's Partnership Government will complete all infrastructural projects currently in train in Tobago. [*Desk thumping*] We will work with the Tobago House of Assembly to formulate an action plan for the completion of all these projects and it is common knowledge that when I went to the Chief Secretary asking for an audience to make this possible, he indicated that he would not collaborate with me on any such thing.

It is obvious, Mr Speaker, that the previous administration in Trinidad, together with its Assemblymen in Tobago, cannot deliver. After 10 years and \$14 billion, Tobago is still languishing in the economic and social wilderness, lacking basic goods and services, adequately provided for through government funds.

Scarborough is a shanty town. It is not uncommon to see tourists and locals alike climbing over each other's backs to access the ferry. One phone call from Jack Warner, the Minister, fixed that already. Thank you, Minister Warner. The hotels were empty and one phone call from Minister Warner fixed that.

Mr. Speaker, when the tourists come off the cruise ships in the Scarborough harbour, they come on to the port and say "Can you show me the way to the town?" They are already in the town and they cannot imagine that they are in the town. Perhaps it is better if I do not read.

We work tirelessly to ensure that moneys allocated to Tobago are spent in Tobago on the business of developing Tobago and not on the private interest of sycophants and lackeys. Mr. Speaker, I will tell you something about Tobagonian psyche. When the Tobagonians are on the road, it does not matter who comes left or right. The Tobagonian sets his face steadfastly to achieve his aim. No distractions bother us.

Mr. Speaker, the THA has something called unspent balances. Over the years, whatever the allocations have been, the Tobago House of Assembly has not been able to spend all the money. Every time, every year, there are unspent balances. Nobody knows what they are. There is just no accountability. Nobody knows what happens to them. They are supposed to be put aside for capital projects, which seem to be buying SUVs for friends and families; buying trucks to rent out to WASA and things of that nature.

Since 2003, no Auditor General's report has been laid in the Parliament for Tobago. The THA can prioritize its parliamentary allocation since releases from

the central government are received en bloc in accordance with the Tobago House of Assembly Act, No. 40 of 1966. In addition, the Assembly has the enviable privilege to vire funds from one vote to the next. The Assembly can utilize all of its unspent balances however it wishes; whenever it feels without any accounting.

Any responsible government will stop that gravy train and the People's Partnership Government will stop the gravy train. I want to emphasize, Mr. Speaker, that I am sure and I want everybody to be sure that I hold the greatest respect for the Tobago House of Assembly as an institution. I will do everything in my authority to strengthen the Tobago House of Assembly; to bring greater autonomy to the island of Tobago and its people; but I will not countenance the corruption that is rampant. Therefore, if that honourable institution will find some honourable and honest leaders, I will laud every step of their path.

Mr. Speaker, it is very difficult for me as a Tobagonian, as it is for the Member for Diego Martin West, to find a way to accept the practices that have become commonplace in the Tobago House of Assembly.

The leader of those on the other side, the present and past leader, did not find merit in the devolution of authority, so Tobago remained a colony of Trinidad and Tobago; an outpost for holidays; forever slipping back into the 18th Century or perhaps into the 17th Century.

The People's Partnership is committed to delivering on this issue and as such constitutional reform has taken the number one position on our 2010/2011 legislative agenda. Mr. Speaker, the 2020 vision blindly espoused by those on the other side offered no such policy on the issue. The People's National Movement's draft Constitution document 2009 made no mention of constitutional autonomy for Tobago. Half of one page and half of the following page were dedicated to Tobago, saying that things for Tobago will be prescribed.

The People's Partnership Manifesto promises a Tobago that has constitutional authority to treat fully with all matters under the Fifth Schedule of the THA Act within the framework of the sovereign democratic state of Trinidad and Tobago; a Tobago where every service under the Seventh Schedule will be available and Tobago will stand as an equal partner in this beautiful republican nation.

To this end, funds have been allocated to the Ministry of Tobago Development to drive the process of constitutional reform and amendments to the Tobago House of Assembly Act. The measures will fulfil the long-held aspirations of Tobagonians to own their lands, to acquire the lands left to them legally from their foreparents, to seek loans in financial institutions and banks.

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The Aliens' Landholding Act will be revised. The issuance of land licences will be addressed and the PPG will transform Tobago into a modern society with a viable economy.

In winding up my contribution to this debate, I reaffirm the People's Partnership commitment to:

- transform the educational sector in Tobago;
- to stimulate entrepreneurship at the micro and small level;
- to complete the Scarborough Hospital and deliver proper health care to Tobago;
- to accelerate the process towards new constitutional arrangements for Trinidad and Tobago;
- to address the issue of land regularization and thus empower the people of Tobago;
- to ensure that all government services will be delivered in Tobago;
- to mitigate the negative impact of the higher cost of living in Tobago and to alleviate poverty and to empower our people;
- to ensure the delivery of all infrastructural projects, languishing, awaiting completion, over the last 10 years.

Mr. Speaker, because of the People's Partnership, the children of Tobago can now sing like the children of Soweto: Freedom is coming tomorrow. The People's Partnership will bring freedom to the people of Tobago.

Our Government, in its first budget presentation, will free Tobago from the stranglehold of the PNM government. Mr. Speaker, the PPG is here to serve the people; serve the people; serve the people for a long, long time.

In conclusion, Mr. Speaker, I stand here today as the elected representative of the people of Tobago East and speak also on behalf of my colleague the representative of Tobago West. Allow me to beg the people of Tobago, wherever they may be, at home or in the diaspora, to unite with the People's Partnership to rescue our beloved Tobago; to encourage the leadership of the Tobago House of Assembly to serve the needs of the people of Tobago and not to stand in their way; to take a page from the People's Partnership Government and serve the people, serve the people, serve the people.

Mr. Speaker, I thank you.

The Minister of Legal Affairs (Hon. Prakash Ramadhar): Mr. Speaker, it is with the greatest of pleasure and with a deep sense of honour and pride as a member of this People's Partnership Government that I stand today to make an intervention in the proceedings of this House.

What better an occasion you can imagine than a debate on a budget which articulates the clear path to economic growth and national development? For two and a half hours on Wednesday last, I sat here and listened to what must have been one of the finest presentations of a budget in this House.

6.15 p.m.

The first thing that needs to be said is that Trinidad and Tobago finally has a Minister of Finance who understands his role in that capacity. After 48 years of independence and on the eve of our 34th anniversary as a Republic, we have a Minister of Finance who has the intellectual capacity, the competence, the integrity and the courage to adequately perform the duties of that important office.

I want to take this opportunity to offer hearty congratulations to the hon. Minister, the Member of Parliament for Tunapuna, for a budget that is rich in direction for this country; that is rich in ideas on how to stabilize the economy and begin the process of growth; that is rich in measures designed to bring immediate and long term improvement into the lives of our citizens, that is insightful and futuristic, that is likely as a head and certainly a head of many in this House. The hon. Minister of Finance has outdone himself in presenting a budget which achieves the perfect link between providing for citizens' immediate needs and laying the foundation that would secure the long term well-being. Listening to the Members opposite, you would not think so. In fact, listening to Members opposite one would easily come away with the impression that the sky was falling down; that Trinidad and Tobago was plunging into the abyss.

To the extent, that may have been true until May 24, Members of the Opposition might want to consider their own culpability. In the course of the contributions of Members opposite so far, I have heard many reasons why this budget is a bad one, why it will not work, why this Government may fail. But, the only place from which you are hearing these kinds of comments is from the Front Bench on that side and from their political allies.

While some of the relevant stakeholder groups have asked for clarification and explanation of some of the budget's proposals, all have hailed this year's budget as a good one, yet Members opposite have the audacity to come and attempt to discredit this package of measures which has found widespread favour

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with the vast majority of our economic experts and with the general public.

In the face of all the negatives that have been directed towards the Minister of Finance, this budget really demonstrates, beyond a shadow of a doubt that this Member is a man of remarkable strength of character on an unwavering determination to stand by what he believes in.

This budget's widespread acclaim by so many, validates his approach to governance that is all embracing and which encourages meaningful participation by all concerned. This is what 21st Century governance is all about. It is about consensus building and allowing people to determine how they want to develop individually and as a nation. Gone are the days when leaders could sit on high and from their thrones, make life-changing decisions which their hapless subjects would be forced to live with. That the Member for San Fernando East must now sit where he does on the southern side of this Chamber, is adequate evidence in support of the point.

Governance in the 21st Century demands a different approach to that adopted by our maximum leaders of the past. It is this new approach which best describes and illustrates the new politics that the Minister of Finance has spoken tirelessly about and which is clearly manifest in the contents of his budget presentation, even though the words "new politics" were not specifically used.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, for our benefit and for the benefit of all of those who have been asking what was meant by our mantra of new politics, the answer is in part represented in this year's budget. It is the part about involving people at all levels in important potential life-changing decision making. It is in part about governing in partnership with the population, rather than governing over the population. This budget marks another important step in completing the partnership which started prior to the last general election with five political parties and it now includes the entire population, our business stakeholders and the NGOs.

No amount of commendation would be too great for our Prime Minister who has been skilfully leading this partnership ensuring its stability and growth. She has led this nation with humility as opposed to arrogance. She has led the Cabinet with a firm hand and a sense of purpose, while respecting Members' individuality and while encouraging discussion on the basis of the diverse views represented in the Cabinet. May I indicate without any breach of privilege that in our Cabinet we are a very robust group. We express our views very openly and very strongly, but yet at the end of the day, always come to consensus because we serve the people.

It is indeed amazing how consensus building among persons of differing backgrounds and who represent diverse interests lends itself to a proactive approach to resolving our citizens' problems.

On that note, I want to share a few thoughts on some of the initiatives being undertaken by my Ministry, the Ministry of Legal Affairs, of which I have the tremendous honour to lead to improve the citizens' lives and well-being.

A budget based on the seven pillars: It is significant to note that the budget statement of 2010/2011, is based on a three-to five-year horizon, which will be geared to facilitate inclusive development, a sustainable future, competitive environment and a growing economy. As the hon. Minister of Finance indicated, the budget is driven by seven pillars of the People's Partnership manifesto which are designed to:

1. Foster people-centred development;
2. Ensure national and personal security;
3. Entrench good governance;
4. Steer the country towards a diversified knowledge intensive economy;
5. Move towards eradicating poverty and promoting greater social justice;
6. Present an accommodating foreign policy;
7. Expand the use and availability of information and communication technology.

It is also significant to note that the Minister of Finance has pointed out the need to expand the research and development facility at the Business Development Company. This is an essential element for developing local intellectual property and tapping into the substantial pool of multi-billion dollar global royalties that are payable to investors.

Similarly, the pioneer/innovation fund/window will foster innovation. It is important, therefore, to emphasize the point that the generation of intellectual property should be accorded higher priority in our ongoing attempts to revitalize our economy in the face of the recent global crisis. The development of new project ideas is essential to international competitiveness and more so for the establishment of new export industries.

The Intellectual Property Office: As you are aware, the Intellectual Property Office operates within the Ministry of Legal Affairs and it processes patents for

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local and foreign inventors. One significant development in this regard is legislation to protect local agricultural products.

Under the New Plant Variety Act and Regulations, Trinidad and Tobago has had, since 1977, legislation to protect plant breeders' rights. However, this legislation only protects newly bred varieties of plants and was never intended to protect existing varieties, land races and wild types.

It should be noted that because Trinidad and Tobago was a party of the 1970 Act of Union for the Protection of New Varieties of Plants, we were obliged to publish a list of protectable genera and species. This list now includes all genera and species from the plant families, inclusive of pigeon peas, bodi, black-eyed peas and cocoa. In fact, the inclusion of cocoa paved the way in 2010, for the filing of 11 varieties of cocoa by the then Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Marine Resources. This filing reflects the culmination of decades of work to improve characteristics, yield and disease resistance of our Trinidad select types of cocoa, which are primarily of the Trinitario type.

It has been obvious, over the last generation under the PNM rule, that they have been almost the enemy of agriculture. They have decimated our ability to feed ourselves and therefore, our real right to be truly independent, because no nation could be independent unless it feeds itself. The disrespect to agriculture, I am sure my brother, the Minister of Food Production will deal with it more adequately, is represented by recent actions when cultivated areas will be bulldozed weeks in advance of the reaping period for the purpose of housing.

There are many plant varieties in this country that we have so much to be proud of. I have been informed, indeed, that there is a pepper called "the Scorpion". That is the hottest pepper in the world and it is something that we really must educate ourselves more about. Indeed, we may even get a representation in the *Guinness Book of World Records*. This would be one of the plant varieties that may very well enjoy what we call geographical indicator, and protection. These developments will undoubtedly enable Trinidad and Tobago to reclaim its position, as in the old days, as a primary source of knowledge in tropical agriculture, particularly since many of the older hybrid cocoa varieties have been taken abroad to replant plantations in other countries.

In order to benefit from these new cocoa varieties, the Ministry of Legal Affairs will take immediate steps to file these varieties. This will then allow commercial control over the dissemination of the genetic material and could represent a revenue stream and recognition of Trinidad and Tobago as a knowledge base for further value-added plant breeding.

Rising food prices: The budget statement identifies food price inflation as a pressing concern. Daily in the newspapers, we read complaints from members of the public about the rising cost of food items; not to mention our own personal experience. These complaints are usually accompanied by questions about what the Consumer Affairs Division, which also falls under the Ministry of Legal Affairs, is doing to help keep food prices down. I think it is very, very important to point out for the benefit of the members of the general public, the fact that neither the Ministry of Legal Affairs nor the Consumer Affairs Division of the Ministry has the authority to set prices. We are price takers in this country.

The reality is that Trinidad and Tobago operates in a free market environment and is bound by several international agreements which outright prohibit price control. That is not to say, however, that the Ministry of Legal Affairs and the Government have abandoned the responsibility to manage runaway prices. Quite the opposite is true, the Ministry is actively engaged in tracking and influencing prices through a number of mechanisms. Among them are: price monitoring, collaboration with the poultry industry, and the Prices Council.

The Ministry conducts weekly, monthly and quarterly surveys to monitor prices across the country. These surveys attempt to capture long and short term fluctuations in food prices, with a view to determining the causes of these fluctuations and identifying how these may be mitigated. In this way the Ministry attempts to work with suppliers to ensure consumers receive the best prices possible.

The Ministry of Legal Affairs has recently embarked on a process to review all of these strategies for price monitoring with the aim of making them more effective and more relevant in the campaign to keep prices affordable.

Additionally, we recognize that poultry is an essential component in the menu of most citizens but that poultry prices are subject to extreme fluctuations. The Ministry therefore set up a committee to examine the best way to treat with this matter. Its final report would be submitted on September 29, 2010.

A Prices Council has been in existence for some time with a mandate to comprehensively address, from a supply perspective, the level of prices in the economy, particularly with respect to food and construction. The Council is required to advise the Minister of Legal Affairs on factors affecting food prices including mark-ups and price manipulations on the local market. The Council should also propose recommendations to address these issues.

A Note would be forwarded to Cabinet within two weeks, seeking to extend the term of the Prices Council by three years and once renewed, the Council

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would be provided with a team of specialists to assist with undertaking its work.

The Council which will be chaired by former Chairman of NAMDEVCO, Ms. Wendy Lee Yuen, will be empowered to research prices on the international market, as well as taxes and other applicable costs. This will enable the Council to make assessments of what would be a fair and reasonable price for food and goods imported and sold in Trinidad and Tobago.

In addition to these, the Ministry of Legal Affairs is undertaking a range of activities designed to protect consumers. Among these are:

- consumer complaints monitoring;
- testing and rating of consumer products;
- collaboration with the Trinidad and Tobago Bureau of Standards; and
- a bio-safety project, in which the Ministry will chair a committee to develop a national policy and regulations on bio-safety.

This will ensure that products of modern biotechnology do not negatively affect plant, animal or human health, genetic resources or the environment.

Consumer rights and responsibilities: This Government is of the view that our consumers must be protected from unfair exploitation by unscrupulous vendors and traders. However, recognizing that there are limits on how much any government can do by way of direct intervention, we have come to the inescapable conclusion that consumers themselves must assume much of the responsibility through their buying habits. This implies that buyers must demand goods and services of significantly higher quality and they must be prepared to do what is necessary; whether it is to withhold buying when that time becomes plain.

Individually and collectively, when it comes to making commercial transactions, our citizens must cease being lambs and must become lions instead. To make this transformation, however, it is incumbent upon the State to ensure that consumers have the capacity to insist upon their commercial rights.

6.30 p.m.

In a free market there ought to be free knowledge and it is my own view that education and information are the keys in this process. That is why the Ministry of Legal Affairs proposes to embark on a protracted and intensive campaign in public education and information, to raise awareness among the population about the factors which artificially drive prices upwards.

Many are convinced that elaborate networks of middle-men, unofficial cartels and ad hoc groups all contribute to inflating prices way beyond what they should and can be.

We propose to expose these unofficial cartels and ad hoc groups to public scrutiny so that when consumers go out to make their purchases, at the very least they will do so from an informed perspective.

It is our intention at the Ministry of Legal Affairs to give the public all the information they would need to make the best decisions possible when it comes to their spending. Of course, what individuals do with that information will be left to their own discretion.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, it baffles me that the former government would have invested hundreds of millions in GATE and a host of other training programmes, but failed to invest a single cent towards this kind of initiative.

It is difficult to fathom that we would seek to produce thousands of lawyers, doctors and engineers and a variety of other professionals, but we would do nothing to educate and empower them about simple things which impact their daily lives. This, Mr. Deputy Speaker, is clearly a matter of political will and it forces one to wonder who or what the former government was attempting to protect. But as the People's Partnership Government has demonstrated; where there is a will, there is a way, and we will do it.

White Paper on Consumer Protection: An important element of this Government's attempt to empower consumers will be its comprehensive review of existing consumer legislation. Very soon, a White Paper on consumer protection in the 21st Century will go before the Cabinet for its consideration before it comes to this Parliament. This White Paper deals with a number of issues within the sphere of consumer protection, including:

- guarantees for services;
- distance selling/e-commerce;
- consumer credit;
- sales receipts;
- dual pricing;
- balance parcels;
- credit notes;

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- unfair business practices including misrepresentation, misleading conduct, no intention to supply, bait advertising, referral selling and pyramid selling schemes;
- restocking fees;
- repairs;
- tied selling;
- hoarding;
- codes of practice; and
- the establishment of a consumer tribunal.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, one of the matters which my Ministry intends to pursue vigorously is the process involved in obtaining mortgages from financial institutions. It is abundantly clear that in negotiating mortgages, consumers and financial institutions do not operate on the same level and customers are at a clear disadvantage. One example is the banks' uncompromising position that the mortgagor must bear the professional legal charges for preparing mortgage documents by the bank's lawyers.

It is so ridiculous that if a customer has a son or a daughter who is an attorney and who is willing to prepare the mortgage document for free, he is unable to do so because the banks insist upon using their own lawyers.

Even where the bank allows a third party to prepare the mortgage document, there is still a charge to the customer so the bank's lawyers could look over the document, even where the document may be identical to others that would have been prepared previously.

Many persons are very concerned about the spread of interest rates which on your deposits you may get up to 2 per cent, but when you borrow money its spread may be a 7 per cent or 9 per cent difference. It is my Ministry's intention to address the manner in which interest is calculated on loans, as well as several other provisions which are usually included in the mortgage instrument.

As a result of these, we expect that much of the financial hardships endured by mortgagors will be alleviated and home ownership will become less costly and more accessible for citizens of this country.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, the end objective of the White Paper is to give significantly more protection to consumers and to strengthen the enforcement of existing consumer laws. This legislation has been long in the making and goes back some

considerable distance before the People's Partnership came into Government.

However, like so many others under the former administration, the initiative was never given the kind of attention that was necessary to make it a success. While the hard-working men and women of the Consumer Affairs Division toiled to come up with workable models for Trinidad and Tobago, the government at the time practically turned its back to the project by failing to insist on its development.

We will do no such thing. The citizens of Trinidad and Tobago can look forward, within a matter of months, to consumer legislation comparable to the best that currently exists anywhere in the world. And may I say, this is being done in close collaboration with relevant stakeholder groups.

Alternative Dispute Resolution: We acknowledge that with the kind of sweeping changes being proposed in terms of consumer rights and responsibilities, issues inevitably will arise between buyers and sellers. In addition to built-in mechanisms for resolving such issues, the Ministry of Legal Affairs is actively exploring options for expanding the use of alternative dispute resolution.

A team has been established within the Ministry to examine and, where necessary, develop a model for harmonizing the delivery of alternative dispute resolution services in Trinidad and Tobago. ADR is by no means a new concept and is currently used by a number of organizations and institutions with varying degrees of success.

While no firm decisions have so far been made, we anticipate that this technique would be applied across all government agencies and, perhaps, non-governmental agencies as well, to help ease some of the congestion in our courts. It will be used to complement and support the Judiciary and judicial reforms, as well as increase access to justice while seeking to reduce the costs and time for dispute resolution. The Ministry of Legal Affairs will, in due course, when we complete the necessary research, consult with the Ministry of Justice and others, on how this might best be pursued.

Rent restriction: Mr. Deputy Speaker, I want for a moment to speak about the issue of rent and rent reform as this too falls under the Ministry of Legal Affairs. One of the very first matters that came before me upon assumption of the responsibilities of Minister of Legal Affairs was that of rents, and the urgent almost desperate need for some kind of intervention and resolution. The previous government took a decision not to reappoint members of the Rent Assessment Board as provided for in the Rent Restriction Act, Chap. 59:50. The thinking, I

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am advised, was to do away with this board as part of the complete rationalization of rental agreements. Alas, this turned out to be yet another example of the last government starting a process and abandoning it midway.

Except in this instance, by not re-appointing members to the Rent Assessment Board, citizens were left without recourse for the meteoric increases in rental by landlords. I do not have to tell you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, the impact this has had on many of our citizens who cannot afford to purchase their own homes, nor do I have to tell you of the tremendous additional burden this has placed on thousands of parents whose children occupied rental apartments and house near the University of the West Indies at St. Augustine.

As an interim measure, the Ministry of Legal Affairs is contemplating the re-activation of the Rent Assessment Board until such time that Government can develop a proper mechanism that would ensure the affordability of rental properties, whilst respecting the need for landlords to get a fair return on their investments. One of the options before us is to pass legislation for the establishment of a rent restriction tribunal which will deal with the subject matter of rent, tenancies and land tenure.

Rent consultations: To inform these decisions, the Ministry of Legal Affairs proposes to embark on a series of rent consultations throughout Trinidad and Tobago with a view to examining the rent of both land and buildings, whether they are residential, commercial, industrial or agricultural in nature. This examination would be done from both the landlords' and the tenants' perspectives. Rent policy and legislation will be guided and informed by the citizens of this nation, for the citizens of this nation. If this matter of rents is not put to bed by the end of this year, we certainly intend to have it settled by the end of the first quarter next year.

Tobago land tenure: I know the Member for Diego Martin West would be quite eager to hear that we are, in fact, going to deal with the issue of land tenure in Tobago. Of course, I have spoken to my colleague, the Member for Tobago East, on this matter. Simultaneously, with settling rent issues in Trinidad and Tobago, the Ministry of Legal Affairs is actively pursuing the matter of land tenure in Tobago. Sadly, this is also an issue that goes back some considerable distance, but was never resolved by our predecessors despite their myriad claims to care about the people of the sister isle. A large number of families in Tobago do not have title to the lands upon which they live. Through no fault of their own, plots have never been legally assigned.

Despite this and almost miraculously, we seldom ever hear of land disputes in Tobago. This is testimony to the value system on that island and people's respect for their neighbour's property. Still, neither values nor respect will enable our Tobagonian brothers and sisters to go to the banks to obtain mortgages on their properties so they might develop their homes and improve the quality of their lives.

Against this background, a committee was established several years ago, to consider and make recommendations for regularizing land tenure in Tobago. That committee completed its work as mandated and went out of existence. Its recommendations, I am advised, have been placed in storage somewhere where they have been languishing for more than four years.

It is the intention of this Government to resurrect this committee, with a view to determining the applicability of those recommendations which is more than four years old, to today's realities in Tobago. On the basis of this review, which will include consultations with the people of Tobago, the Ministry of Legal Affairs will determine how next to proceed.

This initiative is intended to be settled early next year so our brothers and sisters in Tobago can have the peace and comfort that come with security of tenure of the lands they occupy. Consider this, Mr. Deputy Speaker, as a sacred commitment of this People's Partnership Government.

Laws of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago: You would appreciate that all of these initiatives require some kind of amendment to existing legislation or the drafting of new legislation. I, as Minister of Legal Affairs, have instructed Mr. Deo Bhagowtee SC and the Law Revision Commission, to undertake comprehensive review of many of our laws that may have become outdated, irrelevant or simply too cumbersome to effectively administer.

There are some laws on our books dating back a hundred years, and which have absolutely no relevance in today's environment. Others, while useful at their time of enactment, have now become more of a nuisance than anything else. Take, for example, the annual renewal of liquor licences for bars and other establishments which sell alcohol.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, you may or may not be aware of the nightmare that is created at the Magistrates' Courts when hundreds of dealers show up to renew their licences. Valuable judicial time is wasted on what are really administrative matters that have no place before magistrates who have far more important matters to deal with. It is our suggestion that the annual renewal of liquor licences should be treated as an administrative function and should be approved at the

court's registry upon payment of the applicable fee.

Only in instances where there is objection to the renewal of a liquor licence, should the magistrate be called upon to adjudicate, and even then it may be possible to resolve the matter at some lower level of the system. Not only will this save valuable judicial time, the measure will also make life considerable easier for the thousands of small business people who operate liquor establishments.

Similarly, we at the Ministry of Legal Affairs have taken note of the remarks attributed to a sitting Magistrate, as they relate to the payment of fines imposed for traffic offences. Even before the learned Magistrate made her observations, the Ministry of Legal Affairs review of legislation had already established the need to completely revamp the existing system for paying fines, not just traffic, but all fines which may be imposed on behalf of the State.

With specific reference to traffic fines, we agree with the magistrate that two weeks are inadequate time to allow for payment. The reality is that some persons may not get paid within the two-week period and may not have the means to make the payment. In such instances, it becomes mandatory for them to appear before a Magistrate.

It is our suggestion that more time should be allowed for payment of traffic fines. Where persons fail to comply with the new timeframe, they will automatically be entitled to an extension but at double the original fine figure. It is only when persons have failed to make payment by the extended deadline will they be required to appear before a Magistrate.

It is our view that by giving people enough time to raise the money needed to pay fines, coupled with the penalty for failing to pay on time, citizens would be more likely to comply. This will have the dual effect of collecting fines that might otherwise go unpaid, while simultaneously freeing up congestion and clutter at the Magistrates' Courts. Such innovative ideas for problem solving can be implemented in quick time at little cost to the State.

The Law Revision Commission and Mr. Bhagowtee SC will continue to explore these kinds of possibilities. In the meantime, the LRC will continue to perform its existing function or revising and updating the country's laws. The LRC produced its first supplement to the 2006 Revised Edition of the Laws of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago, which updated the laws to December, 2007. This meant that stakeholders now have access to updated laws via the Internet and loose leaf format. The electronic version of the laws is being produced in-house and would be available by October, 2010.

The Law Revision Commission will pursue the digitizing of the laws of Trinidad and Tobago, updated to December, 2007, in addition to digitizing all the laws of Trinidad and Tobago from 1800 to date.

Legislative agenda for the Ministry of Legal Affairs: All of these projects suggest that the Ministry of Legal Affairs will be pursuing a somewhat heavy legislative agenda. This agenda for the period 2010—2011 has been finalized and forwarded to the hon. Attorney General.

6.45 p.m.

It focuses on legislation that is aimed at improving the protection of consumers for both goods and services, strengthening intellectual property protection and rights, as well as enhancing the system for capturing and registering the vital statistics, and real and personal property of citizens.

The Registrar General's Department: Mr. Deputy Speaker, this brings me to Registrar General's Department (RGD) of the Ministry of Legal Affairs. The RGD has responsibility for recording and maintaining official of documents on behalf of the Government of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago. These include everything from birth and death certificates, marriage certificates, land deeds and a host of other official documents.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, for years the process of preparing these important documents was a manual process in which district registrars would record information and forward these records to Port of Spain where official documents would be produced. This invariably required persons in Port of Spain to interpret handwriting, which frequently led to inaccurate information being recorded on the final official documents. I do not need to tell you the terrible hardships and inconveniences these errors have cause tens of thousands of citizens. To assist with that problem, the Ministry of Legal Affairs is engaging an Investigative Department who will be able to go to persons who have difficulties. Because you may have a situation where two persons will have the same birth certificate with the same names and the same Pin numbers. That leads to incredible problems and instead of they having to come to us at the Ministry, we will be creating this department to go to them to solve those issues.

Following the separation from the Office of the Attorney General, the Ministry of Legal Affairs under the direction of Minister Kamla Persad-Bissessar, who then was the first Minister in the Ministry of Legal Affairs, started to computerize and to devise systems to reduce the incidence of these errors and resulting hardship to these citizens. It was the hon. Kamla Persad-Bissessar, who

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is today the Prime Minister of the Government of the People's Partnership, who began the process of bringing our official records into the 21st Century. To their credit, subsequent Ministers of Legal Affairs, even under the PNM administration did not abandon the project and, in fact, some did make efforts that were somewhat successful. We recognize and compliment their efforts.

In the intervening years, the Registrar General's Department of the Ministry of Legal Affairs has made notable strides. Through the use of technology and re-engineering of its business processes, all records held by the department are now captured in electronic format and the department has worked assiduously to ensure that persons in Trinidad and Tobago have easy access to its record and services.

In 2007, the department launched its company online facility and it has continued in this vein with the introduction of PIMMS online, which allow users online access to land registries upon payment of a minimal subscription fee. Approximately one month ago, the department launched another service which enables online ordering of computerized birth certificates. While these represent significant achievements in their own right, it unfortunately represents the limit to which the department and the Ministry have been able to take their online services.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, as we approach the end of 2010, while it is possible for our citizens to apply online for birth certificates and to access the land registry database, they still have to come physically to the office of the Ministry to pay for these services. This is because the previous government in its limited vision failed to recognize the potential for developing a system in which all aspects of any given transaction could be done via the Internet.

In today's virtual world, it would have been so much more convenient for thousands of our citizens if they could have applied online for birth certificates, make their payments online and receive their certificates via the mail. This is a facility which tens of thousands of our citizens who are resident abroad have been clamouring for. Trinidad and Tobago is a small island, so it may be relatively easy to visit an office of the Registrar General to physically make a payment of \$25. But can you imagine, Mr. Deputy Speaker, one of our national residents residing in Boston applying online for a birth certificate, but still having to travel to an Embassy in Washington and New York to make the payment of \$25. This is what happens. Not only that, do you know that whereas a person, whose birth is registered in Port of Spain, can receive a birth certificate with two weeks. A person, whose birth is registered in San Fernando and elsewhere, must wait

almost a year for a birth certificate.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, do you know that the technology to enable immediate registration of births, deaths, marriages and the like anywhere in Trinidad and Tobago is already available and has been sitting at the Registration House for years? What has been lacking is the vision and the political will to make these things a reality on behalf of the people of our beloved country. As you are aware, online payments via credit cards which will solve many of the problems I have described a moment ago for our foreign nationals, has been held up because there are no electronic data protection laws in place. This is the situation in the year 2010, after the previous government spent billions of dollars on Vision 2020. It seems that Members opposite were so focused on Vision 2020, that they became blinded to the real needs of our citizens. It now falls on the Government of the People's Partnership to solve these problems and we intend do so.

Recognizing the difficulty encountered by our citizens, my Ministry is asking Cabinet to agree to the implementation of web enabled access to civil registry database. This means that citizens and foreign nationals will be afforded easier and faster access to their vital records. The department is also moving swiftly to implement electronic registration within a matter of weeks of births at all major hospitals. This will bring relief to parents who will no longer have to wait lengthy periods for the receipt of their child's birth certificate.

It will interest citizens to know that I will soon pilot legislation to bring relief to persons who have no first names on their birth certificates. An amendment to the current Birth and Death Registration Act is forthcoming to allow such persons to visit the Registrar General's Department to have their first name inserted on their birth records after relevant proof of identify has been provided. This will help reduce the incident of identity fraud, improve security documents and integrity of data.

The Registrar General's Department is currently pursuing the electronic registration of all companies and businesses, and trade partnership with the Ministry of Trade and Industry on a single electronic window project. This initiative will ultimately result in the same day approval for companies and business name applications and will reduce the time frame for the registration of business and incorporation of companies from one week to three days. This will no doubt positively impact this country's ranking under the global competitiveness index and it will make doing business easier.

The Registrar General's Department will also soon implement e-registration of

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land documents, that is, Deeds of Conveyance. This will be the first step towards implementation of online conveyance, a move which will bring greater convenience to conveyancers and which will reduce the timeframe for registration of land transactions.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, on the basis of all that I have said so far, you will recognize that my Ministry is taking the leading role in making use of available technologies to make the life of our citizens easier and more productive. While introducing cutting-edge technology to our day-to-day activities, we are working feverishly to ensure that the necessary legislative support such as electronic data protection is put into place. This is because we have a vision for Trinidad and Tobago, which sees technology as having the potential to help us work more faster, smarter and more efficiently.

It is this vision which, in part, informs our decision to furnish every child entering secondary school with a laptop computer. Our critics fail to recognize that every time we give a laptop to a student, we simultaneously give a laptop his family, to his community to his country. [*Desk thumping*] By so doing, we help these families, some of which cannot afford to purchase their own computers to get onboard the technology train. It will allow them access to all online government services and programmes, so that we could truly better service our people.

As the Government moves towards more rapid computerization of these services, these families must never be left behind. Rather, we would have outfitted them with the tools that would allow them to enjoy maximum benefits. This is a vision of a government that cares about its people.

The Ministry of Legal Affairs is a public service organization responsible for providing comprehensive legal, consumer, intellectual property and registration services to members of the public, businesses and various agencies, with the aim of facilitating the social and economic development of our people.

Under the Government of the People's Partnership, we undertake these responsibilities for the benefit of all of our citizens. I want to reassure everyone that Government, and certainly my Ministry, is about serving our entire population, regardless of political or other affiliation.

I say this against the background of a deliberate attempt by some members opposite to paint this Government as uncaring and discriminatory. Nothing, Sir, could be further from the truth.

Members will recall prior to the budget presentation, senior members of the

PNM, current and former members of this honourable House were making outrageous predictions about what the Minister of Finance would and would not do in his presentation. Remember the rumour that was deliberately spewed about removal of GATE and other important programmes in education? The reality is that these programmes have been given additional support and funding.

You will remember the last Minister of Finance under the previous administration, making claims that this Government would persist with the property tax under a difference name. The reality is that the property tax has received the axe. There are many, many more malicious rumours, all intended to undermine the credibility of this Government to strike fear into the hearts of our population, particularly into the hearts of those who continue to support the PNM.

There are thousands of good, decent citizens who support the PNM, and who deserve much better from their representatives than malicious rumour-mongering designed to intimidate, terrify and breed discontent. It is their party leaders who are guilty of betrayal of trust through their lies and attempts at deception. As all of us on this side, fully expected the Minister of Finance, under guidance from the hon. Prime Minister, to put a lie to all of those opposite ridiculous claims, by producing a budget which establishes a solid foundation for the future development of our entire country and all of its population.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I ask the question: When I sat and listened to the Member for Diego Martin West, refer to our Prime Minister with a new defence "that wasn't me", I pose the question through you, of course, who was it that was responsible for the almost decimation for our national character in the last decade? Who was it that was responsible of the meteoric rise in the murder rate?

Mrs. Gopee-Scoon: In the last few months?

Hon. P. Ramadhar: We will deal with the last few months because I am happy you raised it, Member for Point Fortin. Significantly to what my friend—No, no, no. Yesterday in contribution, the Member for Arouca/Maloney really showed what is happening in this country, when she said and spoke of a school that was in dire need of refurbishment. She said for 20 years there was dire need. Then it was as obvious as daylight that all the blame of the past, they now want to shovel onto the shoulders of the People's Partnership. We have been here for only three months, and I say only three months—that last administration was there—[*Interruption*]

Dr. Gopeesingh: For nine years.

Hon. P. Ramadhar:—nine years. Let me give them the benefit, eight years.

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Eight by 12 is 96 months. What were they able to do in that 96-month period?

Miss Hospedales: Plenty.

Hon. P. Ramadhar: Plenty? Yes, of course, the rise in the murder rate, the rise in crime and rampant corruption. I am not going to be long. I just want to ask these simple questions: I am really a lawyer. I am a visiting politician and I want to ask this question: Who amongst you on the other side are proud of the rise in the murder rate from the year 2001 to this year? Put your hand up please, if you are proud of it. Who amongst you are proud of the level of corruption and rot that we find in this country? Put your hand up if you are proud of it. I see no hands. Who amongst you are proud of the incredible decimation of agriculture where we cannot feed ourselves? Put your hand up.

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. [*Mr. A. Roberts*]

Question put and agreed to.

Now that we have seen those on the other side, [*Desk thumping*] [*Laughter*] not one of them was able to answer the question of being proud of the PNM for the greatest—oh, you put your hand up for murder?

7.00 p.m.

Mrs. McIntosh: Proud of being PNM—[*Interruption*]

Hon. P. Ramadhar: Yes, I know, I—[*Interruption*]

Mrs. McIntosh:—all those who are proud of being PNM. [*Interruption*]

Hon. P. Ramadhar: Mr. Speaker, when the questions were posed as to murder, corruption, decimation of agriculture, and I could go on and on as to the failures of the administration of the past, not a single hand went up but the Member is proud to be a member of a party. Nothing is wrong with that. Nothing is wrong with being proud to be a member of a party, but that party, the PNM party, has betrayed its followers.

Hon. Member: Yes.

Hon. P. Ramadhar: It was once a great institution, but, especially in the last several years it had grown to represent nothing short of disappointment and failure. As one of my colleagues earlier today put it, “The shoulda, coulda, woulda government”. You always shoulda, coulda, would have. You did not do

and, when you did, it turned out to be with cost overruns and rampant corruption. This is the People's Partnership. We are your partners whether you like it or not [*Desk thumping*] and, over time, over time, you will be convinced that you must join in this mission to save this nation. [*Desk thumping*]

Many have forgotten in so short a period, three months it was, where this country was—it really was on the edge of the abyss—and by the population voting, and I thank God for the opportunity for this nation to have the right to vote on May 24th, this country was saved, yet we get blamed for the flooding.

I heard one of my friends yesterday make mention that it may be an ill wind that portends of evil or something to that effect. “How come almost right after the election this country saw so much flooding and so much natural disaster?” You know why? God said, if he allowed it when you were there, the people would have had no one to help them. [*Desk thumping*] It was because of the neglect from your administration of all the infrastructure that the slightest rains would bring floods. It is because of your neglect that during the crop time, we call it, we do not have water. It is because of your failure to uphold the laws you find developments on the land—on the mountainsides where homes now come tumbling down. It is because of your failure to observe what is right and proper, every time you look at any agreement this Government involved itself with, you find something like the *Su*. You look left, you look right, “is more *Su*, more *Su*, more sewage”. [*Laughter*]

It really is disgusting; and I tell you this. I came into the politics not for anything other than to redefine what politics ought to mean. There are good and noble people sitting across but what has happened, when you come as one group, your goodness and your nobility transcend themselves now into loyalty to party and never to the people. Because you are proud to belong to a party, to say that you are PNM and you could wear the balisier on your chest, you give up your duty to your people.

You have given up the duty to defend our people. You have given up your duty to protect the interest of our people and yesterday when Dr. Lincoln Douglas spoke you actually broke the constitutional protection that you had a duty to give to our people. That is what we are talking about. You need a whole lot of introspection. You need new leadership. You need new guidance. You really need the People's Partnership. [*Desk thumping*]

You know, I was so fortunate, Prime Minister, and other leaders, Mr. Dookeran, to have been present when the name, the “People's Partnership”, was created. It was not just a convenient name or it sounded good. I remember the philosophy was that we

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really must partner with the people because the enormity of the task ahead was so great that we understood that we needed each and every citizen, each and every patriot, to come together to work for the benefit of this land, and that is why it was named People's Partnership. So feel welcome to join us in our mission. You could keep your name but join us in our effort. Nothing is wrong with that.

Hon. Member: Repent first.

Hon. P. Ramadhar: The repent—I shall not go into that. That is a matter individually between the person and their God.

So the People's Partnership is here. The People's Partnership will do all in its authority and its power to protect and save this land. It is really a comfort zone for all those who do not yet feel liberated from the yoke of the PNM. Walk over slowly but surely. Walk over. As the Prime Minister has said, hold our hand. We are not your enemies, you know. You may not appreciate it at this point in time but we are your absolute best friends because you live in this country, and, when this country succeeds, you too will succeed. It is as simple as that.

So, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I thank you for the opportunity to have spoken here. I know that mine was not the riveting sort of delivery but it is the nature of the work that I have been given the honour to deal with. So I thank you warmly from my heart. Thank you so much. [*Desk thumping*]

The Minister of State in the Ministry of Education (Hon. Clifton De Coteau): Mr. Deputy Speaker, I rise in my first contribution in this honourable House to first of all congratulate the Minister of Finance on his budget presentation and to thank him for delivering what the country so badly needed, a budget with a clear sense of direction for Trinidad and Tobago and one that will ensure that the country is able to move forward with a pattern of development that is people-centred.

I take this opportunity to thank members of my constituency, the people of Moruga/Tableland, who have been neglected for years under the previous administration, for removing the PNM as their representative and electing me as their representative. [*Desk thumping*] I also want to thank the honourable Prime Minister, the Member of Parliament for Siparia, for the trust she has reposed in me by placing me as the Minister of State in the Ministry of Education.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, when we campaigned in the general election we told the voters that we would take this country in a new direction, one in which the focus will be on people, a country in which arrogance, squandermania and corruption and, if I may add, giggling—giggling; and, the teacher in me, I know we used to

say, when some people are giggling, you say they are giggling like a Cheshire cat, whatsoever that expression may mean, because it seems as though when our cognitive structure becomes vacuous, all we can do is grin, because we have nothing to absorb, we reach saturation point so quickly.

When you consider they believe that repetition leads to retention, it is a basic thing of learning, so they continue to bring the falsehoods because they know them only too well—terminological inexactitude, unmitigated falsifier of veracity. [*Desk thumping*] That is what you have on that side. [*Desk thumping*] That is what you have on that side. How could you, in the name of kingdom, say our young, young innocent ones going to school are dunce? Give a dog a bad name and he lives up to it.

Hon. Members: Shame! Shame!

Hon. C. De Coteau: Someone for whom I had such respect—

Hon. Members: Shame on you!

Hon. C. De Coteau:—shameful. You know, the voters agreed. They said no to the hubris of the past regime. They said no to wastage of public funds. You heard the Member for Tobago East. You know, it hurts me. It hurt me to see that instead of people weep—because they were confessing, you know.

When they were using the adjectives of, “deceitful”, “vindictiveness”, “cannot be trusted”, they were making an altar call to the Member for Arima to confess their sins. [*Laughter*] This is what they were doing. It was a testimony of their sin and wickedness. [*Laughter*] [*Desk thumping*] That is why they are here. [*Desk thumping*] You know, Mr. Deputy Speaker, they were on a feeding frenzy. That past government was leading us down the path of perdition. I would say political purgatory. What they said yes to was hope as they overwhelmingly elected the People’s Partnership, so we on this side are messengers of hope as opposed to that side, messengers of hopelessness. [*Desk thumping*] That is what they are. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Deputy Speaker, when I heard the contribution of the hon. Member for Arouca/Maloney—beautiful person—in which she suggested that the budget was full of fluff, I had to question whether the hon. Member and I had listened to the same budget. I had to ask myself whether the hon. Member was trying to pretend that she did not understand what was contained in the budget, because, Mr. Deputy Speaker, surely she must know that this budget was well crafted to take Trinidad and Tobago back on the path of economic growth and lay the foundation

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for the future of economic prosperity.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I was really overwhelmed. You know, I know during the '70s when I was actively involved in what we may call the black power area, some people believed that when in argument you shout, loudly void of logic, you know. We had a course at UWI, "Use of English", where they talk in terms of valid syllogism and invalid syllogism. When I looked and I listened, even to my good friend, my good friend, former principal, former education colleague, the representative for La Brea, I actually wondered, because he convinced himself, he convinced himself; and I wept silently for my brother. I wept silently for you.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, you would no doubt be aware that this Government identified the manifesto, "Seven Interconnected Pillars For Sustainable Development", and you all are quite acquainted, the other side. Page 7, "Pillar 1: People-Centred Development", and I would—it adds what the Member for St. Augustine said, "We Need Everyone and All Can Contribute". So I am assured that if you come on this side we will be able to clear you of what kind of intellectual stagnation you may have, right. Come on this one and we know that you can make a worthy contribution. I am saying this to wake you all up.

Hon. Member: "Doh hurt dem."

Hon. C. De Coteau: No, I would not hurt them. I am not hurting them. "Pillar 2: Poverty Eradication and Social Justice—Preference for Poor and Disadvantaged". "Preference for Poor and Disadvantaged". "Preference for Poor and Disadvantaged". [*Interruption*] Certainly we are not talking to my colleagues on the other side because they never had a preference for the poor and the disadvantaged. As a matter of fact, they suppressed them! Sometimes, you know, I cannot remember the reader—and you have to forgive me for my contribution as I should quote the reading—but I know somewhere along it was suggested by someone that she remove that Balisier emblem from their chest because that is one of the biggest signs of oppression and suppression in this country. [*Desk thumping*]

"Pillar 3: National and Personal Security—Human Security for Peace and Prosperity". We would like that to happen. "Pillar 4: Information and Communication Technologies—Connecting Trinidad and Tobago and Building a New Economy".

7.15 p.m.

"Pillar 5: A More Diversified, Knowledge Intensive Economy—Building

on the Native Genius of our People”. “Pillar 6: Good Governance—People Participation”. And I know the other side may not really like that. “Pillar 7: Foreign Policy—Securing our Place in the World”.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, if you look at the seven pillars, people are always central. This is also the case in education where, as you know, the Government has moved swiftly to deal with the considerable challenges in our education system. Make no bones about it, Mr. Deputy Speaker, the country’s education system faces real challenges. We will not say problems. We say challenges, because we can surmount the challenges; key to which are quality and equity.

I want to thank our esteemed Prime Minister for connecting me in the Ministry with the Member for Caroni East, Hon. Dr. Tim Gopeesingh. We are really an enlightened duo. [*Desk thumping*] Mr. Deputy Speaker, we cannot develop this country on this two-tiered system, one in which some students are at a distinct advantage over others because of where they live or the financial capabilities of their parents. Hon. Members, what I am saying is that in ensuring there is greater equity in the system, we will ensure that all students have the basic requirements to succeed.

This is a major reason this Government decided that all students entering secondary school should have a laptop computer. [*Desk thumping*] It was to ensure that students, regardless of their race, creed, financial circumstances or geography, have access to a laptop; a doorway to ICT as a learning tool. I do not propose to spend any great time on the laptop issue, because my esteemed colleague, the Minister of Education, Member for Caroni East, will deal most effectively with that laptop issue.

Mr. Speaker, I want to look at what is truly the foundation of the education system; and that is the primary school system. In our manifesto, or should I say in our contract with the people of Trinidad and Tobago, we talked about ensuring that our children are literate, numerate, and aware of e-learning and Internet-based opportunities with the primary level. [*Interruption*] Listen again. I am not bashing anyone, and sometimes I question the foundation—the primary foundation of some on the other side. Literate, numerate is questionable.

We noted that it is at the primary schools that the foundation must be laid, so the students will have a love for learning and become critical thinkers, use their creativity, and have an entrepreneurial outlook. You would have read, and I heard, well I think it was the Member for St. Ann’s East, or Arouca/Maloney—one of them—talking about 35 schools not reopened.

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We are here only three months. Deterioration does not take place overnight or in three months' time. The fact that the schools were in that state of decadence, it meant that it was that administration that had it so. [*Desk thumping*] Am I correct, Principal? Is it not true? Because there was no kind of preventative maintenance; a preventative maintenance that this partnership would introduce, so that we would not have that kind of deterioration.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, when I was a school supervisor in Port of Spain and the environs, the Member for Port of Spain North/St. Ann's West was, indeed, a very enlightened person; one of my most cooperative principals, so I would not take her to task. But what I say, that when you are in a certain party, there is some degree of toxicity.

Mrs. Mc Intosh: Vacation Repair Programme, for the past 10 years.

Mr. Sharma: Did he take good care of you?

Mrs. Mc Intosh: Very good care.

Hon. C. De Coteau: Mr. Deputy Speaker, the former administration clearly did not believe that the primary school system is the bedrock of our nation; and I probably only use one school as an example. New Grant Government Primary School, in their stronghold, in the Sixth Company area, that they call "The Mang". All their supporters come from that area, but over 12 years now, the school is still to be repaired.

Hon. Members: What a shame.

Hon. C. De Coteau: And then it was shown to us by the Planning Division that when the school came up to be put on first order of priority, the former Minister said put it aside. Their own people. Their own people, and that is what happened. So when I hear people coming here now and appealing to the Minister of Works and Transport to, "Do something for me please,"—as we would say in the layman language, "Give we a little bligh, nuh," I say, but were you not in charge. Was your administration not in charge? And they gave you nothing.

Mr. Roberts: Nine years.

Mr. Sharma: What did you all do except thief?

Hon. C. De Coteau: This is how they treated their supporters. Nothing. Nothing for them. And now, I assure you that the People's Partnership will take care of you. We said to achieve this, we will embark on curriculum reform, that the Minister will

develop. To address the needs of 21st Century development and to build a foundation for responsible citizenship; and the optimization of multiple talents, including talent in the arts and sports.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I cannot understate the importance of the primary school system, which, together with the early childhood, form the building block of the educational system. It is, after all—[*Interruption*] I am tempted to say something, but I do not want to be provoked. I want to maintain my equanimity in this august Chamber. As an educator, I have to maintain my equanimity.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, at the primary school level, this is where the social skills are taught, and where children are taught how to learn. I heard one of the speakers, in their contribution, speak in terms of civics, good manners; thank you, respect. Because, you know, what is happening is that we have lost respect for people in this society of ours, and most of the things you will hear the young men on the block say, “You disrespected me. You ‘dissed’ me.” So we have to get that basic respect.

In the schools, you would see long ago, “Manners maketh man,” and “Cleanliness is next to Godliness”. Do we practise these things?

Mr. Warner: Thou shalt not steal.

Hon. C. De Coteau: Thou shalt not steal. [*Laughter*] Mr. Deputy Speaker, we have more than 440 primary schools; a large number of which are in terrible condition. Fifty years old, left to rot. Even as we speak, today, TTUTA was in two of the schools in an area, and we had to get EFCL to move with some pace to do some maintenance to prevent strike action. We know that if you put people to learn in poor facilities, it negatively impacts results.

Unlike the former administration, we will take action to improve the schools. And to that end, I was advised by the hon. Minister that we are going to furnish most of the schools. New furniture, new desks for most of the schools. [*Desk thumping*] This is indeed a challenge, in that the work required can only be done, as in the past, it was during the August vacation; because we are talking about roof replacement, floor replacement, major upgrade to toilet facilities and electrical works. You know, just recently, we had to do some work on QRC; changing a whole floor, replacing it from board to concrete. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I can assure you that in the future with the People’s

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Partnership, we will continue and we will indulge in preventative maintenance. I need to say that. I need to say that and repeat it. When you go around and you look at the deplorable conditions of the schools, our young teachers come out from teachers' college with all their theoretical knowledge, but when they go into the classroom, it is demotivating. Totally demotivating.

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

We want to have the aesthetic of the schools in such a position that it is encouraging. It encourages learning. The ethos is one where you feel to be in the schools. Just being on the compound itself and the classroom settings, you feel to learn. But, not the situation where the children come out and are going on to secondary school and we call them dunce.

Hon. Members: Shame.

Mr. Sharma: Shame on the PNM.

Hon. C. De Coteau: We hope that with these national responsibilities, there would be improved effectiveness and success of schools; improved student achievement; more efficient delivery of service and resourcing of schools; improved supervision and evaluation; democratization of the system, thereby allowing greater stakeholder and community involvement in the decision-making process; and greater efficiency in management and governance of the system.

That brings me to school boards. The last administration did not take the people with the educational competence and put them on the school boards. What did they do? Friends and party group members; they put them on the board.

Mrs. Gopee-Scoon: Why are you taking so long with your boards?

Hon. C. De Coteau: Why we are taking so long to move them? We do not move with haste. Hurry man does eat raw meat, eh. [*Laughter*] We are not dealing with spite. No, we are very systematic and analytical in our approach. We want to reform you before we can remove them.

Mr. Speaker, one of the bugbears of the education system is the traffic 5ttwoes, and we feel assured that with the Minister of Works and Transport, the Member for Chaguanas West, and his co-pilot, the Member for Couva South, another dynamic duo, good things are going to happen. [*Desk thumping*] There will be, we predict, a reduction in the traffic woes as teachers, parents and students can access services and resources at the education districts and government employees are located closer to their homes.

Mr. Speaker, let me tell this honourable House a little about the traffic woes and how it impacts on the education system. As you are aware, there is almost gridlock along the East-West Corridor on weekdays, during 6.30 a.m. and 9.00 a.m. The same happens heading into San Fernando on an afternoon. When we look at those educational districts and teachers' punctuality, we see the areas with the biggest problems or challenges in Trinidad are Victoria, Port of Spain and the environs, and St. George. Mr. Speaker, in Victoria alone, the record shows that for the last school year, we lost in teaching time, more than 60,000 minutes. In Port of Spain and the environs, there were 275,000 minutes in teaching time lost.

7.30 p.m.

Of course, there are teachers who are not as timely as they should be; in some cases there would be extenuating circumstances, but the fact is something has to be done and we believe that decentralization would assist, in addition to the Minister of Works and Transport mitigating the situation we have.

How do we hope to achieve this change? The People's Partnership Government will ensure a more decentralized and participatory quality education system, by establishing autonomous regional authorities that can effectively coordinate, manage and improve performance in schools. I know they are going to say, "Is we idea," [*Laughter*]; the historian in me would tell you that it was the same thing with the West Indies. When the Spanish came and they owned the island, the English and the French said, "Prescription without possession availeth to nothing"; so you could say it was your idea. You could be promised that someone would marry you and I could promise you that I will give you a house, and then one comes along and delivers you. We are the deliverers. [*Desk thumping*] [*Laughter*]

Mr. Speaker, the People's Partnership Government will ensure a more decentralized and participatory quality education system. We are going to strengthen the capacity of the education districts and schools to plan, cost, manage and monitor delivery of education services. Why in the name of kingdom—Member for La Brea, you know this. A teacher has to get a recommendation, he has to leave—no disrespect when I say—"quito, quito" Cedros to come to Port of Spain, when they could just—am I correct my dear? Everything was centralized and we believe that with the decentralization process it would help, so principals would have more authority to manage their schools.

Why does a principal have to go to head office and sit like a little mendicant to a clerk who he is senior to, to ask for some help? It is demotivating, and the

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Member for Port of Spain North/St. Ann's West knows what I am talking about, also the Member for La Brea. I am sure you experienced that, Member for La Brea, when you had to go and sit like some little mendicant, asking for help. It would take place in the districts. [*Interruption*]

Mrs. Mc Intosh: I cannot even get to see the Minister.

Hon. C. De Coteau: This Government has been left with the task of completing the decentralization thrust commenced since 2003—but as usual the PNM always has some kind of "educational interruptus". They cannot deliver on time and they take a lot of time to deliver. As you are aware that the way to hell is paved with good intentions and while the former regime articulated a lot of things for the education system, like so many other aspects of national life, they did not deliver.

Let me give you an example. The Ministry of Education had a plan of restructuring and decentralizing; under the plan there were five goals—remember them?—that would be achieved in a two-year period. They were:

1. The central administration completely restructured by 2006—yes, 2006—it sounds like the Brian Lara thing [*Laughter*] you promised; they really say a promise is comfort to a fool. "I promise you I will deliver it by 2006;" that was four years ago;
2. Upgrade of educational districts by September 2007;
3. New organizational structures for the school based management model institutionalized by September 2006;
4. Development and implementation of a system for outsourcing certain services and operations by September 2006; and
5. Modernization of the educational management information system by 2006.

Mr. Speaker, it gives me no pleasure in saying that none of these were achieved. It is for this People's Partnership to make it happen, because they are good measures and we will make it happen. We congratulate them for their efforts, but somewhere along the line—this happens to be a marathon and they could only sprint for a little 25 metres; they cannot go the distance. Even in staying in political administration, they could only go two and a half, two and a half; they cannot go the distance. The Member for La Brea said, "Town talk say dey eh go last." Member, you stop there and feel we would not last; we are going

for the five. You may not last. [*Crosstalk*] They promised the moon and the stars, but nothing happened. I bring it to you again, "Prescription without possession availeth to nothing."

Therefore, in fiscal year 2011, this administration will outfit staff and we are going to operationalize three of the seven education district offices, beginning with the south eastern education district; not because I am living within close proximity. We are going to start with that. We will also continue works to ensure the establishment of all district offices by 2012 and the operationalization of four full accounting units by 2013.

We are going to develop and implement the performance management framework for the education district offices and schools. Our schools will now become accountable for the quality of learning outcome and service delivery; therefore, we will ensure that we provide support to schools and districts in preparing implementation, monitoring and evaluation school development plans and district business plans. They are trying it in some schools.

We are going to review the system of resource allocation, that is, funding, material and personnel to schools and districts and implement the recommendations to support the achievement of their annual targets. We have to do these things. We have people from Chaguanas working in Cedros and when they try to get a transfer, they are given all kinds of stories. Why? Why? Someone wants to go from one ministry to another in an advisory capacity, and all the bureaucratic obstacles are placed in the way to frustrate the people; this is what is happening. You are approached to assist, not to compromise the system, and when you go, there are bureaucratic obstacles placed in front of you. It stays on people's desk for a long period of time and you have to go and literally, as they would use the term, "Suharry", to get it going. You have to put oil in your hands.

We will establish school based management as the preferred framework for improving the administration and management of schools. We will re-culture, empower and restructure schools so that they are better able to assist students to performance at high levels of achievement.

Hon. Members, steps are being taken to provide the mechanisms and structures that give schools the autonomy to set directions and the power to achieve results. We have to move away from rewarding mediocrity. [*Desk thumping*] We have to move away from that. That is one of the diseases in this society; as soon as you could play a little sports, you are a big hero. Let us begin to reward through excellence. If you do not perform well, we encourage you to

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improve your performance and then when you achieve that level of excellence, you are rewarded. Thanks to the previous administration over the years, you have the accumulation of rewarding mediocrity. So you have performed, your party says, "Good, good, good," national pride.

School based management also allows interaction and interconnectivity between the key stakeholders. It allows the central administration to set and implement national education policies, develop appropriate curricula and provide oversight for monitoring standards and performances, management and accountability standards.

Member for Point Fortin, you have the secondary schools out there. We talked in terms of tourism over the years. Tell me, which one of the secondary schools on the coastline have on the curricula small engine repairs? So the man in Moruga has to go to Marabella to get the small engine repairs, because we do not have that foresight, that vision, of preparing them with education for worthwhile living.

There is a whole book on education by R S Peters, but how many of the past administration even took up a book and read on education? How many of them? How many were au courant with some of the educational philosophies? The Member for Lopinot/Bon Air West would know what I am talking about. If you are in a particular field, you are supposed to edify yourself. If even every month you say, "I am in this field, what is the latest?"

I remember serving on the Teaching Service Commission for about seven years. One of the first things I would ask when someone came for an interview was, "What was the last book you read on education?" and persons would start stuttering. Are we encouraging our students to know something about the history of their place? You are living in Princes Town, how was it named Princes Town? You are living in Lopinot/Bon Air, how was it named? This is one of the things we are hoping, that students will be aware; they would know something about their surrounding, how it was named and that would be a start, because it would bring pride in our community.

It would bring national pride, but let us get the pride at the community level. When the Prime Minister initiated "Beautifying T&T", we should have removed all the scales of the politics and be involved in the national pride. But no, what do we do? We politicize everything and then when we have those political chameleons, whose skins would change to suit the party in power—and you all know that very well on the other side, because a lot of your supporters have left you. They have changed; political chameleons. They were there since Napoleon's time, during the French Revolution, 1789; they have jumped ship; I have seen it.

Mrs. Mc Intosh: They will jump back.

Hon. C. De Coteau: They have nothing to jump back to with "allyuh". [*Laughter*]

Hon. Member: The Member for Toco/Sangre Grande knows about that.

Hon. C. De Coteau: Toco/Sangre Grande? I do not know anything about that; I am Moruga/Tableland. [*Laughter*]

We have all the district level support. [*Interruption*] Yes, I should know. I know, and do not provoke me. I know, because I was one there. I supported the PNM; I left after I voted for your present Opposition Leader and the Member for that area there, San Fernando East. They were vexed with me.

7.45 p.m.

I supported him, but then I realized, as most people are realizing, that that side uses you. They take you for granted and they use you and then they discard you. They discard you! Look what they did to the people in Sixth Company for years; look at what they did to the Baptist community for years. [*Interruption*] What did they do with—I do not want to call people's names. You would realize it too, Member for Port of Spain North/St. Ann's West. Trust me. You are going to realize it and reformation would come like a thief in the night.

Mrs. Mc Intosh: I will come by you.

Hon. C. De Coteau: You know, Henry V, *The Prologue*, states:

“Oh for a muse of fire, that would ascend

The brightest heaven of invention,

A kingdom for a stage, princes to act...”

And we continue with it, “eh”. It would come to you; trust me.

How will we know that our schools are performing at the optimal levels? We will have schools throughout Trinidad and Tobago with vision, values and high expectations. High expectations! Why are some schools performing and others not? Do you know why? Because some schools have the organizational culture of delivery and performance so that you know once you step into the school—you know as parents, everybody wants to go to a particular school. Why? Because they have the vision, values and high expectations.

We will have a culture of inclusiveness, accepting all students as individuals and capable of achieving well. We are going to have schools, those built in the

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future, capable of dealing with the disabled. We are really not too disability friendly, you know, because some students cannot access—it is pathetic. Where is the thinking? Where is the vision? Where is the love? What is an administration for? Just self-aggrandizement? Where is the love? I wonder, where is the love?

Hon. Member: Too much karaoke.

Hon. C. De Coteau: Too much of karaoking? “All yuh” have a fixation with that.

Mr. Ramadhar: They only singing party line.

Hon. C. De Coteau: Yes, they only singing party line. So we will have this culture of inclusiveness, accepting all students as individuals, capable of achieving well and it would be consistent with the staff expectations of each other and their students; effective and well-understood processes for assuring and raising the quality of teaching and learning. Let me tell you something. Our teachers work extremely hard. Extremely hard! [*Desk thumping*] Preparing their notes for lessons; preparing all their charts. They work extremely hard.

There will be clear and collaborative leadership that seeks to further build leadership capacity in the staff and students. A number of our young students—and the future of Trinidad and Tobago is with our young people—are creative; they are proactive; they are brilliant. They are not intellectually challenged and they do not reach intellectual saturation point easily. I am not throwing stones at anyone on the other side, but as they say, if the cap fits, pull the string. They have a tremendous capacity for hard work and intellectual challenges. They do not grin when they see a situation and they do not go into analysis paralysis.

We will have a relevant and attractive curriculum that develops a love for learning; effective systems for assessment, progress tracking and target setting. My Minister would tell you about the SEA and what the Partnership plans to do with it. Listen and listen intently. For years it has been there, but they did not have that vision. They would not come out of the box. Sometimes, you know, there is the need—you know this visioning. They stay in the box. You know, you have to just visualize.

How in the name of kingdom: sometimes we travel so much; you see things and you say, "Listen, why can I not apply it to my country?" You do not. So that when the Minister of Works and Transport says, "We are going to go with the tunnel through the mountains", somebody said it cannot be done. I say what madness! This person does not travel. I mean, I do a lot of travelling. You go through Europe, it is tunnel through tunnel, through tunnel, you are going through. Why can it not be done?

Because this is what I am saying, we are messengers of hope; we are visionaries; we are optimistic as opposed to pessimism and “it cannot be done”.

When Christopher Columbus went to the King and Queen, at the same time people were saying, "If you go, you go fall off." Um? It can be done and I know the Member for Port of Spain North/St. Ann's West and the Member for La Brea, I mean, give Jack his jacket, I work with them and they are enlightened persons. That is why it “vex” my heart! I am totally flabbergasted!

Further, we are going to have strong, productive partnership with parents and the community—strong productive partnership with parents and the community—so that they would be part of it. Do you know something? Southeast Port of Spain—that school—I remember as a supervisor the community used to guard the school. They say it is a bad-boy area, but they, the community people, used to take responsibility. So we have to develop that partnership. How could you have a playing field and when the former administration did not provide a playground, you as the principal say they cannot use the ground? It is an extension of the community and they must use it.

I have spent my life in education, as a student-teacher way back in 1964.

Mr. Speaker: The speaking time of the hon. Member has expired.

Motion made, That the speaking time of the hon. Member be extended by 30 minutes [*Hon. A. Roberts*]

Question put and agreed to.

Hon. C. De Coteau: Thank you, Mr. Speaker; thank you, colleagues. I said I spent all my life in education. From 1964, I started as a student-teacher at Mausica Teachers' College where I met the indefatigable Member for Chaguanas West; served as a teacher; dean of discipline; vice principal; principal, school supervisor and area superintendent of the continuation classes up to May 24. [*Desk thumping*] So I have worked all my life in education. So that in seeking to improve the lives of our young people—and that is why I can say without a doubt that the decision of the last administration to remove the post of director of school supervision was, indeed, a retrograde step. [*Crosstalk*] As the Member for Port of Spain North/St. Ann's West would say, as a teacher you come to a class; sometimes you have to ignore the direction of the sound or else you would be distracted.

So we believe that the removal of the director of school supervision was indeed a bad move. You need the director of school supervision. Even though they are saying, or it was proposed that at the district level you would have the school administrator, you need the director of school supervision.

What is the role of the school supervisor? The role and function of the school supervisor and school principals are spelt out quite clearly in the Education Act, but in short, the school supervisor monitors, advises and guides principals in the performance of their duties. They ensure that the policies of the Ministry of Education are adhered to and are implemented. For example, schools have been involved in a project to produce a school development plan. The school supervisors are crucial in this because they have to work with the principals and schools to ensure we have plans that are feasible to meet the target set by the Ministry of Education.

If you do not have good, administratively strong and competent school supervisors, then the whole concept of school-based management and decentralization will be placed in jeopardy. It falls apart. When you look at even the situation we face at the moment—or we faced—the school supervisors were not in the loop; they were left out by the Education Facilities Management Company Limited and we are saying that they must be an integral part. You cannot manage a school if you do not know what is happening! [*Desk thumping*] How could you be doing work on a school and the principal of the school or the board of management does not know the scope of work? That has to change, where school principals are responsible, and we will give them that mandate to be responsible for their school.

My line Minister and I met with the different associations and one of the things that the primary school association begged for is that we increase their funding; even the secondary level. So when you go and register your child—what they say—you see people complaining, "Oh, I go to register the child and they tell me I have to pay so much of money", we say it is not a fee because you are not supposed to pay any fee.

But the point is, we have to increase, and the line Minister has given that commitment that we are going to increase their grant so that there will be no need to have to, as you say, "tax" the parents when they come into the school. So you tax them for registering; you tax them for this; you tax them for printing; you tax for security and so on. Let us empower them; let us give them the moneys. [*Desk thumping*]

You go into a school, as someone said, you can only make a first impression once. The furthest you might reach in the school is just to the front, and we are saying, clean up the surroundings. So we have given instructions to EFCL, go to all schools—and we have started with the primary schools—and all those old furniture, move them. Clean up the surroundings. Clean up the surroundings!

[*Desk thumping*] Schools must not be a place for rats and dogs and all these things so. Clean up the surroundings. Children must feel comfortable. Have park benches.

Mrs. Mc Intosh: Go and see St. Francois.

Hon. C. De Coteau: I know; I know that. Your artistic perfection is implemented in your school.

We cannot give to the chief education officer who would have his or her responsibility, the responsibility to supervise the people. We need a director of school supervision. I told the honourable House at the beginning of my contribution about the need for equity in the education system and while we talk in terms of one of the roles of the school supervisor is to ensure the role of students who are in need of social intervention, like school transport, textbooks and rental et cetera, benefit from the programmes, to many vulnerable students and, indeed, their parents, these social programmes can make a difference in attendance, enthusiasm and, of course, performance. With the new Ministry, with the Member for Caroni Central as the head, let me say we have had total cooperation so far. [*Desk thumping*]

8.00 p.m.

Mr. Speaker, I want the hon. Members to consider the performance of students in what we call the Cedros zone—I am sorry the Member has left — where this year 103 students wrote the SEA and only 12 got over 75.

Mr. Speaker, 75 per cent is unlikely to get you into one of the better performing secondary schools—your first choice. More than that, 15 out of 103 students scored less than 30 per cent in a situation where the national average is 11.6 per cent. What are the reasons identified by the Ministry for the poor performance?

Of one student, it was absenteeism, which was particularly bad at certain times of the year. When food prices were high, some of the students stayed at home to help their parents. We had a case of drug and substance abuse also identified.

So, we see the problem of inequity affecting performance and the need to have strong school supervision so that principals who are inexperienced could receive mentoring and support from school supervisors. That is why it was so important for this mentoring for the students.

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This Government respects and values what the stakeholders make in education. We on this side do not see education as something with which to politic. It is the future of our country. It is what can transform individual circumstances. It is what can change lives. It is what allows many to dream about being lifted out of poverty and having a better life. In other words, we shall all rise out of the poverty. It is why we are so passionate about education and ensuring that we build on the strengths of the system and that we improve the areas that cry out for change.

We will continue to work with all those committed to education and we will ensure when history is written, it will show that we took our education system, transformed it and left the country in a much better place than we found it.

Mr. Speaker, it will be remiss of me, the Member for Moruga/Tableland, if I do not say something about my constituency. That is why when I think about Moruga/Tableland, the former administration should hold their heads in shame for the neglect they have thrown on the people of that area.

The Minister of Works and Transport, after a visit to the area and listening to the cries of the people, do you know what he said? When he saw for himself, he said: If Christopher Columbus should return now, he cannot get lost. Nothing has changed.

Mr. Speaker, for decades, the people of my constituency supported those on the other side, the former administration. Election after election, they entrusted the People's National Movement with their votes and what did they get in return? Nothing. Contempt. Can you imagine that since the 1950s the late Prime Minister Dr. Eric Williams promised a fishing port and facilities for the people of Moruga and it is yet to be built? Imagine one of the most productive fishing areas in Trinidad and Tobago without a port and a port facility where fishermen could moor their boats and have workshop meetings. Nothing!

Mr. Speaker, even during the first term of his Prime Ministership, the Member for San Fernando East went to Moruga and spent the day promising again a fishing port and improved facilities. Nothing happened. Such has been the former administration's love for the people of Moruga/Tableland and Barrackpore. They literally "dis" them. It is no wonder that when I went in 2007, I lost by a close margin and when I returned in 2010, the marginal seat was won by nearly 3,000 votes.

Mr. Speaker, while this Government spent millions of dollars on two summits, my constituents do not have a reliable ambulance service. If you get sick while in Moruga, prepare to die. If you are pregnant, you will have some kind of transportational abortion. You will die.

Thanks to the People's Partnership and the Ministry of Health, we have been promised a 24/7 health service. You will get a birth certificate. This is no joke. There are many people there who do not have their birth certificate. Thanks to the Member for St. Augustine, he is going to arrange that so that a mobile unit will go and they will get their things.

Mr. Speaker, my constituents had to block the roads for weeks before there was an improved service. Thanks to the People's Partnership again and the energetic Member for Chaguanas West, roads were paved. Mandingo realised paving on all the roads in the constituency.

Imagine, we have Maurice Aguilera, West Indian Cricket captain, and the area he is from, Marac Grounds; no lights. Penal Rock Road with Tommy Morales and the team and on the 24th Joe Public would go and indulge them in football; no lights. What is shameful is that the people in that area used to vote for them all the time.

My constituents can feel assured that they finally have a government that is working in their best interest. I know my colleagues, including the Minister of Finance, knows the challenge of living in a rural area; his being from Rio Claro, as is the Minister of Works and Transport.

Again, I congratulate the Minister of Finance for his budget presentation; my honourable colleagues for the courtesy of their attention and for giving me the opportunity to speak. I assure students and parents that the People's Partnership Government will work to ensure that their future is brighter than it appeared four months ago. There is hope as we the messengers of hope will deliver and make a brighter day for them.

Mr. Speaker, I thank you.

The Parliamentary Secretary in the Ministry of Sport and Youth Affairs (Miss Stacy Roopnarine): Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Before I begin my contribution to the 2011 budget debate today, I would like to congratulate the hon. Prime Minister and the hon. Minister of Finance for one of the most people-centric budgets ever delivered in Trinidad and Tobago.

With this being my maiden speech in this august House, I take this opportunity to congratulate all Members on their elevation into office, both on the Government side and the Opposition side; in particular the hon. Prime Minister of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago. Her elevation to the position of first female Prime Minister of this country sets a precedent for all young women with dreams in this nation.

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I also thank her for the opportunity to serve the people of Oropouche West and, as I stand here today, it could not be possible without the love and support of my constituents. For this I thank them.

Mr. Speaker, before I get into the plans for youth development in Trinidad and Tobago, I first apologize to the people of Oropouche West for the immense neglect that they have faced for the last nine years under a PNM government, which so often beat their chests and boast that great is the PNM; so great that they have miserably failed the people of Oropouche West. They have deprived them basic amenities of roads, proper drainage and a proper water supply.

I ask the last Minister of Works and Transport, the Member for Diego Martin North/East, who is once again absent, if he knows about a road called Pluck Road? Does he know about San Francique, Woodland, Gopie Trace and Tulsa Trace? Does he know about those roads? I believe he does not because if he did I cannot understand and the people of Oropouche West cannot understand why these roads have been severely neglected over the last nine years.

Imagine children walk these and many other roads in the Oropouche West Constituency to go to school. When rain falls, they are deprived of the education because the roads are impassable; not to mention what happens when it rains for more than half an hour. The people remain stranded in their homes as the flood wreaks havoc and devastation on their crops and their livelihood as a result of the failure of the previous government to address drainage. I would hate to think that this was a case of political victimization of a people not known to be traditional supporters of a PNM administration.

Mr. Speaker, I want this noble House to know that this current Minister of Works and Transport, the hon. Member for Chaguanas West, knows firsthand about the problems in Oropouche West as he and the hon. Minister of Local Government, the Member for Fyzabad, personally visited these areas and gave a commitment to address the concerns of the people in this far too long-neglected constituency.

8.15 p.m.

This is the kind of representation that the people of Trinidad and Tobago voted for. I want to ask the last Minister of Works and Transport if he ever went to Oropouche West. Yet, these Members continue to boast that great is the PNM. They continue to boast about Vision 2020. Well, I would like to advise that this Government will take this country far beyond the boundaries of their 2020 shortsightedness as we seek to turn our economy around.

Mr. Speaker, I take this opportunity to assure this House that this Government remains committed to ensuring the development of our young people as we recognize that the future of our nation lies in the hands of our youth.

Our hon. Prime Minister has certainly shown her commitment to youth development, as for the first time in the history of Trinidad and Tobago, a youth has been appointed as a Parliamentary Secretary in the Ministry of Sport and Youth Affairs. For this I must thank her.

In the same vein the hon. Minister of Sport and Youth Affairs, the Member for D'Abadie/O'Meara also recognizes the importance of empowering young people, as it was to this end he has given me the privilege of having direct responsibility for youth affairs and I thank him today for this opportunity.

The PNM administration has certainly failed the youth of this country. While they were busy constructing million-dollar stadia, the youth crime rate was increasing. While they were busy hosting summits, the youth unemployment rate was rising and that is why on May 24, the young people of this country voted for change. They voted for a Government that seeks to empower young people and treat them with the mutual respect deserving of the future leaders of this country.

After I heard the Leader of the Opposition refer to the Form I students as "dunces" yesterday, I am convinced that the PNM still does not care about our young people. As I stand here representing youth, I must express my immense disappointment with the approach taken by the Leader of the Opposition. His statement of whether or not a Form I student could use a laptop was total disrespect to the hard-working young students. One would think that if the student does not know how to use the laptop, that we teach them and empower them. The goal of providing these laptops to the children is to empower them with access to technology for growth and development and allow equal opportunity for all children of this nation. Is it that the PNM administration does not believe in equal opportunity for all our nation's children, or it is they are saying that we should exclude the poor and less fortunate children of our country from accessing information communication technology? Clearly, they do not understand the importance of bridging the digital divide gap in order to move forward as a nation.

I have listened attentively to the budget debate since yesterday and I have listened to Members of the Opposition criticize the budget presented by the hon. Minister of Finance. I believe the Member for Arouca/Maloney went as far as to quote some John and Jane Doe in her contribution, calling our budget cosmetic. I think it is important that this House hears the view of the real young people on the

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budget.

In an article in the *Newsday* of September 11, the Trinidad Youth Council and the Trinidad and Tobago Youth Economic Society praised the Government for the budget presentation. I quote:

“The Trinidad Youth Council and the Trinidad and Tobago Youth Economic Society have lauded Government on its efforts to create economic sustainability and industrial diversification in the 2011 budget.”

The Member for Arouca/Maloney is yet to tell this House where her comments came from. Or is it another case of a false lie?

We must commend the Member for Tunapuna for consulting with young people on the budget. This Government, in our manifesto, is committed to involving youth in the decision-making process and the Minister of Finance certainly demonstrated this in consulting with youth on the budget. The youth population of Trinidad and Tobago is approximately 446,000 persons, over 30 per cent of our population in Trinidad and Tobago, and as such, great emphasis must be placed on the plans for the development of our young people.

This year, from August 12, 2010 to August 12, 2011, the United Nations has deemed this period “International Year of the Youth”, with the theme of dialogue and mutual understanding. In bringing sharper focus to youth-related issues, International Year of the Youth seeks to place these issues on global, regional and national developmental agendas. The United Nations recognizes that young people are a major human resource for development, positive social change and technological innovation. Young people are not merely passive beneficiaries, but effective agents of change in the process to address the world’s major challenges. This Government of Trinidad and Tobago therefore endorses International Year of the Youth and plans to utilize the opportunity to promote and increase understanding of the importance of and benefit of meaningful youth participation in all aspects of society.

In the past, National Youth Month has been a celebration of youth and their achievements and 2010 was no different in this regard. This Government is certainly not about reinventing the wheel, but we are certainly about optimization and efficiency. This year, National Youth Month, hosted in August, as we continue to promote the theme of dialogue and mutual understanding, in keeping with the international celebrations, the Government saw it fit to honour our youth on International Youth Day. Young people were honoured in the areas of bravery, academics, leadership, service and sports. I congratulate, again, all recipients and

it is this Government's sincere hope that more young people will continue to strive for excellence in their endeavor.

This Government certainly realizes and understands the importance of engaging young people in dialogue and it was to this end, that in the month of August, we launched a National Youth Consultation Programme during National Youth Month. For the first time in the history of our nation, a young person could walk right off the street and engage in dialogue with Ministers of Government. We had the Minister of National Security; Minister of the People, the Parliamentary Secretary in the Ministry of Planning, Economic and Social Restructuring and Gender Affairs and many other representatives of other Ministries. Young people had the opportunity to dialogue with us on issues of education, employment, hunger and poverty, health, environment, drug abuse, juvenile delinquency and HIV/AIDS. The point I am making is that this reiterates the pillars of good governance and people-centered development as was included in the People's Partnership manifesto, which is now Government policy.

I also had the opportunity to attend the World Youth Conference this year, held in Mexico and I must thank the hon. Prime Minister for the opportunity to represent Trinidad and Tobago to the world. One outcome of this conference was to encourage continued dialogue between young people and governments. It is my pleasure to report to this House, as it was my pleasure to report to the world then, that Trinidad and Tobago was already well ahead in this regard. We had already launched our National Youth Consultation Programme. This is the kind of representation that this Government affords our young people.

Let me also assure this august House and the national community that this Government represented the people of Trinidad and Tobago at that conference on a world class scale, as Trinidad and Tobago was given the honour of being selected by the United Nations and the other organizations to deliver closing remarks on behalf of all 36 Ministers of Youth and 120 countries participating at this conference.

This Government is committed to ensuring fullest participation of all our young people and, therefore, it was to this end that we decided that we will take our National Youth Consultation Programme throughout this country. As we have already done Port of Spain and San Fernando, we will continue to expand to Penal, Siparia, Sangre Grande, Moruga and Chaguanas, just to name a few. We will not continue in the habit of putting all our youth development resources only along the East/West Corridor. There must be equitable and fair distribution of our resources to develop all young people and, of course, side by side we stand with

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our sister isle of Tobago. This Government journeys to Tobago this month for consultation. The youth of Tobago will not be left behind by this Government.

Mr. Speaker, let me assure this noble House that unlike the previous government, we will ensure that these consultations actually result in action. We will not get into the habit of having youth forum which results in no action, as this is a direct insult to the young people of this country. I want the young people to know that the results of each consultation so far were already submitted to the relevant line Ministries for consideration.

I ask my colleagues now in Opposition to tell us if the benefits derived from these consultations can even compare to their traditional near million-dollar youth rally hosted during youth month. Imagine \$6.955 million spent on youth month 2008, only for a MORI poll to show that 1 per cent of the population participated in this activity. Tell me; is this value for our taxpayers' dollars? Every cent that this Government spends will certainly add value to the lives to the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago.

This Government committed to the young people of Trinidad and Tobago in our manifesto that we would review and amend the National Youth Policy to make it relevant today and implement it in such a manner that all stakeholders who interface with young people are guided by it accordingly. We intend to create a task force that will research and investigate a range of issues that affect youth. This task force will serve as an advisory body of the National Youth Assembly and will also review all legislation that treats with children and youth and make recommendation for the creation of alternative approaches and spaces to address the needs of delinquent youth. Not only are we resolved to have the task force review the policy, but we will go a step further and include the feedback received from our young people.

8.30 p.m.

The feedback from the youth derived out of the youth consultation programme will be submitted to the task force as recommendations. In this way, all youth of Trinidad and Tobago can have a direct say on the policy that guides us. Has that ever happened in the past?

Mr. Speaker, youth crime and violence is a growing concern in Trinidad and Tobago. Last year, some 700 children were held in connection with serious crimes, including kidnapping and possession of arms and ammunition. What has the previous administration done?

Hon. Members: Nothing!

Miss S. Roopnarine: A study was conducted as part of the research done by the Caricom Commission on Youth Development to analyze the situation of Caribbean youth and recommend policy interventions to empower them and improve their well-being. According to the study, murder rates in the Caribbean at 30 per 100,000 annually were higher than any other region of the world, and that youth were the primary perpetrators as well as the victims of crime and violence.

This study of Caribbean youth has revealed that youth risky behaviours are wreaking serious havoc on the economies of the Caribbean. Lost tourist revenues, as a result of crime, had reached in excess of US \$200 million per year for the Caricom region, and overall youth crime was costing at least 7 per cent of the region's gross domestic product.

This Government recognizes that this situation needs to be given due attention. Lucky for us, Mr. Speaker, the hon. Minister of National Security has a passion for youth, as indicated in his contribution earlier this morning. He went on to explain, at great length, programmes for youth with respect to community programmes, youth mentoring programmes and school outreach programmes. The Ministry of Sport and Youth Affairs remains committed to supporting such an initiative for the development of our young people.

Mr. Speaker, Trinidad and Tobago is a developing country blessed with an abundance of natural resources which are utilized to propel economic development. The care and protection of our patrimony must be passed on to the youth. The recently concluded "Clean and Beautify T&T Campaign" initiated by the hon. Prime Minister, was hailed as a tremendous success and acted as a catalyst for citizens to take active responsibility for the cleaning and protection of the environment. It was to this end that the Ministry of Sport and Youth Affairs has launched the "My Country, My Community, My Space Environmental Campaign" in August.

This campaign seeks to ensure that young people realize that they are the guardians of the environment and are responsible for its protection. It is proposed that youth groups will adopt a space within their community and ensure that this space is cleaned and protected on a continuous basis. It is believed that if citizens claim ownership of a space, there would be a greater effort in the preservation of that space.

The aim is to simplify environmental responsibility to an individual level making it easier for each person to understand how he can help save and protect the environment and reduce his own carbon footprint.

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Just look at the recent flooding we have been experiencing. If the last administration had done what it was supposed to do, the people of Oropouche West, Couva North, Caroni Central, Tabaquite and many more areas in Trinidad and Tobago would not have suffered the flooding that they have over the last two months. We will continue to work with all citizens to ensure that we all do our part in the alleviation of this problem.

It is in this vein that we will continue our efforts through various youth groups. We have embarked on the "Clean up the World Weekend" from September 17, 2010—September 19, 2010. As Trinidad and Tobago joins with the United Nations and 35 million people across 120 countries, we continue to work together to ensure the protection of our environment. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Speaker, youth unemployment is a continued challenge for Trinidad and Tobago as well as other Caribbean countries. In fact, it is due to this high unemployment rate that the national youth policy defines youth from 12 up to the age of 29; whereas youth is defined as up to 24 years of age by the United Nations.

This Government realizes the need to restructure the On-the-Job-Training Programme (OJT) to expand private sector placement. We will also re-evaluate technical vocational programmes such as MuST and HYPE.

We understand the importance of youth entrepreneurship and see the need for programmes that will enhance the link between entrepreneurship and small business development. It is our aim to partner with the private sector to provide mentorship and guidance to our young entrepreneurs.

Mr. Speaker, this Government seeks to ensure that maximum participation is afforded to all the young people of this country in tertiary education, and to this end we will continue to expand the GATE programme. Let me say it again, in case Members of the Opposition did not hear: We will continue to expand the GATE programme. [*Desk thumping*] They have a way of trying to trick the population into believing that this Government is against GATE. I think they may have forgotten that the foundation for GATE actually came out of the Dollar for Dollar Programme, which was instituted by a UNC government by the then Minister of Education who is now the Prime Minister of this country. [*Desk thumping*]

Miss Hospedales: That is a false lie.

Miss S. Roopnarine: Mr. Speaker, let me pause for a cause. The Member for Arouca/Maloney seems to think that the term "false lie" is something that should be

said in this august House. [*Interruption*] Well, I want to tell her and I think that even our “duncy” Form 1 students would be able to say as well—as said by the Leader of the Opposition—not by me, but by the Leader of the Opposition—[*Desk thumping*]—that a false lie is a double negative and actually means a truth. [*Desk thumping*] So, when she wanted to give the Member for Lopinot/Bon Air West in his maiden speech in this House, a lesson in literacy, I would like to tell her that she needs a lesson in literacy from even those said Form 1 students. [*Desk thumping*]

This Government also recognizes the need to facilitate the dissemination of information on healthy and productive lifestyles to young people. Studies have reported that young people in the age group of 12—29 account for 20,000 of the reported cases of HIV/AIDS worldwide. To aid in the fight against HIV/AIDS, Trinidad and Tobago Government will continue education throughout the country and continue to educate young people in sex education and the implications. We will partner with organizations that have a proven success rate with HIV programmes as we fight the HIV/AIDS problem in this country.

Mr. Speaker, the Ministry of Sport and Youth Affairs has in the past provided support towards the functioning of a National Youth Council of Trinidad and Tobago. The council functions as an independent representative for young people. National Youth Councils are umbrella bodies or NGOs for youth volunteers. They provide services with an aim of promoting leadership skills amongst young people. After spending almost half a million dollars on the National Youth Council per year in the past, we must seek to understand the value derived from this.

However, it would appear that the National Youth Council of Trinidad and Tobago file, by some abracadabra power, as the Leader of the Opposition would say, has mysteriously disappeared since May 28, 2010. Mr. Speaker, well, I cannot say what happened to that file as May 28, 2010 was the same day that we were being sworn into government. I would like to say though that I can assure the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago that we will not spend another cent until proper audited financial statements are seen from this organization by the Ministry of Sport and Youth Affairs. [*Desk thumping*] This Government is committed to serving our people with transparency and accountability. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Speaker, this Government seeks to ensure participation and inclusion of all young people of the society. As you may notice, unlike our colleagues in the Opposition who, during their tenure in government, came into this august House wearing their balisier ties, unlike them, we proudly wear the national flag of

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Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*] We do not come here bearing the symbols of the rising sun or the circle of circles, because there is a national pride in wearing the flag that did not cost us \$2 million. [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. Members: Ohooooo! [*Desk thumping*]

Miss S. Roopnarine: The youth of this country should feel a sense of pride in their Government and in their country, and we should be able to appreciate our local culture and, once more, be proud to be a Trini. [*Desk thumping*] Mr. Speaker, we all join with the hon. Minister of Sport and Youth Affairs, Member for D'Abadie/O'Meara, in localizing it.

As we congratulate the young Soca Princesses who represented the youth of Trinidad and Tobago so proudly, we continue to support and encourage all young people in positive growth and development.

Mr. Speaker, as I close, I leave this august House with a quote by Franklyn Roosevelt which summarizes this Government's commitment to young people. This quote states: "We cannot always build the future for our youth, but we can build our youth for the future." [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. Members: Ohooooo! [*Desk thumping*]

Miss S. Roopnarine: Mr. Speaker, I thank you for the opportunity. [*Desk thumping*]

ADJOURNMENT

The Minister of Housing and the Environment (Hon. Dr. Roodal Moonilal): I am lost for words. Mr. Speaker, at this appropriate juncture. I would like to move that this House do now adjourn to Thursday, September 16, 2010 at 1.30 pm when, hopefully, the Opposition will be in a position to debate the Appropriation Bill, 2010.

Mr. Speaker, I so move.

Leave of Absence

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, before putting the question, may I advise hon. Members that I have been informed that the hon. Member for Diego Martin Central is under the weather. Accordingly, I have granted him leave of absence from today's sitting.

Congratulations

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, may I, on your behalf, warmly congratulate the following Members on their maiden contributions: the hon. Minister of Sport and Youth Affairs [*Desk thumping*]; the hon. Minister of State in the Ministry of Works and Transport, the Member for Couva South [*Desk thumping*]; the hon.

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Minister for Tobago Development, Member for Tobago East [*Desk thumping*]; the hon. Minister of Legal Affairs, the Member for St Augustine [*Desk thumping*]; the very young and dynamic Member of Parliament for Oropouche West [*Desk thumping*]; and, finally, the hon. Member of Parliament for Moruga/Tableland. [*Desk thumping*]

Question put and agreed to.

House adjourned accordingly.

Adjourned at 8.46 p.m.