

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Wednesday, June 01, 2011

The House met at 1.30 p.m.

PRAYERS

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

LEAVE OF ABSENCE

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, I have received communication from the following Members: Hon. Dr. Surujrattan Rambachan, Member of Parliament for Tabaquite and Hon. Jack Warner, Member of Parliament for Chaguanas West, who are presently out of the country and have asked to be excused from today's sitting of the House. The Hon. Winston Peters, Member of Parliament for Mayaro is also presently out of the country and has asked to be excused from sittings of the House during the period May 30, 2011 to June 06, 2011. The Hon. Carolyn Seepersad-Bachan, Member of Parliament for San Fernando West is presently out of the country and has asked to be excused from the sittings of the House during the period May 30, 2011 to June 04, 2011. Mrs. Patricia McIntosh, Member of Parliament for Port of Spain North/St. Ann's West and Dr. Amery Browne, Member of Parliament for Diego Martin Central have asked to be excused from today's sitting of the House. The leave which the Members seek is granted.

FINANCE COMMITTEE REPORT

(Presentation)

The Minister of Finance (Hon. Winston Dookeran): Mr. Speaker, I wish to present the second report (2011) Session of the Finance Committee of the House of Representatives of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago on proposals for the supplementation of the 2011 appropriation.

ORAL ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS

The Minister of Housing and the Environment (Hon. Dr. Roodal Moonilal):

Mr. Speaker, there are two questions for oral answer on the Order Paper, no questions for written answer. Those questions, for the record, are question No. 92 and question No. 93 and the Government is in a position to answer both.

Mr. Sharma: World record.

**Movado
(Details of Ban)**

92. Miss Donna Cox (*Laventille East/Morvant*) asked the hon. Minister of National Security:

Could the Minister state:

- (a) Whether the ban was lifted on David Constantine Brooks also known as Movado?
- (b) If yes, who was responsible for lifting the ban?
- (c) Why was the band lifted?

The Minister of National Security (Sen. The Hon. Brig. John Sandy): Hon. Members are advised that the ban imposed on Jamaican dancehall artiste David Constantine Brooks, also known as Movado, has not been lifted. However, an accommodation was made to allow the artiste entry into the country for one performance following submissions made by the artiste's management team and local concert promoters.

Promoters are advised that the permission granted for the one-off performance was not indicative of a lifting of the ban. Accordingly, parts (b) and (c) are not applicable.

Dr. Moonilal: Movado is a watch?

Miss Cox: I would like to know who made the representation for him to be allowed into the country if the ban was not lifted?

Mr. Sharma: "Oh God ask questions properly nah!"

Sen. The Hon. Brig. J. Sandy: Representation was made by the promoters Tristar

Promotions and RF Promotions.

Miss Cox: Supplemental again, Mr. Speaker. Are you aware that Movado is known for violent lyrics, gun violence and violence against gays?

Sen. The Hon. Brig. J. Sandy: Mr. Speaker, no.

Miss Cox: Next supplemental. Are you aware that a ban was imposed in St. Vincent, the Bahamas and Guyana, because of the same reasons, because of the crime situation?

Sen. The Hon. Brig. J. Sandy: No, I do not even know who Movado is.

Dr. Rowley: Could the hon. Minister tell us what was the basis on which this artiste was banned and is currently banned?

Sen. The Hon. Brig. J. Sandy: Mr. Speaker, that is a new question. I will be prepared to answer it at a later date.

Mr. Sharma: “Yuh asking questions like all yuh is novice man!”

Order of Merit List (Details of)

93. Miss Donna Cox (*Laventille East/Morvant*) asked the hon. Minister of National Security:

Could the Minister state the date of the Order of Merit List with regard to the hiring of the Commissioner and Deputy Commissioners of Police 2010/2011?

The Minister of National Security (Sen. The Hon. Brig. John Sandy): Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Hon. Members are advised that the date of the Order of Merit List used for the hiring of the Commissioner and the Deputy Commissioners of Police 2010/2011 is July 19, 2010.

FINANCE (SUPPLEMENTARY APPROPRIATION) BILL, 2011

Bill to provide for the supplementary appropriation for the service of Trinidad and Tobago for the financial year ending September 30, 2011 of the sum

of the issue of which was authorized by the Appropriation Act, 2011 [*The Minister of Finance*]; read the first time.

Motion made, That the next stage be taken at a later stage of the proceedings. [*Hon. W. Dookeran*]

Question put and agreed to.

EQUAL OPPORTUNITY (AMDT.) BILL

Bill to amend the Equal Opportunity Act, Chap. 22:03 [*The Attorney General*]; read the first time.

FINANCE COMMITTEE REPORT (Adoption)

The Minister of Finance (Hon. Winston Dookeran): Mr. Speaker, I beg to move the following Motion standing in my name:

Be it resolved that the House adopt the second report (2011) Session of the Finance Committee of the House of Representatives of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago on proposals for the supplementation of the 2011 appropriation.

Mr. Speaker, six months ago, when this House debated the Finance Bill, there was a lot of anxiety in the air. The question that was uppermost in the minds of many was: Will the new Government of the People's Partnership, under the very determined leadership of the new Prime Minister, Kamla Persad-Bissessar, be able to steer this economy to safety and then create the platform for sustainable growth? It is for that reason the measures that were outlined in the budget debate of September 2010/2011 addressed the issues squarely, and the title of that presentation was: "Facing the issues, turning the economy around".

Indeed, we found the challenges manifested in many different ways. In the first instance, there was a sense of fear that the depositors, with respect to the Clico matter, would not find their deposits safely back to them.

There was indeed a cash flow problem that contractors were making noise about, on a daily basis, based on the non-payment for contractors' work in the previous year.

Indeed, banks too were under some sense of anxiety as to whether the commitments of the Government, particularly with respect to comfort letters, will pose a new risk to them, and many of our businesses were very concerned as to the rate at which VAT refund was being made available to them, crippling, to some extent, their cash flow position.

In addition to that, there was great uncertainty about a wage negotiation that had to deal with three years prior to our time and how would a government tackle that, in the context of the financial situation.

Mr. Speaker, shortly after, the People's Partnership Government came into office, I made a report to the nation on the state of our finances and initiatives for future action, at which time I stated publicly, and I quote:

The total Government cash balances declined steadily from \$17.7 billion at the end to the fiscal year 2008, to \$9.7 billion at the end of the fiscal year 2009, and further to \$5.43 billion as at June 2010.

I have since attempted to get an update on this situation. You will note there is a steep decline in the Government cash balances and by the middle of 2010, before the first budget, we had dropped from \$17 billion to \$5 billion. It was concern for fiscal management. One of the first requirements was how to do our cash management in order to ensure that the cash balances of the country do not go into negative terrain.

I had received communication from the Central Bank Governor, suggesting that the overdraft facilities available to the Government were running low. I am pleased to report six months later that this situation has reversed itself. As of December 31, 2010, the cash balances held in the Central Bank have moved from

the \$5.4 billion to \$6.675 billion and as of May 27, 2010, that is last Friday, the cash balances have now moved to \$8.939 billion. [*Desk thumping*]

I raise that, if only to explain to the population why the early expectations for the Government to pay everybody at the same time could not have been realized until we brought the economy to a safe place. Today, as we come to this point of the supplementary provision, for the rest of this year, which is essentially for the last six months of this year, we can say with a certain sense of pride and confidence that the People's Partnership Government has removed the dark clouds in the air and now we are about to see the blue sky once more.

Today, in the presentation that is before us, I would like to adduce the evidence to support that position. In order to do so, I will go immediately to the matters in the Bill before us. It is the adoption of the Finance Committee Report of the House of Representatives, which met on Friday, May 27, and agreed to the proposals that are now outlined before us for the 2011 appropriation.

For the benefit of the wider community, every six months or so, the Government is mandated to come back to Parliament to get revisions as to the appropriation that was agreed to at the time of the budget and that is the exercise in which we are today engaged. At that time, there was a great sense of disquiet as to whether or not the Government's financial projections, both in terms of revenue and in terms of expenditure, could be met, notwithstanding the arguments as to the priorities of that expenditure. Today, we are asking this Parliament for the provision of supplementary funds to the sum of \$2,735,743,695—effectively \$2.7 billion—to fund urgent and critical recurrent and capital expenditure to September 30, 2011. We are at a position at midterm to increase the allocation by \$2.7 billion for expenditure, which is part of our sequencing—get the economy safe then put it on a platform for growth.

The increase in the expenditure proposed is being sought by way of this

Finance (Supplementary Appropriation) Bill. And for the record, I need to put it in *Hansard*, I am told, so you would bear with me with the numbers.

Head 01: President, an increase of \$153,300.

Head 02: Auditor General, an increase of \$2,000,623.

Head 03: Judiciary, an increase \$13,167,000.

Head 04: Industrial Court, \$300,000.

Head 05: Parliament, \$1,000,762,200.

Head 06: Service Commissions, \$2,900,000.

Head 07: Statutory Authorities Service Commission, \$161,000.

Head 08: Elections and Boundaries Commission, \$17,553,000.

Head 09: Tax Appeal Board, \$676,400.

Head 11: Registration, Recognition and Certification Board, \$201,500.

Head 12: Public Service Appeal Board, \$122,000.

Head 13: Office of the Prime Minister, \$4,500,000.

Head 15: Tobago House of Assembly, \$108,957,000.

Head 17: Personnel Department, \$2,000,000.

Head 18: Ministry of Finance, \$378,658,295.

Head 22: Ministry of National Security, \$146,016,000.

Head 23: Ministry of the Attorney General, \$63,973,000.

Head 24: Ministry of Legal Affairs, \$4,426,000.

Head 25: Ministry of Food Production, Land and Marine Affairs,
\$37,527,000.

Head 26: Ministry of Education, \$257,776,000.

Head 28: Ministry of Health \$250,071,000.

Head 30: Ministry of Labour, Small and Micro Enterprise Development,
\$1,633,000.

Head 35: Ministry of Tourism, \$3,000,000.

Head 37: Integrity Commission, \$4,590,000.
Head 38: Environmental Commission, \$304,500.
Head 39: Ministry of Public Utilities, \$201,960,000.
Head 42: Ministry of Local Government, \$91,044,000.00.
Head 43: Ministry of Works and Transport, \$327,682,000.
Head 46: Ministry of Sport and Youth Affairs, \$67,990, 00.
Head 48: Ministry of Trade and Industry, \$4,501,000.
Head 54: Ministry of Science, Technology and Tertiary Education,
\$3,600,000.
Head 56: Ministry of the People and Social Development, \$455,537,000.
Head 58: Ministry of Justice, \$12,205,000.
Head 59: Ministry of Tobago Development, \$3,207,000.
Head 60: Ministry of Planning, Economic and Social Restructuring and
Gender Affairs, \$27,306,000.
Head 61: Ministry of Housing and the Environment, \$164,784,000.
Head 62: Ministry of Community Development, \$1,264,000.
Head 63: Ministry of Arts and Multiculturalism, \$2,759,000.
Head 64: Trinidad and Tobago Police Service, \$69,056,000.

Adding up to a total of \$2,735,743,695.

These are the variations in appropriations for which we are requesting the approval of this House and these were indeed dealt with in some detail at the Finance Committee meeting that was held last week.

During the course of the debate, many Members raised issues. Let me briefly outline some of the summary implications of the appropriation increases that we are requesting. Let me advise the Parliament that included in the increases under Heads of Expenditure is the sum of \$643 million to facilitate the implementation of new industrial agreements and is spread through most

Ministries and departments. Resources are also included under current transfers to statutory boards and similar bodies to meet expenditure relating to new industrial relations agreement.

The five largest heads of expenditure requiring supplementary resources for recurrent expenditure—are in the areas other than personnel expenditure—are the Ministry of the People and Social Development, the Ministry of Finance, the Ministry of Works and Transport, the Ministry of Public Utilities, and the Ministry of Health. The Ministry of the People and Social Development requires an additional \$454.8 million to meet payments of social grants to the end of fiscal 2011, which were increased early in calendar 2011, many months after the 2011 Appropriation Act was approved.

By itself, that reflects the changing of priority of expenditure. We had indicated that, apart from putting the finances in a place of safety, we had to gradually change the pattern of expenditure so that the people would get a larger share of the Government's expenditure than before, and that is reflected in the increases in that particular area.

In the case of the Ministry of Finance, the additional resources are required primarily to supplement the Infrastructure Development Fund by \$300 million. Fifty million dollars of these resources will be utilized to supplement a provision of the four special purpose state enterprises, under the purview of the Ministry of Local Government, to undertake infrastructural development work in communities. The sum of \$100 million will be used to support the construction of houses by the Housing Development Corporation.

The sum of equal magnitude will be provided to the Ministry of Education for the construction of schools. The University of Trinidad and Tobago will be provided with \$50 million additional resources for the construction of its main campus in Tamana and an additional sum of \$41 million has been provided to the

Parliament, Mr. Speaker, I am sure you will be happy, for its relocation to interim facilities and for continued restoration of the Red House. Expenditure in excess of the \$300 million being transferred into the IDF would be funded from positive balances of the fund as of the end of fiscal 2010.

These increases in allocation that we are seeking approval of this House do reflect, as you notice, a new emphasis towards serving the people rather than serving the buildings in Trinidad and Tobago.

2.00 p.m.

What we say on the platform is what we do in the finances of Trinidad and Tobago. And this is what we meant when we said that we shall give priority to the communities of the country, to the people of the nation, and bring about inclusive growth in Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*] But this is only the beginning, for there is much to be done yet in the years ahead of us.

We are also conscious about setting in place the basis for growth to resume, so while we change the priorities, Mr. Speaker, to give a better share to the communities in our country, we also began to look at setting the platform for growth. In this respect, the Ministry of Works and Transport will be given additional funding for the following reasons:

- 1 To provide deficit financing to the Port Authority in the amount of \$63 million, Public Transport Service Corporation in the sum of \$14 million and Trinidad and Tobago Civil Aviation Authority of some \$2.6 million.
- 2 To meet dry-docking of the *Trinidad Tobago Express* and to subsidize the ferry operations between Trinidad and Tobago estimated at \$31 million.
- 3 To meet the debt servicing obligations with respect to loans taken to fund the Programme for Upgrading Road Efficiency, and the Driver

and Vehicle Licensing Authority of approximately \$100 million—and the expected loan in that area over this year and next year will be \$1.5 billion—substantial change in the expenditure pattern to ensure that the growth prospect of the country improves.

In the case of the Ministry of Public Utilities an additional \$197.5 million is required to meet the debt servicing obligation in respect of \$1.3 billion loan taken to finance the one-year action agenda of the Water and Sewerage Authority, as well as funding overdraft facilities and operational expenditure.

WASA's one-year action agenda includes the laying of the parallel Navet trunk main, the construction of new water treatment plants, and the maintenance of existing water treatment plants, replacement of high-leaking mains, pipe replacement, construction of the new booster station and replacement of badly deteriorating sewerage waste water mains in Port of Spain and San Fernando.

The Ministry of Health requires \$180 million, additionally, to what was appropriated before to meet operational costs of the Regional Health Authorities, which occurred as a result of the opening up of new wards and services at public hospitals, and the commissioning of the Siparia District Health Facility.

Mr. Speaker, all of the other details of the proposals were circulated to Members of the Finance Committee, and discussed at its meeting on Friday, May 27, 2011. During the meeting various issues were raised by Members, and as Chairman of that committee I responded to same on the issues raised, and we have supplied the information in the report before us.

Mr. Speaker, there is no doubt that over this six months we have been able to put this country in a safe place again from a financial perspective. In presenting the 2011 budget in September 2010, I had estimated an expenditure of \$49 billion approximately, and a revenue of \$41 billion, yielding an overall deficit of \$7.7 billion or 5.48 per cent of the GDP. The adjustments included in the proposed

Supplementary Appropriation Bill, combined with the proposed transfer of \$445 million to the Heritage Stabilization Fund, along with the use of \$131 million from the unexpended resources of IDF as at the end of 2010, would increase expenditure by \$3.3 billion.

2.05 p.m.

When this increased expenditure is matched against projected increase in revenue, which is \$2.060.4 million or \$2 billion, and analyzed against the backdrop of savings and adjustments within the heads of expenditure, it results in an overall deficit on fiscal operations from \$7.7 billion to \$8.9 billion or 6.3 per cent of the GDP.

Mr. Speaker, when we started this journey six months ago there were a lot of persons who had argued that we would not meet our revenue position. I want to indicate to you that many measures were put into place to ensure that that was not likely to happen. One such measure had to do with the amnesty for tax, and we had proposed in the budget and implemented a tax amnesty that would allow our taxpayers to get credit for any arrears in interest payments, et cetera. I was pleased to announce that after a visit to Inland Revenue Department yesterday, speaking to the hard-working members of that department who have been working long hours and weekends are tedious but very delicate work, that we were able to raise through the amnesty \$1.8 billion for our Treasury—[*Desk thumping*]—a significant improvement as a result of the people's willingness now to support a Government that they can trust. [*Desk thumping*]

I am told that the response rate so far has superseded what has happened on previous occasions and it tells me that this country is ready for the People's Partnership Government to continue in office. [*Inaudible*] [*Desk thumping*] In order to facilitate the backlog and to deal with the long queues that have developed, and after consultation with the chairman of the Board of Inland

Revenue on this matter and with the Permanent Secretary in my Ministry, we decided yesterday to extend for one more month to June 30 the deadline for the tax amnesty. [*Desk thumping*] Hopefully, that would take us over the figure I mentioned to you, and therefore, it adds some new optimism to the financial state about affairs of which I have been speaking about.

Mr. Speaker, the financial aspects of our country have been the most important area for correction. There are other areas in the economic field, but the area that required urgent and immediate attention reflected itself on the financial side. Just to mention that at that time there was a tremendous backlog in VAT refunds and there still is. Given the limits of our possibilities in finance to raise the amount of VAT refunds from \$300 million per month to \$400 million so as to reduce that backlog, we intend now to improve that further so that we can get to the state that if you owe the Government money you must pay it and if the Government owes you money it must pay it too. [*Desk thumping*] That is where I am heading. That is the long-term goal the taxation charter which I spoke about during the budget debate.

Beyond that, the contractors were faced with a problem of non-payment and gradually, over time we have been able to advance the necessary funds to the two main institutions: the Housing Development Corporation of which the Leader of Government Business is the Minister—and I am sure he would acknowledge—as well as to UDeCott, which is now getting itself and its feet on the ground by a new loan facility amounting to \$290 million, in addition to what we had allocated during the course of the last appropriation allotment.

Although we have not completely paid off the contractors I can say with a sense of certainty that many have already received their payment subject to the fact that they have provided the verification of their claims over time, which was a challenge I would tell, but it continues so the noises have subsided. With respect

to the banks, when we came into office we found that the banks themselves were a little anxious as to the risk about financial commitment on the part of this Government, particularly because among the commitments to the bank was a category called “Letters of comfort”. These letters of comfort were given by the previous regime and there was some discomfort because they had to be converted into loans, and in order to convert them into loans we had to do a number of things.

First of all, perhaps, to renegotiate the arrangement; secondly, to ensure that we had the limit to which we can borrow; and thirdly, to go through the legal and other work. But the most important thing about that, and I have here the list which was outlined in the office of the Auditor General’s report of April 28, 2011. It is public information.

Of all the different companies that had letters of comfort—I would not bother to mention the exact number but I would give you the total. But all of these companies were given letters of comfort which we had to honour over time in order to provide stability, safety; yes, stability in financial affairs is also extremely important; letters of comfort to the Housing Development Corporation, to the Airports Authority, to the Port Authority, to the PTSC, to the Water and Sewerage Authority, to the Regional Health Authorities, to the Vehicle Maintenance Corporation of Trinidad and Tobago, to the National Helicopter Services Limited of which the Minister of National Security had to take major surgery measures at some time, to the Urban Development Corporation of Trinidad and Tobago, to the Sugar Manufacturing Company, to the Evolving Technologies and Enterprise Development Company, to—well what was then—British West Indian Airways, to the National Infrastructure Development Company, to the Exim Bank of Trinidad and Tobago—and to the National Insurance Property Development Company.

The number of these letters of comfort which we inherited was of the order of \$7 billion, equal to the deficit. And this Government had to ensure that we can

work out that system to remove that risk and to ensure the stability of the system during the course of our stewardship. Within six months I can say that while we have not covered all, we have covered a substantial part of this commitment, so the banks are no longer ill at ease [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Speaker, I think these facts would put the fiscal equation into some kind of order. You know the difficulties we had in ensuring that we maintain the collective bargaining agreement and that search for breeding space in the economy, and we were well aware that if we did not keep these statistics, these fiscal situations in order that we could be exposed. Although we are still not yet totally clear, because we are now projecting an increase in our overall deficit and that increase is now going to be 6-plus per cent of our GDP. Some may argue how come we are projecting an increase when indeed we have not been able to spend as much as we had hoped that we would have done, and some may argue that this might therefore be academic.

Mr. Speaker, I got the information as to the trend in the releases in the payment, or rather in the rate of expenditure. Suffice it to say, that it is usual over the last four years to have the first six months of the year at a low rate of expenditure and I have had the figures and I would probably, later on, point that out. So, although we have only recorded a \$700 million deficit in the first six months and we are anticipating a \$3 billion deficit, this is part of the trend that had to be changed, and therefore we have kept the allocation for the next six months, because that is when the action really takes place historically.

Mr. Imbert: In the rainy season.

Hon. W. Dookeran: So I am not daunted, although it would have been easier to have more expenditure because we had allocated \$7 billion for the Public Sector Investment Programme and to date we have not spent as much.

That point was alluded to by the Governor of the Central Bank in his

monetary policy report, but I am explaining to the honourable House that this has been a trend over time and the information given to me supports that claim. What it also means is that we would anticipate that during the course of the next six months and beyond we would now have an acceleration of that expenditure, because we still anticipate a fiscal deficit during the course of this year and it is deliberate. In securing the platform for economic growth you had to create the conditions for safety and stability and at the same time to involve yourself in excessive expenditure or rather increased expenditure in order to generate that growth. So what I am suggesting to this honourable House, this has been a crafty exposition of the process by which economic growth can be resumed in Trinidad and Tobago and I am pleased to support the views of the Central Bank that we should see a turnaround, small as it may be, in the economy in 2011 as a result of this approach to it. There are some other factors that I have added and helped us in this respect and that has to do with the issue of the price of gas and the price of oil.

Mr. Speaker, we predicated the last budget on an oil price of \$65 per barrel and a gas price of \$2.75—[*Interruption*] per bbtu. In other words, the price of gas and oil were predicated on those figures. We have seen a gradual increase and based on our most intelligent estimates we have now changed the estimate for the second half of the year to a price of gas of \$75 from \$65.

Hon. Member: Oil, oil.

Hon. W. Dookeran: Sorry, gas—of oil—and we would keep the price of gas at \$2.75.

Dr. Rowley: Sorry, I did not want to disturb you, but I am trying to follow you, but I think you got your thoughts mixed up there and these numbers are very important. You are mixing up oil and gas, maybe not consciously, but could you just repeat that please? [*Interruption*]

2.20 p.m.

Hon. W. Dookeran: Well I will correct the information. What I said is, oil has now moved from \$65 to \$75 per barrel, and gas would remain where we had budget it at \$2.75 then, and we continue to keep that price. Those are the new assumptions that we have made.

Now, Mr. Speaker, it is against that background that I can say with a certain amount of confidence that this economy is getting out of the woods and is laying the groundwork for sustainable growth. I do not think the anxious moments will remain with us. We are now projecting a budget beyond \$50 billion. We are now in the business of getting this economy roaring again and in that respect we have changed the financial expectations to achieve that goal.

What is my evidence? I said earlier on I wanted to establish the evidence for what I am saying. What is the evidence before us in terms of dealing with this issue of the changes of the growth pattern? I mentioned already that we have increased—we have reduced the backlog on VAT refunds, but we are seeing early signs of recovery in the stock market. I remember reading this morning, a newspaper commentary confirming that there are some early signs of improvement in the stock market. That is always an indicator of economic activity about to happen. We are seeing excess liquidity in the banking system has now been reduced, and it is the Central Bank Report, the Monetary Report that said:

“Following an unprecedented increase in excess liquidity in the banking system to a high of \$3.3 billion in October 2010, excess liquidity fell to around \$1 billion by April 2011”.

This has been due to the efficiency with which monetary policy was conducted during this period. [*Desk thumping*] But it has also been due to the new appetite for accessing this excess liquidity by the commercial sector in the country, and it is an indication of what is likely to happen.

We are seeing—and according to the same report—that real estate mortgage

loans grew by 8.2 per cent in the last six months. We have seen the unemployment rate decline to 4.8 per cent in the second quarter of 2010—from 6.7 per cent in the first quarter. These are the figures before us. [*Crosstalk*]—In the second quarter. The first quarter was under the PNM and the second quarter is under the People's Partnership. We have seen the maintenance of a low interest rate regime, both in terms of commercial loans and in terms of loans in the agricultural sector.

When you go back, Mr. Speaker, you will notice the fiscal incentives that were put into place in order to create this new environment that generated this situation. In the incentives that we had put into place we outlined:

- Measures to improve production of oil and gas;
- Measures to support alternative energy use;
- Measures to increase the growth of agriculture and specifically here the lowering of the interest rate by the Agricultural Development Bank;
- Measures to clean up the environment;
- Measures to generate new investment;
- Measures to sustain small businesses development and innovation;
- Measures to promote development poles;
- Measures to improve tax collection;
- Measures to support social equity.

And the measures were outlined at that time.

I am suggesting to this honourable House that the fiscal regime that was put into place was able to direct the behaviour of the economy in a position that we can feel that sense of safety at this point in time.

2.25 p.m.

This has not only been reflected by the local community. It has also been

reflected by international institutions that look closely at Trinidad and Tobago. The most pressing issue that the international institution had looked upon in order to establish the credit rating of this country, was our ability to deal with the fiasco that was inherited, the Clico fiasco.

As you are well aware, very much depended on how that matter was dealt with, and it is not finished. We have been able to design and implement a programme that has been well supported by those international financial bodies that are commenting on Trinidad and Tobago. But beyond that, at this point in time, we have now been able to put the Clico organization on a solid financial footing. Not that they are out of the red, but in terms of the statutory reserves they are now well endowed. We have been able to pay out near to 8,000 people, \$75,000 that was owed to them.

We have been able to put a compassionate window in place for the citizens of this country who had pressing individual problems, medical or otherwise and, to date, 123 persons have been able to access that particular facility. We have been able to set in motion a liquidity support programme for the credit unions and the trade unions, who had invested unwittingly into this enterprise and they will in due course be able to access that liquidity support programme. We are now entering the final stage which is to deal with the depositors over \$75,000 and, shortly, we will be coming back to this House to get the necessary authority to move in that direction.

We recognize that there are still matters to be dealt with. We will deal with those matters as the facts become clearer and clearer to us and, as the situation changes so shall we change. But an important point is that it has led the international financial institutions to say that they have confidence that Trinidad and Tobago, and to use their words, “will ensure that this matter is dealt with properly”. The exact words I believe were slightly different in which they said,

“The Government’s plan to bail out depositors of CL Financial Group’s Life Insurance Company, Colonial Life Insurance Company, will contribute to an increase in the general Government debt burden and, notwithstanding, that we are affirming our “AA-1” foreign currency rating and “AA-1” local currency rating, the outlook looks stable”, at a time when it was felt that it was quite possible that the outlook could have turned from negative to further negative.

Mr. Speaker, the local community has seen the emergence of new investment because of the fact that we have now passed the early stages of restoring that sense of confidence that the local business community is beginning to see. Within recent times, there have been some major investments that have taken place in association with international financial bodies which I will not go into in detail, but merely to point out to you that at this time, as I bring this Bill before us, I do so with a great sense of comfort that we have been able to put our finances in place. We have been able to put this country’s economy in a safe place, but there is much more to be done. This, as I said, is only the beginning. For we have now to build upon this, in order to ensure that we can actually see the results in economic activity in the turnaround, and that is the next step in this process.

Let me conclude in this presentation by saying to this honourable House, that the Bill before us, will allow us to have more facility for expenditure, will indeed estimate more revenues for this country, will increase marginally our fiscal deficit of which we shall be raising funds from many different sources and, in so doing, we will be able to maintain a very solid position on a debt profile in this country and on a fiscal account. We have been supported by the accumulation of foreign reserves that have taken place prior to our time and continue to do so at this point in time, so we are well on a track today of solid economic performance in Trinidad and Tobago.

I, therefore, beg to move that this House approve the Supplementary Appropriation Bill as explained here today.

Thank you. [*Desk thumping*]

Question proposed.

Dr. Keith Rowley (*Diego Martin West*): Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to make a few observations with respect to what the Minister of Finance has put before us. The Minister of Finance represents the Government of Trinidad and Tobago, and has not failed us in seeking to tell us it is A, when in fact it is B.

Mr. Speaker, I just want to draw your attention to a trend that is taking place in Trinidad and Tobago, where one has to be very careful when a government person speaks to the country. We would hope that when we get official statements from the Government, especially on serious and sensitive matters, that we can take it at face value that that is the position. But that is not what is happening. If one listens to the Minister of Finance, one would get the impression that there was some problem which existed in the country and that the Government has fixed it. And as a result of the Government fixing it, the country can now breathe—as the Minister of Finance I think might have said—easily that we have escaped the worst.

At this point in time, the Government is forever mixing the responsibility of the last Cabinet with the responsibility of this Cabinet, because they are still—just about a year into the life of a new Government—in a situation of overlapping responsibility. So unless one is very familiar to follow the timelines in the argument, one can get confused. Some of the points that the Minister of Finance has made related to an earlier period where the Government is taking credit for actions that had nothing to do with this Government. [*Interruption*]

Mr. Imbert: Absolutely nothing! [*Desk thumping*]

Dr. K. Rowley: Because of how our fiscal year overlaps the calendar year—we

go from September over to October 01—one can get confused when you name the years, 2010, 2011, 2009. The Minister of Finance started this discourse talking about 2009—

Mr. Speaker: Please!

Dr. K. Rowley:—and his point of departure was our fiscal position in 2009 and how it collapsed—[*Interruption*]

Hon. Member: 2008.

Dr. K. Rowley: 2008, even worse. 2008 was probably our best year in many, many years. It was the peak of our high revenues out of the last gas price—good times. So he goes back there—we had \$17 billion in hand—but then, in 2009, there was a different government in office. There was a world event which affected everybody and, in Trinidad and Tobago we dealt with that by spending down from those reserves to meet our expenses. The challenge that that government faced, that this Government faces, is not so much the wishy-washy number being thrown out for the sake of throwing out numbers. The challenge that the Government of Trinidad and Tobago faces is to so operate our economy, that we could at least preserve the quality of life that we have become accustomed to and to meet the Government's expenses to service the country.

Mr. Dookeran: Thank you, Member for Diego Martin West. You said that we are throwing out wishy-washy numbers, could you tell me what are the wishy-washy numbers that I have thrown out here today? So be specific.

Dr. K. Rowley: I saying that the objective is not to just do that. If you want to claim wishy-washy numbers, you could claim them. The objective is not just to throw out wishy-washy numbers; and I will tell you what they are.

The objective of the Government is to so manage the economy, keeping an eye on the fact that the quality of life of the people of Trinidad and Tobago will have to be paid for and, therefore, economic performance this year is required to be

of such a nature that you can meet those expenses. When this Government came into office, our crediting rating was A. We had a very good credit rating. We had also significant reserves. We also had significant challenges requiring attention. So, when the Minister of Finance today claims that as a result of some things that the Government did, we have escaped certain things, I think he is not being entirely forthcoming, because we are none the wiser as to why the economy of Trinidad and Tobago has not been stimulated. That was the intention.

When they were in opposition, they attacked the national budgets on the basis that there was too much expenditure taking place. That was their mantra. There was too much expenditure. In fact, coming out of the mouth of this very Minister of Finance was more savings from our earnings, giving the impression that if they were put in charge of our affairs they would spend less and save more. That is what they held out to the population. Completely diverse from any fact of how they would have to service the needs to maintain the standard of living that one had become accustomed to. But the first budget they brought, happened to have been the largest budget in history of the country. That did surprise the country. The record will show that the budget that we are operating now is a record budget and, today, we are here to increase it by a further \$2.7 billion.

The Minister of Finance is required to spend that money on the specifics that we have been told because these things have to be done so as to get the necessary service to the people. All the items are there. I do not think that we will hear much today about not spending this or not spending that, but because the Government is determined to spend that, to maintain our service during this fiscal year, the budget as passed—which is a very big one—is now going to be increased by \$2.7 billion.

I want to ask: where was the magic that would have reduced our expenditure? We are not seeing that. What we are seeing is increased expenditure.

Then, Mr. Speaker, insofar as talking about some special good management on the part of the Government resulting in our fiscal situation being improved, first it was \$17 million—there was a big drawdown—it went a lot lower and, now, we are reporting significant improvements in the fiscal situation and you take credit for that.

2.40 p.m.

There was a budget presented in this House predicated on a certain oil price, not too long ago, before this Government came into office, and halfway through the budget, the Government had to come back to the Parliament, revise the budget downwards because oil prices had been levelling off in the order of \$50 a barrel and lower. Since this Government has been in office in the recent times, oil prices have been rocketing approximating \$100 a barrel, and in fact, gas prices have moved up to approximately \$4.25, so we have had significant improvements in our lifeline inflows that had absolutely nothing to do with the Government. [*Desk thumping*] Absolutely nothing!

These were international market movements. International market movements have put us in a better revenue position, and we should keep our eyes on the fact that even though oil price is hovering about \$100 a barrel, our oil production is nothing to be comfortable with. [*Crosstalk*] And I must tell you, had the gas price—

Mr. Speaker: Members, I would like Members to observe and to display courtesy when other Members are on their feet making their contributions. Every Member will get a chance to speak. I appeal to Members to take notes—and the crosstalk is disturbing, not only myself, but the *Hansard* Reporter. So I ask Members on the Government Bench to take note and to take notes, and allow the Leader of the Opposition to speak in silence. Continue hon. Member! [*Desk thumping*]

Dr. K. Rowley: I thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The gas prices have

improved and it is reflecting in our revenue situation. Had those prices not improved, the \$2.75 of earning of the mmbtu, that we had projected, which we had used as the basis for computing the budget, would have shown considerably, worse performance, but fortunately, there has been upward movement in gas prices, and the projected earnings from gas now looks as if they could be attained.

Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Finance asked me what wishy-washy figures I am talking about. I am talking about different Government people saying different things to the people of Trinidad and Tobago. Let me draw your attention to this morning's papers, I am quoting here from today's *Newsday*. The Minister of Trade of Trinidad and Tobago went down to a function at the Hyatt, I think it was, and this is what the *Newsday* reports today:

“Cadiz sees 5 percent jump in economy.”

So the Minister of Finance sees, as a result of Government's performance, blue skies—

Mr. Cadiz: Mr. Speaker, that report is erroneous—what I said, and I have my speech to prove it. I quoted the Central Bank Governor, as I normally do, which is 2.5 per cent, not 5 per cent. And I have asked the *Newsday* to please correct that.

Dr. K. Rowley: Mr. Speaker, I did not even say what the Minister said, the Minister is correcting it. Mr. Speaker, I crave your indulgence to read what is published in the *Newsday*, and to make my point about what is published in the *Newsday*. The Minister has his opportunity after to deal with the *Newsday*.

The Minister of Finance is seeing blue skies, economic turnaround as a result of Government activity. It is published; and let me read for you what is published in the *Newsday*.

Dr. Moonilal: That is erroneous!

Dr. K. Rowley: Well, he can determine it to be that after, if he wishes.

“Trade and Industry Minister Stephen Cadiz predicted a five percent growth

in Trinidad and Tobago...”

He is now telling us—

2.45 p.m.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, I think a Member’s word is his honour; that is how I operate from here. A Member’s word is his honour. If the Member is saying that he was misquoted and he is immediately correcting the records, I think as the hon. Leader of the Opposition you ought to take the Member’s word. But to go and quote something that the Member is claiming that was misquoted and to put that in the *Hansard* record, I believe it is very unfair—it would not be fair. [*Cell phone rings*]

Member, I have already asked Members to put their phones on silent, please.

So, hon. Member, Leader of the Opposition, I would ask you not to pursue that particular line, having regard to the statement made by the hon. Member for Chaguanas East. As I have said, a Member’s word is a Member’s honour, and I do not think that any Member should query another Member’s word, okay.

Dr. K. Rowley: Mr. Speaker, we have just wasted a number of minutes. I am saying, Mr. Speaker, I was about to say—[*Interruption*] [*Oh, oh, oh*]

Mr. Speaker: Yeah, Member. Members, please, please! You may not have meant it, but you know I have made a statement and to rise and say that we have wasted minutes—

Hon. Member: “Yuh taking basket”!

[*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Speaker: No, wait, wait, “doh tell me I am taking basket”, please. Hon. Member, if you want to take your seat permanently, let me know, but do not challenge me whilst you are seated, and also Member for Laventille East/Morvant; if you want to leave this Chamber, you tell me and I will accompany you out, but do not challenge me. That is what you just did, and you should know better,

because you are boasting that you have 25 years of experience in this Parliament. Anyway, do you want to continue speaking or—

Dr. K. Rowley: “You talk nah, you talk”.

Mr. Speaker: “Doh tell me talk”. Anyway withdraw those remarks, apologize or stop speaking.

Dr. K. Rowley: Mr. Speaker, I withdraw the remark about asking you to speak and I will await your ruling. I withdraw the remarks and I apologize to the House.

Mr. Speaker: I am not—let me just make it very clear to all Members. I am not prepared—Member for Diego Martin West, do you have a problem with my—well you want to talk to me inside my room, but not here. Do not challenge me whilst I am on my legs. There is a way. If you have a problem with the Speaker, you come to my Chamber or you bring a Motion, but do not challenge me whilst I am on my legs. I am not tolerating that from anybody; on both sides of this House.

I have said do not persist with an article from the *Newsday* that the Member has just indicated to us is erroneous, and he is on record as saying it was 2.5 per cent and not 5 per cent. You are now going to put into the record of *Hansard* an erroneous article attributed to the Member of Parliament. I simply asked you to observe and appreciate that a Member’s word is a Member’s honour, and we proceed. But you are going ahead to quote from an article that is going to indicate otherwise. Please, all I ask is for your cooperation and if you could remove that article, if you want to quote other sections, but do not quote the 5 per cent, he has already corrected the record.

Okay, continue, hon. Member.

Dr. K. Rowley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I expect that I will complete my comment and you would have seen, now that I am being allowed to complete my comment, that I was, in fact, going to make that reference and make it unnecessary. I am saying, right, the Member said the article says it is 5 per cent,

the Member said he said it was 2.5 per cent, and basically that point is taken.

But I was going to go on, as I will go on now, if you permit. Okay, so he said 2.5 per cent and not 5 per cent and that was *Newsday's* problem as far as we were told. I was going to accept that had I been permitted to accept it, and I was going immediately to where I am going now. He also noted, and I am quoting from the same paragraph, the next line, and I do not know if this is *Newsday's* fault but all I can do is quote what was printed:

“He also noted that, previous to 2009, Trinidad and Tobago had 60 consecutive years of economic growth.”

Sixty! Six! Zero!

2.50 p.m.

So, according to the Minister of Trade and Industry in Trinidad and Tobago today, up until 2009, for 60 consecutive years, there was economic growth in Trinidad and Tobago. I ask the Member—I am not seeing him getting up to say it is *Newsday's* fault—can we accept that? This is not a misprint by *Newsday*. This is a report about the Minister. [*Interruption*] That, too. Okay, let me sit down then.

Mr. Cadiz: Mr. Speaker, I have asked my office to send the speech that I read yesterday and we will clarify everything then. There is no way I said 60 years of anything.

Dr. K. Rowley: Is the Member telling me that—I do not want to run afoul of your ruling, Mr. Speaker. Is the Member definitively saying he did not say that there were 60 years of consecutive economic growth in Trinidad and Tobago?

Mr. Speaker: The Member is saying that you can quote what you are quoting there; he will have an opportunity later on in the debate when he gets his speech to refute your argument. So you continue.

Dr. K. Rowley: That is all I am saying, Mr. Speaker. I did say it earlier. I said, if

the Member would like to contest the figures, he can enter the debate and do that; but I am saying, as I am speaking now and this is the published documentation quoting the Minister of Trade and Industry, I have no other objective but to use it to demonstrate that different Ministers are saying different things.

It is not my prerogative to change it. However, I was surprised when I saw it because I do not know who in this country, familiar with our economic history, could have said we have had 60 unbroken years of economic growth.

We have had significant declines in our economic growth during the NAR period. The point I want to make is that different Ministers are saying different things and the Governor of the Central Bank has indicated that the best we could do in this fiscal year is a possible 1 or 2 per cent growth and that is if certain things are done by the Government; things that are not being done now.

It is not just the Minister of Trade and Industry, the Minister of Finance and the Governor of the Central Bank who are at variance. The Minister of Finance gave us this rosy picture of how the economy is doing wonderfully well. Let me quote for you, Mr. Speaker, what a young economist, who speaks to the public—*[Interruption]* No. No. I am talking here about Indera Sagewan-Ali. I am quoting from the *Express* of May 04, less than a month ago.

She said this:

“I’d be hard pressed to say how the country is going to realize two per cent growth this year.

All sectors have registered declines in performance with only high-end entertainment thriving in the country.

She believes the national budget has not been effective because it has not implemented the measures needed to stimulate the economy.”

The Minister of Finance will agree with that because he made the most startling suggestion a while ago. He said that the Government has held back on the

expenditure of the Public Sector Investment Programme, I presume, and other similar measures and, in the next six months, we will see the expenditure that was supposed to have been spread across the fiscal year.

Could we take the Government seriously on that? For example, a lot of the expenditure will be in the construction area and I thought that one of the reasons why we changed the fiscal year from January 01 to October 01 is that construction would have been done in the dry season, in the early part of the year, so that we could get more work.

But here is the Minister of Finance saying that the Government did not spend the approved sums for economic activities in the dry season, but now, as I speak to you today, the official opening of the rainy season, the Minister of Finance is telling us to look out; the expenditure will be accelerated in the coming six months. What kind of cockeyed performance and behaviour is this?

Of course, I would have taken the Minister of Finance more seriously if he was able to tell us here today how much of the \$3 billion PSIP has been spent to date. We budgeted to spend \$3 billion in a climate where the Government's expenditure is required to restore economic stability and potential economic growth; that expenditure is desperately needed. Of a \$3 billion expenditure, we are now—how far are we into the year? Three months in the fiscal year? So we have June, July, August, September and you did not spend it then and you are telling me now: Watch out, in the coming weeks, there will be a huge rush of expenditure and that is what will give us the economic stability.

I tell you, Mr. Speaker, had anyone else said what Mrs. Sagewan-Ali said there, if they were my thoughts, they would have said, okay, that is the PNM bad-mouthing the Government. But the bottom line is that when we embark upon an exercise to treat with the outcome of the 2009 global negative effects in Trinidad and Tobago, what was trumpeted loudly by the Government, is that we would have

some kind of economic stimulus and that economic stimulus found itself in the form of a big Public Sector Investment Programme; government expenditure, which is the real and main engine to drive the economy, and the Government did everything else in Trinidad and Tobago. They committed all manner of evil in Trinidad and Tobago. The one thing they did not get done is the job of stimulating the economy by generating governmental intervention in the economy through getting the government expenditure programme going.

As a result, the Minister of Finance is fooling nobody. The economy of Trinidad and Tobago is still in the doldrums. He comes here today and tells us something we all knew; the banks are awash with cash; excess liquidity reached over \$3 billion. Money available for borrowing is not being borrowed because nobody has the confidence to borrow and spend that money in an economy where the Government does not seem to know what it is doing. Just so, out of the blue, like magic, he tells us today that excess liquidity went down to \$1 billion because of something the Government did, because \$2 billion has been spent. Spent by whom, where and on what?

Spent by whom, where and on what? Excess liquidity; so \$2 billion is no longer excess. There has been a \$2 billion borrowing programme somewhere and the business sector has been borrowing it and spending it, on what? Where are the jobs created by that expenditure? The only jobs they could have pointed to were the nebulous 27,000 jobs to come on the highway from Golconda to Point Fortin, which remains a mirage up to this day; six months after they turned the sod. That was the only package of new jobs they could have pointed to.

As we talk, Mr. Speaker, the whole threat to our food supply is a matter that should be of great concern to the Government of Trinidad and Tobago and one expected that people who know so much about the agricultural sector, and having the reins of authority in Trinidad and Tobago, would have done something

differently; something new, anything at all to show us we are spending in the agricultural sector; so that we could do the best we can, producing what we can, to ensure that our food supply is as good as we can make it, even though we will continue to import as we must, if we are to maintain the kind of life to which we are accustomed.

What does the Government do? Before they came into office, the PNM resorted to the idea of growing more food by farming in what we called the megafarms; trying to use technology to get the kind of productivity that one has to get in the current climate if agriculture is to move from the level of pedestrian to go at a pace the country needs. [*Interruption*] Whether they agreed with it or not—and they did not agree because they had a lot to say about the megafarms; one may disagree that the Government is involved in farming, but the idea of having larger blocks being used for farms and using new and improved technology, some of which we imported from Cuba with Cuban help, there could be no real argument against that. Ownership of the farms might be an issue of public policy as to whether the Government should grow cucumbers or should grow ochros; but if those farms were used to produce and teach local people how to produce using those technologies, I do not know that there should be any big argument about it.

But the Government took political positions on them. In the face of the need to expand our food supply, it is being run by naked political positions and from day one they came into office and one expected that we would see the PSIP and other activities generating economic growth in the agricultural sector, what do we see? Abandonment of the existing megafarms because the PNM was doing it.

One of the best of those farms was in Chaguaramas, in Tucker Valley, on some of the best lands available in the country. What did the Government do? Abandon it. Virtually abandoned it! Go down there and see it. Grass took it over; whatever was being produced there is now history. One would have thought:

Okay, this is the response of the Government to the whole policy of megafarms. They did not agree with the policy; it is the Government's prerogative not to follow the policy.

What is the replacement? Nothing! And then out of the blue, while they abandoned the Chaguaramas megafarm, next thing we hear is an announcement from the Government that it has created two new megafarms—one somewhere in central and one in Mon Jaloux. How come, Mr. Speaker, a government that is interested in agricultural production could abandon an existing megafarm in one of the best locations? One that exists, you abandoned based on policy, but then you can open two new ones under the same policies in two different areas of the country.

Today, I put it to the Minister of Finance—I do not know that he knows this because I do not think he is a man like that. I genuinely believe that the Minister of Finance is not a man like that; but I am putting it to him today that this is an act of discrimination. As far as the Government is concerned, Chaguaramas is not their constituency and they can abandon it and close it down. You closed it down under the fact that megafarms are not to be followed. So people lost their jobs; you lost the production; you lost the training aspect of it and, within a matter of months, you are opening two brand new megafarms, one in Mon Jaloux and one in Endeavour.

Dr. Moonilal: Thank you very much for giving way, Member for Diego Martin West. Could the Member, as he speaks about the Tucker Valley farm, indicate to us the type of resources, the revenue that was arrived at and what was the expenditure on the Tucker Valley Megafarm?

Dr. K. Rowley: That is not relevant to my point. I am not talking about any revenue or expenditure. I am sure that Mon Jaloux—the two new farms that you will open will have revenue and they will have expenditure; and, to the extent that

it is acceptable to have revenue and expenditure on those farms, if you use the same formula on Chaguaramas, we will have a third megafarm using the same policy that you have used, the same employment, and, instead of having the two new ones—in other words, what are you saying? Only the two new ones can have expenditure and revenue which you will accept? Is that what you are saying?

3.05 p.m.

If you think that there was some excess expenditure at Chaguaramas, you are the Government, rectify it. But do not tell me that you shut it down and abandoned it because expenditure in Chaguaramas is unacceptable. You are not going to get a megafarm in Mon Jaloux for free, you are not going to get labour for free. If one has a problem with the concept of Government expenditure on a farm then say so.
[*Crosstalk*]

Miss Cox: That is not the problem.

Dr. K. Rowley: But you are not saying so, otherwise you would not be opening a new one at Mon Jaloux. By opening one at Mon Jaloux you are saying, yes it is okay for Government to operate a farm of this nature for the benefits that they have. All we are saying, well give us the same benefits, using the same economics in Chaguaramas, but no, you abandoned us on political grounds.

I want to draw your attention, Mr. Speaker, to another thing that I find—and I want an explanation for this. When you look in the—I received a document among the pile of Government expenditures. I asked the question in committee about the \$180 million that we are going to approve today for the RHAs—I will appreciate it if someone could just pull that up for me. There is a document somewhere in the pile, where we are increasing the expenditure on the RHAs. There will be no objection on this side to that. I want to ask a question with respect to the apportioning of the expenditure—Thank you very much.

Mr. Speaker, we on this side have no difficulty in supporting the

Government's request for an extra \$180 million for the RHAs. You will find it in responses to questions emanating from the second meeting of the Finance Committee.

And when one looks at how the expenditure is to be apportioned, this \$180 million, you will see that in the South West Regional Health Authority, the increase is \$94 million. The South West Regional Health Authority serves that block of the country, I think, the area around San Fernando, Oropouche, going all the way down to Cap-de-Ville and places like that. Then you look at the Eastern Regional Health Authority, you will see that we are going to increase that by \$35 million, the North Central Regional Health Authority by \$42 million and the North West Regional Health Authority by \$8.9 million.

Now, Mr. Speaker, I want somebody in the Government to explain that to me. Is it that the Port of Spain General Hospital is so much better, and is run and was funded so much better than the other regions that the capital city and its environs being serviced by Port of Spain and similar facilities within the caption area—[*Crosstalk*] All of Diego Martin, all of Port of Spain, all of Laventille, Barataria and El Socorro serviced by the Port of Spain General Hospital and other ancillary facilities; is it that they are in such good shape that the Parliament is approving an additional \$180 million covered largely, by goods and services in the form of medical supplies, laboratory supplies, food supplies, plant and equipment, maintenance—a very important area—security services. Because that is what these are meant to fund. Is it that things are so good at the Port of Spain General Hospital, that out of a budgetary increase for the whole country of \$180 million, less than \$9 million is allocated to the area of the North West Regional Health Authority?

3.10 p.m.

I want a direct response from the Government on this matter, because I am

today accusing the Government of Trinidad and Tobago of discrimination against the people of Port of Spain and the north-western area. [*Desk thumping*] Total discrimination!

Miss Cox: And Laventille!

Dr. K. Rowley: It is not the first time. There was a time, Mr. Speaker, when in this country there was a gasoline tax which we used to pay at the pump. We paid that gasoline tax at the pump, raising a certain amount of revenue, and I think at the time the budget revenue was \$150 million. While Diego Martin was one of the major contributors to that tax, under a UNC government, they collected that tax for years and never spent one cent of it in the Diego Martin Regional Corporation. That is a fact of life that we fought in this Parliament.

I was very taken aback when I saw this allocation pattern, because one of the areas where the public has concerns in this country—my constituents from Carenage, Westmoorings, Four Roads and Richplain depend on the services at St. James and the Port of Spain General Hospital. I am calling on the Government today to explain to them; how could they increase the national expenditure on areas like medical supplies, security, maintenance and other similar heads, and you only allocate \$8.9 million to the large area including the capital city and environs—all of Laventille depend on that—as opposed to \$94 million in the south-west region; \$35 million in the eastern region and \$42 million in the north-central region. [*Crosstalk*] I am very happy for those who are getting it in those regions. All I am asking—the question I am putting to you is, are things so well run and the needs and the demands are so less in Port of Spain and environs; in Diego Martin and environs; and in Laventille and environs and now that we are making this allocation of \$180 million, we only need to put \$9 million in this area and the need is greater in other areas and, therefore, one area could get ten times as much; five times as much?

I saw it recently. If you go back to the allocation, recently the Ministry of Works and Transport laid in this Parliament a road programme, and the Diego Martin Corporation was getting about \$7 million and others were getting \$42 million, \$43 million and \$50 million. There are more roads in Diego Martin than most parts of this country. It is an area of intense occupation by the people of this country, and we had \$7 million. [*Crosstalk*] Is that the Government's answer? The Government's answer is that decades we have not spent any money, so they are now carrying out a balancing act. That comes from the Member for Chaguanas East. [*Crosstalk*] I am not querying what anybody got, I am querying what the NWRHA did not get. I want the Government to stand and say and this is a deliberate allocation; \$180 million, and the capital city and all the intensive areas around only got \$9 million!

Mr. Speaker, in the allocation of \$94 million for south-west, medical supplies is \$18 million. That is twice what Port of Spain got. If one assumes that Port of Spain got medical supplies to the tune of \$9 million, then it means that they got nothing for laboratory supplies; nothing for food supplies; and nothing for security. I mean, how could that be fair and reasonable? How could that be fair? This is a Government that likes to trumpet how fair it is. Is it that they believe that we are afraid to point out what is happening? When we point it out, my colleague, the Member for Chaguanas East, justified it by saying that PNM did not spend in certain areas before. That cannot be governance! [*Crosstalk*]

Miss Cox: That is what they do for everything.

Dr. K. Rowley: And that is how they see their role in Government. I want to tell the people on the other side that policy you have; this whole equity—[*Crosstalk*] Okay, Mr. Speaker, that is the answer. The Member of Parliament for Oropouche East describes this totally, wholly and unacceptable allocation pattern as equity. So the people of Laventille, Baratavia, Carenage and Diego Martin, they do not

understand what equity means. Remember, Mr. Speaker, this is additional allocation which the Ministry of Health decides it is going to put into these areas in addition to what the Parliament approved in the national budget. What is the formula that was used? We know they have opened some new wards at the SWRHA, so we expect to see an increase in expenditure there. We know that, but why it is so skewed? Why this disparity; \$9 million as against \$94 million as against \$42 million?

Mr. Speaker, I am really not impressed. I can say a lot of shortcomings exist in our health system, unlike what my colleague, the Member for Oropouche, is trying to say, it is not confined to San Fernando General Hospital. Many of the problems faced by the San Fernando General Hospital; the staff and the patients, those problems are also faced in the eastern districts, in the western districts and in the central districts.

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. N. Hypolite*]

Question put and agreed to.

Dr. K. Rowley: So, Mr. Speaker, I would like to appeal to the Government of Trinidad and Tobago to put the politics aside and address this issue, because it is known to the people of Trinidad and Tobago that there is no area in this country where the public health system in one area is so much better than another area. The people who use Port of Spain General Hospital are experiencing the same kinds of hardships. It might not be identical, but the same pattern of hardships that the persons who use the Eastern Regional Health Authority than those who use the Central Regional Health Authority and those who use the South West Regional Health Authority and, therefore, they will expect that if the Parliament is going to approve another \$180 million to do the kinds of things I have just mentioned in

those hospitals that the people in the North West Regional Health Authority will expect a better and a bigger slice of the cake than is being given to them now. I think it is really painful to hear a Minister of Government say that the reason this is being done in this way is because they are trying to adjust some ill of the PNM's era. [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Speaker, there is one other area I want to raise in terms of the increase, and it has to do with Head 23, Ministry of the Attorney General. Mr. Speaker, we are being asked to increase the Attorney General's expenditure by \$63 million, and in the answer section, we saw where \$13 million of that \$63 million is to make provision for arbitration cost. I hope today as we are approving the cost of the arbitration, an arbitration which we pointed out to the Government was going to come—when the Government decided in the most cavalier of manner to abandon the contract to purchase the OPVs, we warned this country that the Government's cavalier action will have serious consequences and cost to the people of Trinidad and Tobago. The chickens are beginning to come home to roost. I want the Government to get up today and unequivocally inform the country that Trinidad and Tobago is engaged in arbitrations with BAE over the cancellation of the OPVs, and that this \$13 million which we are going to approve today, is the first tranche of the legal payments that we are making provision for to pay lawyers to deal with an arbitration, the outcome of which we are not sure just yet but, certainly, it is not what the Government promised.

What the Government promised us is that they will cancel the contracts and they will get back from BAE—I think it was how many hundred million dollars? Mr. Speaker, \$2 billion. That is what they told this country. It was the Prime Minister leading this charge that we cancel these contracts. As a matter of fact, the Minister of Finance was attempting to factor it into the budget as he was attempting to factor into the budget the Caribbean Court of Justice Trust Fund.

The bottom line is, there is no \$2 billion and there is no \$1 billion on its way in; \$13 million is out into lawyers pocket as the first tranche, and there will be a number of other tranches before this matter is settled. So, today, I just want the Government to be as open as it says it is; to be as transparent as it says it is; and make a governmental statement to the people of Trinidad and Tobago that it is now engaged in the arbitration that the Opposition warned about, and we await the outcome of that.

Something else that is here is a \$47 million increase for payments from the Ministry of the Attorney General, and that \$47 million is explained on the grounds that there are two things happening: one is that they are paying off bills that relate to the Uff Enquiry, and we know that enquiry was fairly expensive. I think the total cost was \$53 million. A lot of it was paid before this Government came into office and some is being paid in this fiscal year, so it falls to this Government. What I did not see was how much of that \$47 million was actually being allocated to paying the Uff Enquiry bills. I trust that somewhere in the debate, the Government could identify how much of it, the reason being that the rest of it is to carry out a strange exercise, something called forensic legal audit; \$47 million.

I come to this, because during the budget debate, we did identify in the budget debate—I think the figure was about \$33 million for the Ministry of the Attorney General to pay lawyers for assignments out of the AG's Ministry. That was \$33 million. We are now being asked to increase that by an indeterminate sum, because until we know how much of the Uff Enquiry falls to this \$47 million, we would not know the exact figure that is being paid to lawyers who have been identified by the Attorney General, and given this assignment to go off into eight or nine state enterprises. I think one is Petrotrin; one is WASA; one is the Scarborough Hospital and one is the Guanapo Church. All of these things are happening. [Crosstalk] The Sport Company, yes that is one of them. There are

nine entities. Apparently there are nine investigations going on under a battery of lawyers; two of those lawyers are foreign QCs, and the rest are local lawyers—[*By order of the Chair, words expunged*] And I am saying to you, Mr. Speaker, what we have is a fund which is being paid out in large tens of millions—[*Interruption*]

Dr. Moonilal: Mr. Speaker, Standing Order, 36(5).

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, it is a reflection, it is imputing improper motives to the Attorney General, and I would like you to withdraw those remarks, and let us stop personalizing the debate. Let us see if we could stop, or try to, personalizing debates, because the moment you go in that direction, you are going to be violating the Standing Orders.

So I would ask you to withdraw those remarks about associates of the Attorney General in that regard, and if you could probably stay away from personalization.

3.25 p.m.

I want to say, if any Member wishes to bring a Motion dealing with the conduct or the personal character of a Member of Parliament, you are free to do so and give appropriate notice.

Dr. K. Rowley: Mr. Speaker, we are clearly breaking new ground. I simply will say that it is our intention to identify how these payments are made. We will file the appropriate questions and we expect that the Government will give us the appropriate answers, which will not be in violation. I am not aware, Mr. Speaker, and I do not want to, in any way, appear to be challenging your ruling, but I must make the observation that the floor of the Parliament is the place where matters are to be raised and I will raise them within the permission of the Standing Orders.

So, I do not want to challenge you on it, but I just want to flag that we are noting a growth in this pool of funds that is meant to pay lawyers to conduct this thing called “forensic legal audit”, and even as we are making these payments, we

are not hearing about any deliverable—tens of millions being paid, including two British QCs, I do not know what the nature of this is, but what I do know is that no appropriate terms of reference for these legal forensic teams is available to the people of Trinidad and Tobago.

I have never seen terms of reference published, quoted, spoken about what these lawyers are specifically going to do, and I think I raised this before. At the time when the first batch of lawyers was hired, I asked the Attorney General to tell us exactly what are the terms of reference of these lawyers? I know they are going to Petrotrin. I myself had some issues with Petrotrin before I became an opposition person. I myself had some issues with UDeCOTT, but I wanted to know since you are sending—

Mr. Roberts: I thank the hon. Member for giving way, just to let him know that it is a matter of record in this Parliament that with regard to the Sport Company, there were very narrow terms of reference, which involved the Caribbean Games, \$85,000,000 which did not come off, the Hasely Crawford Stadium roof growing 1000 square metres, miraculously, and so on.

Dr. K. Rowley: Is the Member telling me, Mr. Speaker, that that is the answer to my question? I am saying, Mr. Speaker, I am not talking to him because I am sure he did not hire or pay any lawyers. I am talking to the allocation of the Ministry of the Attorney General to do something which is described as a legal or a forensic legal audit. I would like to see the terms of reference for these forensic legal teams, because in the absence of that—and I hope you would not tell me here that I am making reflections—in the absence of proper terms of reference to high-priced, high-class lawyers, we may very well be feeding people from the Treasury and receiving precious little in return. Because for a government that is so garrulous and quick to “buss mark”, they have this serious legal team investigating all these enterprises and they are very silent at the outcome.

I have no brief with the outcome, I simply want to know what we are paying for. Because look at how the budget is growing—\$33,000,000 in the original budget, to be increased now by \$47,000,000 with no end in sight, and up to now we have not heard that one issue has come under appropriate scrutiny in a way to justify that. And all I am saying, if you are going to be spending taxpayers' money like that, let us know the people that you have hired, what they are required to do.

3.30 p.m.

Mr. Speaker, for example, what are they doing in Petrotrin? What are they doing in WASA? Tell us what the terms of reference are, so we could know what we are funding. I will leave that for the time being, because at the appropriate time we will file the appropriate questions, and I am sure we will get the appropriate answers.

I want to mention one other area. The Minister of Finance trumpeted the great success of the tax amnesty. I am happy that the tax amnesty has generated payments that persons owed the State. I myself took the opportunity to file my taxes, because I really operate—[*Interruption*]

Hon. Member: “Yuh get away.”

Dr. K. Rowley: “No, I eh get away; dey have money for me.” [*Laughter*]

Mr. Speaker, we did know that there were a lot of people out there who had not filed taxes in time, and at the time when the amnesty was put, we supported it, as we supported the budget. We are now being told that the amnesty has recovered a significant amount of money, and we are happy for that. But to portray the amnesty as some solution to our economic problems is to misunderstand it. The amnesty is a one-off injection into our fiscal situation—[*Interruption*]

Hon. Member: Oooh!

Dr. K. Rowley:—and should be seen as a one and done, and to the extent that it brought any improvement to the bottom line of the performance of the budget, I am

hearing—Mr. Speaker, did I hear the Minister of Finance say, in the face of all of that, including the amnesty payments, or amnesty receipts, that the deficit was looking in the order of \$9 million? Did I actually hear that? [*Mr. Dookeran nods head*] So in the face of the one-off payment of \$1.6 billion—because next year there is no amnesty to collect money from, you know. Next year there is no amnesty money to come.

If with \$1.6 billion of this windfall “one and done” the deficit has grown from \$7 billion to \$9 billion, against a background of nice oil prices and good gas prices, the people of Trinidad and Tobago, in the face of all of that are still seeing a stagnant economy, understand what is likely to happen if these good times that we have no control over even make a blip. Because the one thing the Minister of Finance is not going to be able to convince this country of is that the economy of Trinidad and Tobago has been stimulated and growth is coming along.

As a matter of fact, when last did you see the unemployment figures, Mr. Speaker? When last have you seen the CSO figures on unemployment? These are figures we used to get on a quarterly basis, all of a sudden the figures are not available. I would like to ask the Government to ensure that the unemployment figures are available as they used to be, so we could chart the performance of the economy, insofar as it is having an effect on the people who are in the workplace. Come and tell us nice words about how wonderful it is.

There is one other issue. On the revenue side—and again, I do not want to run afoul of the Standing Orders, because in this House a Bill has been laid to deal with the re-enactment of the lands and buildings taxes. The Minister of Finance strangely silence on the loss of revenue, in the face after a growing budget deficit, from \$7 billion to \$9 billion. This country is foregoing traditional revenue, which normally would have come to the State. I am talking here of upwards of \$200 million, the Government is foregoing it. Do you know why, Mr. Speaker?

There is no law in place in Trinidad and Tobago today, for the Government to collect any lands and buildings taxes. [*Interruption*]

Dr. Moonilal: “How much money dat is?”

Dr. K. Rowley: How much money it is? You see, it is not worth collecting. So while the North West Regional Health Authority is forced to accept \$8.9 billion, we are foregoing \$140 million a year in guaranteed revenue. Mr. Speaker, nobody in this country has been able to pay taxes for the year 2010/2011. If you have paid up to 2009, you are up to date in your tax payment in Trinidad and Tobago. It is not as a result of any new policy or any enlightened thinking; it is as a result of political incompetence on the part of the Government, because they took a political decision to remove the existing law, whether you like it or not, but having done so, they have not been able to re-enact a law to allow the country to be properly serviced by the traditional lands and buildings taxes.

Last year was an announced amnesty. When the incompetence faced us in September, the Prime Minister announced an amnesty. That was \$140-odd million down the drain, and possibly more. We are now into June for the following year, I have not heard an announcement of an amnesty, but what I have seen is that nobody is able to pay for their district services.

So while we are getting the service of the regional corporations, the garbage collections and the drains being cleaned, those moneys are being spent, and the moneys are needed, because the budget does not have the revenue. What we have is a huge hole in the budget, but because we have taken political positions which we cannot deliver on or which we do not want to pay the political price to deliver on, you find that the Government has turned its back, as though they have no responsibility to ensure that lands and buildings taxes are properly collected under the appropriate legislation. But we leave that for the future; we expect that would come to the House at some time, if it ever comes, or the country will now move to

a situation where we have abolished lands and buildings taxes in Trinidad and Tobago.

I call on the Government to tell us what we can expect. Is it that we have now reached the point where there will be no longer any lands and buildings taxes, or that there would be legislation coming to the House which would allow the relevant authorities to collect lands and buildings taxes.

Mr. Speaker, I simply want to say that the economy of Trinidad and Tobago is still heavily dependent on what happens in the oil and gas sector. Notwithstanding all that we say, notwithstanding all our expectations, the reality is that today, in Trinidad and Tobago, the oil and gas sector is the driving force of our economy. If it is healthy, there is a good prospect that our economy would be healthy and our quality of life can be sustained and maintained. If on the other hand it is not, then the prospect of concern should be there for us.

When Ministers speak on these very important issues, we must be able to take them at their word. Fortunately, the Minister of Trade and Industry was here to rectify what was published, but the Minister of Energy and Energy Resources is not here, and I am sure she will be told. I simply want to point out that recently there was a leasing of offshore acreage for exploration, because you know that we are required to get involved in some serious exploration to prove up more gas, to maintain our usage rate and also to possibly expand into other things.

When the bids were opened, especially against the background of the Ministry of Energy and Energy Resources congratulating itself about what new policy they were putting in place, bidders were invited, the Government embarked upon a self-congratulatory exercise. What was the fact? Eleven blocks were put out for bids. Eight of those 11 blocks did not attract a single bidder; not one. Of the 11 blocks that were put out, eight did not attract a single bidder; two attracted a bid each, and one attracted three bids. That was the outcome of the bidding

process.

Against that background, the Minister of Energy and Energy Resources was praising the Government for all the wonderful things that were happening. One is to bear in mind that we need to get on with exploration; we need to ensure that we prove up more gas. Do not take my word for it, Mr. Speaker, take David Renwick's word. David Renwick is not a politician; an independent bystander in the media regarded as an energy expert, following the world energy developments and our position in that market.

On March 02, 2011, David Renwick had this to say:

“I am reluctant to rain on Energy Minister Carolyn Seepersad-Bachan's parade in relation to the deep water block round which closed the week before last but almost everything she said about the outcome was inaccurate, or, at best, hyperbolic.”

In other words, the information provided by the Minister of Energy and Energy Resources—Mr. Renwick does not use unparliamentary language, because nobody could say that the Minister did not tell us the truth. He said it was “hyperbolic”. It means that what the Minister of Energy and Energy Industries was saying to us, about the outcome of the bidding process and reality, were not the same.

He described it on March 02, 2011:

“almost everything she said about the outcome was inaccurate,…”

But you did not need an expert like Mr. Renwick to tell you that, if you put out 11 blocks, nobody put in a bid for eight, for two you get one bid, and only one was reasonably attractive.

But there is another point to it: even as the bids went out, there was one local company of international repute that really was in the bidding mix. The rest of the companies were small timers. If you saw how the Government behaved, you would believe that we attracted Exxon, Total and others to come and drill in our

waters. I do not want to cast aspersions on the people who were on the bid, but in the scheme of things, especially in this climate, especially after the BP disaster in the Gulf of Mexico, one has to look very carefully at the prospect of any new and significant deep sea drilling in Trinidad and Tobago.

The climate at this point in time is not particularly attractive, against the background of a global recovery which is sputtering. Only yesterday there was a lot of talk about the numbers in the US economy, probably pointing to this lagging thought that there might be double-dip recession. Those are not things that spur on investment in our kind of offshore waters. But the Government will tell you everything is hunky-dory, and there is nobody who could praise themselves—maybe yes, there is somebody—there are few ministers who praise themselves like the Minister of Energy and Energy Resources, about what wonderful things they are doing. But the fact is that David Renwick had more to say about it, and was not pleasant, because he was taking issue with the veracity—

This is what David Renwick had to say on March 23, 2011. He said that what the Minister told the country about the outcome and some of the energy policies:

“Complete nonsense and completely untrue.”

That is David Renwick. The highly respected analyst describes a Minister of the Government of Trinidad and Tobago’s presentation to the country on policies and programmes and a bidding exercise as complete nonsense. [*Interruption*]

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, I have already indicated to Members, when we are quoting from newspapers and those quotes are unfavourable to a Member of this honourable House, the Member who is quoting would have to take ownership of that quotation, because David Renwick is not in this House, but he is actually attributing certain areas to a Member of Parliament’s conduct in terms of whether the person told the truth or not.

So I want to advise Members to be very careful, when they are quoting from writers who are not Members of Parliament, but who are reflecting negatively on a Member of Parliament. You will have to take ownership of that statement and, therefore, I would ask you not to go into that particular area, because you are really insinuating and impugning the character of the Member and imputing improper motives.

Dr. K. Rowley: Thank you for your guidance, Mr. Speaker. I would simply quote the next line, which I do not think would offend the Standing Orders. I really think I must acknowledge the wisdom of David Renwick, because I understand his knowledge of the local energy sector. He had this to say:

“Trying to pass off deep water block auction as a success...”—[*Interruption*]

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, your speaking time is up, but I will give you some injury time of a minute and a half.

Dr. K. Rowley: About five minutes? You are a generous man.

Mr. Speaker: No, at 2.48 you will have two minutes.

Dr. K. Rowley: He summarized this very important matter, which should be of great concern to the people of Trinidad and Tobago, by saying that what we were doing was:

“Trying to pass off deep water block auction as a success when it was, in fact, a resounding failure.”

The people of this country must take note, that a resounding failure in the area of our attempt to get exploration going in Trinidad and Tobago, is a matter of great concern. It should be a matter of great concern to the Minister of Finance and the people who depend on the revenue that would come from success in that exploration.

I would close in my last 50 seconds by telling the Minister of Finance what the local business sector thinks of what is happening in the country,

notwithstanding the best clothes that he puts on and presents the best political position. I quote here from the *Trinidad Express*; this is very recent, May 25. They are talking about the state of the economy, Government's role in the economy. We do not have time today to go into that, but we will have time. The budget is not far away. It says:

“The business community”—and I am talking about the Trinidad and Tobago business community—“has commended aspects of its performance”—the Government's performance—“but laments that many of the positive intentions have not translated into real measures designed to kickstart the economy.”

That is the status of the current economic situation in Trinidad and Tobago today, getting out of the horse's mouth, out of those persons who operate in and drive the economy.

Mr. Speaker, this is the situation. The Government's best intentions, many have not translated into real measures designed to kickstart the economy. So therefore there is a need to kickstart the economy, and no amount of “ol' talk” will change the fact that our economy has not been stimulated.

I thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: There was a statement made by the hon. Leader of the Opposition during his contribution, in which he alleged that the friends of the Attorney General—lawyers who are friends of the Attorney General—that clearly was an insinuation. I want it expunged from the records of the *Hansard*, that particular section. Otherwise I do not want to anticipate anything. So in the interest of everyone, let us expunge those words. I will see the record of the contribution of the hon. Member and those words will be expunged.

The Minister of Education (Hon. Dr. Tim Gopeesingh): Mr. Speaker and distinguished Members of this House, permit me, first of all, to sincerely

congratulate the hon. Minister of Finance for bringing to this country the facts as they relate to the turnaround in the economy by the People's Partnership Government in just one short year. [*Desk thumping*]

It has been a phenomenal year for us in the People's Partnership Government, aptly led by a very competent and distinguished Prime Minister, who has led from the front and has demonstrated to us and has caused us to work assiduously, in all areas and in all ministries, to bring this country to the level of prosperity which now enjoins, and having done that in an atmosphere of transparency, accountability and one of probity, so that no one could question the way that we have spent our money.

Our People's Partnership manifesto 2010, "Prosperity for All", spoke about a unified people or uniting people to achieve sustainable development. We have established a partnership within the last year with the people, to build unity and prosperity for all. So people are now breathing a sigh of relief in terms of their ability to live and to survive, whereas previously they found it extremely difficult in the circumstances in which they lived, with high inflation rates and low income.

May 27 was a defining moment for this country, when our People's Partnership Government was sworn in. We had the unenviable task of building a sustainable economy, which was put onto the shoulders of the hon. Minister of Finance, who has the tremendous capacity and capability to lead in a financial situation, [*Desk thumping*] one of the leading economists and financial gurus in the Caribbean, even in the Western Hemisphere. We were very honoured to have been led in the financial area by such a distinguished citizen and a son of the soil.

He was faced with deterioration in the economy. In almost every area of our society, we were faced with deterioration, from inadequate infrastructure, to high levels of crime, poor social services and the lack of meaningful job creation. The task we faced, and he faced, was to stabilize the economy and rebuild our society.

We knew that the task was not easy. We were faced with a troubled global economy, which started about two years prior to this, with its negative impact on the ordinary people everywhere. And so the Minister of Finance and this People's Partnership Government had to embark on an economic transformation, with initiatives to transform our economy, ensuring fiscal sanity.

Mr. Speaker, what the Minister of Finance met, first of all—let me just refer to what the Member for Diego Martin West said in his 75 minutes. I find it strange that—probably not strange, that the Member for Diego Martin West came ill-prepared for this budget debate. [*Desk thumping*] He was grasping for straws here, there and everywhere. Imagine in a budget debate he was grasping for straws, speaking about \$12 million for the North-West Regional Health Authority, when we as a Government were faced with billions of dollars in waste, over expenditure and widespread corruption. I wonder where he was for the nine years between 2001 and 2010, with wasteful spending and overexpenditure, when the Governor of the Central Bank had to tell the PNM government at that time, that there was overheating of the economy and they were driving the inflation rate to the highest level.

It is unfortunate that the Member for Diego Martin West is leaving, I would like him to hear what we are saying. [*Crosstalk*] From the first thing he said, one would get the impression that there was a problem in the country, talking about finance. Our Government has fixed and rescued this country.

Let me take this nation to the state of what we met in this economy, which the Minister of Finance touched on, and I am going to elaborate a little more on, what we faced when we came and took over this Government on May 27. Do you know what the state of our finances in this country was? First of all, I am going to speak about the public debt and how much we owed as a country, and compare that with the gross domestic product (GDP).

Local loans were \$19 billion, external loans, \$8.7 billion; other loans serviced, \$4.3 billion. So that is \$32.3 billion in local and foreign loans. Letters of comfort—the hon. Minister of Finance spoke about it. [*Crosstalk*] I am quoting from the Auditor General’s Report for the financial year October 01, 2009, under their watch, to September 30, 2010. We came into Government basically at the beginning of June—June, July, August, September, four months. The PNM administration signed letters of comfort of \$7 billion. So that is \$32.4 billion plus \$7 billion, and I want to speak about the guarantees that were given by the previous government on a number of areas. [*Crosstalk*]

Page 23—the guarantees signed by the previous administration amounted to \$11.27 billion. Promissory notes, \$2.456 billion. Mr. Speaker, foreign government loans, \$200 million. In effect, do you know what the People’s Partnership Government met in terms of debt for this country? We met \$32.3 billion in foreign and local debts, guarantees, \$11 billion; letters of comfort, \$7 billion and promissory notes, \$2.456 billion. This country owed nearly \$48 billion.

Mr. Sharma: Repeat that.

Hon. Dr. T. Gopeesingh: Mr. Speaker, \$47 billion this country owed when we took over Government; \$47 billion in letters of comfort, guarantees, foreign and local loans. That does not include the off the balance books by the 15 special purpose companies and many of the state enterprises. So we have found ourselves owing close to \$60 billion, with a GDP of less than \$120 billion. So we went beyond 50 per cent of our GDP in terms of debt to GDP. That is “a la PNM”. [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Speaker, for the \$60 billion that they spent over the number of years, they have no moral authority to speak about anything in finance in this country; no moral authority.

4.00 p.m.

So when the Member for Diego Martin West speaks about, “We give the impression—one would get the impression that there was a problem in the country,” that was the problem. Sixty billion dollars this country was owing and in what situation, Mr. Speaker?

The Minister of Finance met a lot of bank drafts that had to be satisfied. He met creditors—and he was unable to tell for the first two to three months who we were owing, and who were being owed and which contractors we owed from UDeCott to all the special purpose companies. And general outstanding invoices and liabilities were not forthcoming because they spent money, and spent money corruptly, and we did not know who we were owing.

He had to pay for certified and approved billings. There were suspended contracts that he had to deal with. There were a number of contracts that were terminated that the Minister of Finance had to deal with. A lot of them were unknown, he did not know exactly what had happened before, so he had to spend the first three or four months trying to get the facts and figures and information. He even had to call the contractors, where the contractors were then saying, well you owe us this and you owe us that, and we were now even know what situation these contractors were owed.

And I just want to go on to the question of litigation. The Minister of Finance and this Government met a situation where this country had serious litigation. World GTL has a litigation of almost close to \$12 billion which we as a Government, have to defend.

So, besides owing \$60 billion, and a litigation of World GTL of another \$12 billion, Mr. Speaker, where are we in this country? This is what we inherited as a People’s Partnership Government. Nearly close to \$72 billion, and then we expect that there might be more litigation coming from Sural Company on their Alutrint and e-Tek business, and so on, Mr. Speaker. Where are we going? What has

happened? Those on that side have no moral authority whatsoever to speak anything about finance, Mr. Speaker—absolutely none! Absolutely none! [*Desk thumping*]

Let just me allude to some of the stranded projects which this Government has found itself having to deal with—stranded projects. The first one I will talk about is the small one, Vanguard Hotel. The last government bought Vanguard Holdings Limited, \$341 million; we now have to spend another \$150 million to resuscitate Vanguard Hotel. So a hotel—\$340 million plus \$150 million—now \$490 million for Vanguard Hotel.

Hilton Hotel, Mr. Speaker, we have already spent—they spent \$550 million so far on Hilton Hotel, and we now estimate that to bring it to the level that is required will cost another \$120 million. Imagine that government committed us to a stranded project—a Hilton Hotel for \$670 million and Vanguard Hotel \$490 million. Three billion dollars with World GTL—a stranded project in the refinery upgrade—\$3 billion—plus facing a lawsuit of \$12 billion.

Mr. Speaker, the Performing Arts Centre—that is a stranded project—that was supposed to cost US\$100 million with a loan from the Government of China at 2 per cent—for both South and North Academy for Performing Arts. The north alone has cost \$1.2 billion and the south is not complete. And what are we doing with it? What can we do with it when it has a seating capacity for only about 1,200 people inside there? What a waste and a colossal waste of money! And they want to talk about \$12 million for North/West Regional Health Authority, and what are we doing about the mega farms in Diego Martin.

Mr. Speaker, the waterfront Project—they boast about the waterfront project. That waterfront project was originally scheduled to be a public sector/private sector partnership where the Government would not have had to spend any amount of money.

They have committed the children and the grand children of this country for the next 17 years to pay \$250 million every six months, Mr. Speaker—\$126 million every six months—\$252 million for the next 17 years. This waterfront project is estimated to cost this country \$4.2 billion.

And they said they were building an international financial centre and they wanted to bring people from Dubai and all the rest of the world to invest in finance and to be the financial centre of the Caribbean, and South America and Latin America. And the building had remained empty for almost two years since it had been constructed; now we have to find people to try to fill that building. Mr. Speaker, \$4.2 billion invested in another hotel—Hyatt Hotel. And you know these hotels, like Hilton and Hyatt, cream off the top, because they get their percentage based on the income not on the profit. So, \$4.2 billion there—you have Hilton, \$670 million, and you have Vanguard Hotel, \$490 million, and that is \$1.2 billion in hotels plus Hyatt and probably another \$8 million—\$2 billion in hotels. What is Government doing in hotel business? That is the situation that we have met. Where do we have money now to spend to do the things we want to do and carry the nation forward?

4.05 p.m.

The Brian Lara Stadium, close to \$1 billion spent already and that is a white elephant. That was built for the 2007 World Cup. It was supposed to have been built; it was not even started. We spoke when we were on that side in Opposition about it and they said that they were going to build this big stadium to be able to have the World Cup Cricket and we got the dirty brown paper bag for the World Cup Cricket because we gave away our rights to say that we were going to be the centre for the ACS countries. [*Interruption*] And what we have inside there?

The last Prime Minister said that this was going to be a place for if there is a tsumani or if there is something that people would be housed there. So, what has

happened to all these stadia that we have? What has happened to Queen's Park Oval where they play cricket and so on? Why did they have to go and build a Brian Lara Stadium when the thing is not going to be used at all and it is nowhere close to completion and over \$1 billion spent on it?

Tamana Intech Park, Mr. Speaker—who dreamed up the idea to have a university quite in Wallerfield? Which student in Trinidad and Tobago would leave any part of Trinidad and have to travel to Wallerfield to go to a university? By the time they reach the university they are tired, they spend three hours on the road and three hours to come back, what time are they spending in a university? And e-TeK, they have spent—the Minister of Trade and Industry will tell you—over \$1 billion already spent on Tamana Park. What is the end objective? What are they trying to do with it? Nothing! They cannot tell you what they were going to do in Tamana Park in e-TeK, and that is over \$1 billion spent there as well, Mr. Speaker.

Alutech—they said that they were going to do aluminium mag wheels with Alutech in that area. You think you could compete with the rest of the world to build aluminium wheels in Trinidad? That is a dream, a pie in the sky. So, you had Alutrint, Alutech, World GTL, Vanguard, Hilton, National Academy for the Performing Arts, waterfront project, Brian Lara Stadium, Tamana InTech Park, EMBD; spent \$1.2 billion to develop lands, the lands were not developed and the lands were not given to the people.

So, when the Member for Diego Martin West, former Minister, says that we are giving the impression that there was a problem in the country, that is the problem, Mr. Speaker. That is the problem we met and the Government has fixed it and we have fixed it. One short year and we are trying to fix it so far, and he said we are taking credit for actions not related to this Government. I want to ask the Member for Diego Martin West, where was he during the last year? “We

taking credit?”

In the first 120 days of our action plan, immediate action plan that we stated in our manifesto, there are about 32 things; we succeeded in more than 90 per cent of implementation of the 120-day action plan. Just let me give you some examples: laptops—brought 17,000 laptops to the primary students; 3,200 to teachers in Forms I, II and III; we expanded GATE when they were saying that we were going to close GATE and we are now expanding GATE for technical/vocational training; we rescinded the property tax when the people were crying out, huge cries throughout the country that they have to pay their life-long earnings and they may lose their homes and they were frightened of losing their homes and we said that if we got into government we would rescind the property tax. That is what we did, Mr. Speaker. The People’s Partnership Government rescinded the property tax so the low income people who worked all their life for a home breathed a sigh of relief that they could keep their homes and own their homes. [*Desk thumping*]

We reviewed programmes targeted at poverty alleviation and social support. [*Interruption*] The Member for Caroni Central. The Prime Minister ensured that she put a Ministry of the People and Social Development and the Minister was able to do so much during the little time that he had within the last year to be able to accomplish some of the things in the social services. Housing grant was increased from \$10,000 to \$15,000; household items grant from \$4,500 to \$6,000; [*Desk thumping*] medical equipment grant from \$6,000 to \$7,500; domestic help was given to poor people; funeral grant from \$3,400 to \$7,000—Mr. Speaker, there is dignity in death with our People’s Partnership Government, where was it before?—special child grant; housing assistance grant from \$10,000 to \$20,000; pharmaceutical grant from \$900 to \$2,500; house rent grant from \$4,500 to \$7,500; school supplies grant for secondary schools, \$1,000; primary schools, \$700;

education grant, \$300 to \$500.

Mr. Speaker, this Government, the People's Partnership Government cares for people, looks after poor people, tries to bring equity into society and social justice by looking after the poor people and making sure that the vulnerable people are cared for. This is what we are doing and did for the last year. So, when the Member for Diego Martin West speaks about the Government taking credit for actions not related to this Government, this is the credit we take for the work that we have done in the first 120 days and so much more. So, we established a Ministry of the People and Social Development, we began to release resources from the Green Fund. That Green Fund was dormant for more than 10 years with over \$2 billion in it and the Minister of Housing and the Environment saw the need for the release of that fund for some money to protect the environment and to do things with the money. They did not have the foresight. They collected the money all the time and it stayed there for almost close to \$2 billion.

The Member for Diego Martin West wants to speak about agriculture, and we closed down a megafarm somewhere down in the west. Mr. Speaker, under the People's Partnership Government, agriculture was 3 per cent of the GDP when the previous UNC administration—the office was taken from the UNC in 2001, agriculture formed 3 per cent of the GDP. Under their administration, systemically it went down to 2 per cent of the GDP, 1 per cent of the GDP and .5 per cent of the GDP and they have the audacity and temerity, they have no moral authority to talk about agriculture. They decimated agriculture in this country! [*Desk thumping*] When the hue and cry started and people began to talk about it and we could not be self-sufficient with an import bill of \$4 billion per year, they said they were going to build a megafarm down in the west.

They spent \$17 million on that megafarm—the Member for Oropouche East was trying to tell the Member for Diego Martin West—what was the cost?

Seventeen million dollars. What was the revenue from it? Not even half a million dollars—a Member on this side, the Member for St. Joseph in the last administration came with a long cucumber and two tomatoes in a bag and said that was the produce that they gave him.

Hon. Member: “It cah even make a lil choka.”

Hon. Dr. T. Gopeesingh: “It cah even make a little piece of choka”, and they spent \$17 million on a megafarm and he has the audacity to criticize and comment.

[Desk thumping]

Mr. Speaker, our People’s Partnership Government led by the distinguished hon. Prime Minister, Mrs. Persad-Bissessar stimulated the Minister of Food Production, Land and Marine Resources, “I want performance”, and you know what he did, he performed. The Minister of Food Production, Land and Marine Resources made sure that there were more than 100 access roads constructed already in the agricultural farms. He established two megafarms already. There are hundreds of farmers across the country who have been given leases for lands for agriculture and they are developing agriculture. He built 300 ponds so far for the dry season, in case the next dry season in the agricultural workers have any difficulties in terms of water. In terms of fishing he began to ensure that fishing depots all over the country were being constructed properly so that the people can store their fish, ice their fish and distribute the fish.

Mr. Speaker, agriculture is on the rise in this country and pretty shortly we would be doing very well in terms of protecting our people. You know what the inflation has been in food prices under their watch? It went as high as 37 per cent, the inflation rate for food. Do you know what we have it at now? Under 10 per cent. When we came into office it was 17 per cent and the inflation on agricultural foods is less than 10 per cent now, Mr. Speaker.

Minimum wage: people who were working for \$9.50 per hour, this

Government, the Minister of Labour, Small and Micro Enterprise Development made the decision with tripartite talks and the Government decided to give a \$12 per hour minimum wage, and sincere congratulations to the Minister of Labour, Small and Micro Enterprise Development for bringing this thing. [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. Member: —\$12.50.

Hon. Dr. T. Gopeesingh:—\$12.50; from \$9 to \$12.50. Mr. Speaker, 52,000 people benefited; 52,000 citizens of this country benefited from the—what they said was a senior citizens' grant which they converted, which was a pension and a right for the people above 65, they made it into a senior citizens' grant. A grant is something that you can take away at any time. That was the limbo for thousands of citizens facing above 65 years of age, the PNM gave them a grant, a senior citizens' grant. We changed that around, it is no longer a grant, it is a pension which is permanent and 52,170 persons benefited from that increase in pension to \$3,000.

Mr. Speaker, we established a life fund now being administered by an independent board in a fair, equitable, transparent and accountable manner and no child would ever be left behind and have to die for the lack of medical care because of cost. This is what we brought on, the life fund.

Mr. Speaker, each Minister was asked to present a one-year plan within the first 120 days and each Minister had a one-year plan and worked assiduously to fulfil their one-year plan. We established an economic development board so that that economic development board would be able to bring to the Government the new ideas and stimulate ideas for fiscal policies in line with the monetary policies and for economic transformation and economic development.

We initiated forensic audit. We are wondering whether the Member for Diego Martin West is afraid of the audits and why is he criticizing the audits while we are spending moneys to get best lawyers in eight different areas for the audits for these

areas: UTT, EMBDC, UDeCott, Petrotrin. Mr. Speaker, I am beginning to feel that there is an air of fright across on that side, because the last Prime Minister said “jail eh nice”, so I hope they know and tell their friends who were in the government at that time that “jail eh nice”.

Mrs. Mc Donald: That is imputing improper motives.

Hon. Dr. T. Gopeesingh: No, no.

Mrs. Mc Donald: Tell who on this side? Please! [*Crosstalk*]

Hon. Dr. T. Gopeesingh: Mr. Speaker, he said that we get confused—the year 2008 was one of the best years that they had. In the year 2008, Mr. Speaker, I just want to find in the books here the figures related to 2008 in terms of the revenue and the expenditure.

4.20 p.m.

In the year 2008, Mr. Speaker, their revenue, it was really the best—\$54 billion in revenue. He said this year budget for us is the highest budget ever. We have a budget of \$42—\$43 billion, around there. [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Speaker, \$54 billion in 2008 was the revenue. You know how much they spent? They got \$54 billion, they spent \$55 billion. So it was obviously the best year for them to spend and corruptly waste. So they got \$54 billion in 2008; it was the best year for them, they had money to spend. Calder Hart had money to spend; UTT, EMBD, Petrotrin, everybody had money to spend.

Mr. Speaker, their revenues over a five year period—the country must hear this, how much money passed through their hands like a dose of salts: 2006 revenue, \$37 billion; they spent \$39 billion, more. They spent more than they ever got all the time. That is the ability of the PNM, more I get more I spend, nothing to save.

Mr. Sharma: Waste; total waste.

Hon. Dr. T. Gopeesingh: That is right, total waste! In 2007 they received \$38

billion, they spent \$41 billion; 2008 they received \$54 billion, they spent \$55 billion; 2009 they received \$37 billion they spent \$45 billion.

Mr. Sharma: They would never have an opportunity again.

Hon. Dr. T. Gopeesingh: Never have another opportunity again! This is what they did with the people's money of this country. In 2010, \$42 billion they received, they spent \$46 billion. So I just want to show with a graph, Mr. Speaker, this is what the Auditor General's report shows. [*Dr. Gopeesingh shows the graph to the Speaker*]

Here you have revenue, and in light blue you have expenditure. Under the five years, 2005—2010, they were in office for nine years; always expenditure way greater than revenue. They never saved. They kept on borrowing so that they reached over \$60 billion that the country owed and every year they borrowed and borrowed. The exchequer fund reached \$13 billion; \$13 billion in the exchequer fund, a negative. This is the graph, Mr. Speaker, this is the graph on the Auditor General's report which shows balances on the exchequer account at the end of the financial years 2006—2010: 2006, \$4.7 billion, you see it here, small. This is negative, Mr. Speaker, 2007; \$5.75 billion gone. More money borrowed again and more money spent.

In 2008, \$5.683 billion; that is where the reserves are negative—exchequer; 2009, \$10.789 billion; 2010, \$13.194 billion. That is a PNM, “a la PNM”. “A la Diego Martin West”, for nine years he was in government except the last two years when his Prime Minister throws him out as a Member of Cabinet. So, it kept getting worse and worse. From \$4.7 to \$5.7 to \$5.68 to \$10.78 to \$13.194 billion. That is the economy for PNM. What a shame! What a disgrace!

You see when the Member for Diego Martin West talked about challenges requiring attention, these were challenges; these are challenges that required attention. When he speaks about the economy not stimulated, what does he mean

by the economy not stimulated? I have some figures somewhere on the stock exchange. The inflation rate went down to 9.4 per cent—headline inflation; in March 2011 it declined for the third consecutive month to 9.4 per cent. We stabilized the national economy and put it on a path of growth.

4.25 p.m.

Through the Minister of Finance and the People's Partnership Government, we have increased confidence in the economy, that has been reflected in the Trinidad and Tobago Stock Exchange where the composite index was up by 7.5 per cent for the first four months of 2011. Is that not stimulation of the economy?

[Interruption]

Mr. Sharma: Dr. Gopoesingh, you need to repeat that.

Hon. Dr. T. Gopeesingh: Does the stock exchange not really reflect the economy? Mr. Speaker, the composite index was up by 7.5 per cent for the first four months of 2011. That is a reflection of the economy. The hon. Minister of Finance said, admittedly, that the bank had approximately \$3 billion at one time, but within the last three to four months more than \$2 billion of that had been spent and injected in the economy. So they only had approximately \$1 billion left for the banks to use for loans. Is that not investment in the economy; is that not confidence in the economy?

So, Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Finance and this Government had to take some time to assess what was happening in this country in terms of the finance. We met a financial situation that almost crippled the entire country for years, but we had to rescue the economy. The Minister of Finance through his hard and diligent work with his team had to rescue the economy. There were other things that we did for the poor people, as well. We initiated a payment on a non-taxable special allowance of \$1,000 to all servicing officers of the police service. Yes, you all remember that?

We brought legislation here to increase the pensions of pensioners, who went through the public service—whether in the public service, whether in the nursing sector, whether in the Judiciary—and were receiving pensions of less than \$3,000, some of them who are struggling with a pension of only \$2,000. We brought legislation here to ensure that the pensions were carried to about \$3,000 per month for these people who were struggling. Other things for the poor people are the PTSC buses. There were about 100 buses in Trinidad. Now there are about 350 buses moving through Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*] Tobago had about nine or 10 buses. We have increased it to 40 buses, so that the poor people from rural areas do not have to spend money to travel. Mr. Speaker, in the rural areas of Trinidad where people never saw buses—[*Interruption*] they had four—there are buses now in that rural area. People never even dreamed to see buses in the rural areas. This is what we are doing for the poor people.

Mr. Speaker, a significant part of south Trinidad was without water for years and years. The Minister of Public Utilities in his very quiet manner worked diligently and ensured that 26 kilometres of new waterline from Navet in south Trinidad, a Navet main trunk, began to give water to more than 350,000 people in south Trinidad who never had running water in their lines. That was from a budget that was estimated by them, that was going to cost over \$300 million and take two years to be done.

The People's Partnership Government did it for \$120 million within nine months with local contractors. Not going to any foreign contractors, local contractors. So, where was the rest of the \$180 million to \$200 million going? We do not know, and that is economics and finance PNM style.

Hon. Member: Shame!

Hon. Dr. T. Gopeesingh: People are now able to get water in their lines, and we have saved the wastage. Almost one billion gallons per year was wasted in these

burst mains, so we are now saving that water for the people. If we were to calculate it—I do not know what the cost per gallon of water is—we can extrapolate cost based on one billion gallons of water.

Mr. Speaker, the roads. We completed the Aranguetz—the Member for Diego Martin North/East started it, but we completed it in a short period of time.

Mr. Imbert: You had nothing to do you.

Hon. Dr. T. Gopeesingh: The Aranguetz vverpass.

Mr. Imbert: Just look at it and it was finished.

Hon. Dr. T. Gopeesingh: No, we completed it. Mr. Speaker, you would remember going from O’Meara to Wallerfield—I think my colleague would remember—and seeing an amount of material on the right hand side for years; five or six years. *[Interruption]*

Hon. Member: Ten years!

Hon. Dr. T. Gopeesingh: For ten years it was there.

Mr. Imbert: I will deal with that. I am talking next.

Hon. Dr. T. Gopeesingh: In a few short months, that extension—

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, I think it is a good time for us to pause for tea. It is now 4.30 p.m., this sitting is now suspended until 5.00 p.m.

4.30 p.m.: *Sitting suspended.*

5.00 p.m.: *Sitting resumed.*

Hon. Dr. T. Gopeesingh: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you colleagues. Before we took the tea break, I was moving on to respond to one or two of the statements, in addition to what I have responded to before from the Member for Diego Martin West. The first one I would deal with is the statement on the petroleum issue. He said that oil production has dropped, and began to question this Government’s commitment and performance as far as the oil sector is concerned.

Mr. Speaker, everyone knows that this country's oil production was about 130,000 barrels per day and, there seems to have been a systematic or non-purposeful approach to ensuring that that production continued under their administration. So when we took office, oil production had reached almost less than 100,000 barrels per day and the figures will show that.

Mr. Imbert: Really?

Hon. Dr. T. Gopeesingh: Yes. We are now fighting desperately to develop systems—which the Minister of Energy and Energy Affairs has been speaking about—for the resuscitation of some of the wells and secondary recovery, so that we can bring oil production up to what it was before, close to 130,000 barrels per day or even more. Of course, we have developed more fiscal incentives in terms of a number of areas, where the Minister of Energy and Energy Affairs has given to the exploration companies for them to explore for more oil and gas production. The question the Member for Diego Martin West alluded to was that the price of oil was soaring to \$100, so what are we doing with the money that we are getting from the increased price of oil and gas?

Mr. Speaker, we must remind this country that in 2008—I believe it was from 2007—2008—the price of oil soared to about \$145 per barrel—I wonder if everyone would remember that—and the price of gas moved to beyond US \$6 per cubic feet. Within the last few months, the price of oil has now gone over to about \$100 and the price of gas to \$4.75/\$5. Now, what did they do in their time? They had predicted the price of oil, I believe, at \$40 per barrel and the price of gas at a certain value. Within one year, when they saw that the price of the oil was climbing, to facilitate them getting more money rather than having to put most of these gains from the price of oil in the Heritage and Stabilization Fund—which they were very loath to do—they adjusted the price of oil on two occasions. So they went close to \$75 per barrel. They went to \$55 I believe, and then to \$75 per

barrel.

In one fiscal year, they adjusted the price of oil twice and the price of gas once, so that they would have had more money coming in for them to spend, rather than having to put the accumulation from the increase in the price of oil and gas into the Heritage and Stabilization Fund. That was the year when they spent close to \$55 billion. So, as they got the money, they corruptly wasted close to \$55 billion in that 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. E. McLeod*]

Question put and agreed to.

Hon. Dr. T. Gopeesingh: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and thank you very much colleagues for allowing me a little more time to complete my contribution and my support on this Supplementary Appropriation Bill of the Minister of Finance.

So, Mr. Speaker, the Member for Diego Martin West's statement on the question of increased revenue from the price of oil and gas, is nothing in comparison to what they had received. It is infinitesimal, a small amount in relation to what they experienced and what they did with the money that they got from the increase in the price of oil. Remember, the country was talking about a boom and bust in the 1970s when there was the boom and the bust in the early 1980s, and then there was the boom again in mid-2004, 2005 and 2006, and there was a bust again subsequent to that.

So, I do not think they have any moral authority to talk about the oil prices. They have spent about \$3 billion in Petrotrin and up to now there is no evidence of major improvements in the Petrotrin refinery. So things are looking quite bleak. The new board has a lot of work to do and has been doing quite a lot work to try to

resuscitate Petrotrin and bring it to what it was supposed to be.

Mr. Speaker, the Member for Diego Martin West went on again and began to speak about discrimination, about the people down in the West, discrimination in his own constituency, the people are not benefiting from what is happening, why you are only giving \$12 million to the North West Regional Health Authority and you gave \$94 million to South-West. Everyone knows in this country that under their administration from 2002—they took office in 2002 and had to demit office in May 2010. They had almost nine years, what did they do for the health sector during that time?

Everyone knows that patients were sleeping on benches; babies were being delivered on the floor; patients were falling off the beds and dying; children were going in for surgery at the Eric Williams Medical Sciences Complex and coming out with brain damage; overflowing on the wards; patients were in the accident and emergency department for three to four days and were not receiving medical care; they had not increased the number of nurses in the country; they said that they were going to bring in more doctors, not many more doctors came into the country. They brought in some doctors who were not experienced, patients began to die; nearly 300 vacancies for senior doctors in this country; more than 1,500 nurses are needed in the country for hospitals; a state of dilapidation. The South-West Regional Health Authority received \$94 million to pay the bills that they had created for some of the things that were being owed by the Regional Health Authorities under their watch. Therefore, they are the last ones to even comment about money spent on the medical system.

In fact, the medical system needs so much more that no one should be questioning the expenditure on the medical care system, because we have found a rotten system, a sick system, and one that needed immediate resuscitation and intensive care support. This is what the People's Partnership Government is doing

at the moment, to make sure that the medical situation comes to a better standard of practice in all the hospitals, and to ensure that patients are taken care of at all levels.

Mr. Speaker, it is the intention of this Government to build a Paediatric Hospital in Central Trinidad, and that has been stated by the hon. Prime Minister. We are going to continue to improve the infrastructure in all the hospitals of Trinidad and Tobago and the Regional Health Authorities. We are moving expeditiously to increase the number of nurses, so that we can staff the wards and bring back a substantial number of the doctors from abroad so that we can take care of the population.

It is important for me to speak as Minister of Education of what I met, where we are going in the Ministry of Education, where we are taking it and how we are spending our money profitably and wisely in the Ministry of Education.

Mr. Speaker, when we were in opposition, we began to ask what they were doing about the infrastructure within the education system. It was the former Minister of Education, Mrs. Manning, who indicated that they were constructing a number of primary and secondary schools and so on. And when we began to ask how many had been completed, we were given answers like, 15 being constructed and they are ready for completion, and a number of primary schools almost to be completed.

5.10 p.m.

Mr. Speaker, at the end of it all, there were two Ministers of Education, one, Mrs. Hazel Manning and then Ms. Esther Le Gendre. At the end of both of their terms, they were not able to complete one secondary school or one primary school that we are aware of. Not one! But incurred expenditure of \$117 million for a secondary school—one secondary school. They signed contracts with companies, construction companies, to construct these secondary schools at \$117 million for

one and a primary school at \$40 million for one! They were creating hotels, Mr. Speaker.

The countries around the world, when we told them that we are spending close to US \$30 million, our neighbouring countries of Jamaica and Barbados asked whether we were going crazy, because the highest cost in Jamaica of one of their secondary schools with the same number of spaces was close to about US \$5 million for the max. We were spending six times that amount and where was the money going?

Mr. Imbert: And what are you doing now?

Hon. Dr. T. Gopeesingh: Where the money gone? [*Interruption and crosstalk*] Listen now! We had been committed to one, it was a design that had been done there, and therefore we had to go with it because the contracts were already awarded on it. Mr. Speaker, primary schools—so they completed no secondary schools, but you know what, we have completed one already—Marabella Secondary. We are having four more completed by September and in one year's time, we will have another four secondary schools completed.

Then the primary schools, Mr. Speaker—\$40 million for one primary school. They started the construction and we have completed one—the Penal SDMS Primary School. We have four more going to be completed by September and four more within a year from then. But, Mr. Speaker, we have moved away from that now. We have decided to utilize the finance that is available, the scarce finance in a very profitable.

A pre-engineered, prefabricated primary school is now costing not more than \$5 million, Mr. Speaker, and we have constructed four already. Balmain has just been opened, we did one in Charlieville, and we have four more under construction. Could you imagine we are spending \$4 million to construct a primary school now that will last 25 years? In fact, we have constructed two pre-

engineered, prefabricated schools that will last 50 years.

You know there are some apartments along the highway by Kaydonna Drive-in? Those apartments were built by the same company with the pre-engineered, prefabricated way and those are apartments. And we have built two of those schools under that type of design, one for \$3.5 million and one for \$4 million and those schools could last 50 years. And the pre-engineered, prefabricated schools now, the other type could last for 20 to 25 years, and this is where we are going. We have built four already; we have five more on the drawing board, but we have 478 primary schools which we have inherited and many have been dilapidated over a number of years.

During the term of office of our distinguished Prime Minister, when she was the Minister of Education, she built 47 schools during that time, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Sharma: A world record!

Hon. Dr. T. Gopeesingh: A world record! Including Biche, which they kept open—I will come to that shortly.

Mr. Speaker, the other thing. The world is moving with a system of early childhood education. We are leaders in Latin America and the Caribbean in education. When you go to these Latin American and Caribbean conferences, we have universal primary education, universal secondary education, and universal tertiary education. Who created universal secondary education? Our distinguished hon. Prime Minister when she was the Minister of Education. She said not a child must be left behind. She has instructed me as the Minister of Education, that I must ensure that no child between the ages 3 to 5 will be left behind by creating universal early childhood education.

5.15 p.m.

Mr. Speaker, if we achieve that and it is our purpose and intention to achieve that in the next three years, to achieve universal early childhood education, we will

probably be the first country in the world to achieve universal early childhood education. [*Desk thumping*] We have to take care of 34,000 children between the ages three to five. We have 200 government, government assisted and Servol schools. Servol is about 74 and that takes care of 12,000 children. The other 12,000 children will be taken care of. We will construct early childhood education premises on school compounds of 200 schools which are less than 70 per cent populated. So we will take care of another 12,000 children there.

We are working with the private sector which has kindergartens and nurseries. There are 700 kindergartens and nurseries which are registered with the Ministry of Education. We have already begun discussions and we have gotten at least 100 of them so far, to agree to moving with the Ministry of Education for us to help them manage it, and to bring them to fruition, with improvements in the infrastructure, the facilities and to train their teachers.

So, Mr. Speaker, we will have 600 early childhood education centres with at least 60 children in each school to take care of the 34,000 children, that way and we hope to complete this within a two-year period from now. And you know what we are doing it with? The last administration said that they would build 600 early childhood education centres by 2012; they made that determination in 2009. They built 22 early childhood education centres between 2002 and 2010, you know how much we have done in just one year? We have already completed 12, we have formally opened [*Desk thumping*] at least four. At the end of this month, June, we will complete another 11, that is 23, and by the end of December we will complete another 24. So by December, in a year and a half, we would have done 47 early childhood education centres [*Desk thumping*] in comparison with 22 that they did in nine years.

Cost-wise, they were going to spend \$5 million per early childhood education centre. So 600 by 5 is \$3 billion. We are utilizing existing primary

schools and upgrading their facilities, so that we will have the early childhood— not one of these early childhood education centres is going to cost more than probably half a million dollars or \$1 million. So 200 more to go at \$1 million, that is \$200 million, and if we move with the private sector and we spend \$1 million to help them fix theirs as well, that is another \$200 million, so maximum \$400 million.

When they were trying to do the same thing, but spending \$3 billion, that is the difference between we of the People's Partnership Government and they of the People's National Movement government. We are prudent in our fiscal management, we spend it wisely for the benefit of all. So that in addition we are moving with the Ministry of Science, Technology and Tertiary Education to train close to 3,000 early childhood education teachers, so we have a massive intensive training programme for our teachers.

So, Mr. Speaker, in just one year we have been able to do all of that, and I only spoke about education here, because that is my portfolio for the time being to show where we are going. There are many other areas which I can speak about, but it will not be of major interest since we are dealing with a financial issue at the moment.

In closing, I think the People's Partnership Government has undertaken seriously an economic transformation of this country. We have developed initiatives to transform our economy and we are now ensuring fiscal sanity. They had on their side ill-conceived fiscal policies of their administration which resulted in distortion of the economy, and mismanagement of our resources; everyone knows that.

We are now restructuring our economy, thanks to the Minister of Finance, and we are immediately reorganizing our economic strategies. We are maximizing the development of our people by ensuring that the needs of the poor and

disadvantaged are given priority.

This is why we have a Ministry of the People and Social Development and whatever we do we are giving preference to the poor and disadvantaged.

5.20 p.m.

We have managed to stabilize our economy as the Minister of Finance indicated this afternoon, so the 2010 fiscal year has been a year of stabilization of the economy and we are now positioned for sustainable growth. We are creating an emphasis on reduction in wasteful spending and I feel ashamed, as a Member of Government now, to say what they have done. I feel ashamed for them; for the wasteful, corrupt expenditure of over \$30 billion during their nine-year period.

This is what the people rebelled against. The people became fed up. Four hundred and fifty something persons voted against their corruption and their wasteful expenditure. This is why we are here today and they are there. [*Desk thumping*] We have managed and continue to reduce inflation to less than double digits. We are increasing investor confidence in the economy and we are committed to harmonious industrial relations. We have settled the PSA industrial dispute recently and we are working assiduously; the Minister of Labour, Small and Micro Enterprise Development, the Minister of Finance, the Minister of Public Administration are all working together to ensure that all industrial relations issues are sorted out as quickly as possible for the benefit of the country.

We began the diversification into the non-energy sector, the services sector and the financial sector. We have weathered the global financial crisis and we are getting economic growth now. We may not get the 4 per cent we predicted, but we are getting close to 1 to 2 per cent of the economic growth of the GDP. Therefore, we are moving upward.

We have sound economic planning and we have created the institutional arrangements to facilitate that. We have an enabling environment for growth and

expansion of locally owned businesses with economic opportunity for all and we are committed to economic, monetary and fiscal policies as essential components.

We are ensuring fiscal probity. The Prime Minister promised that within the first 30 days she would lay two legislative proposals to deal with transparency and accountability in procurement and this we did. We have a joint select committee now that is working toward bringing a legislative framework to deal with procurement, to ensure transparency, good governance and accountability.

The Minister of Finance has assisted in creating an enabling environment. We are addressing the regulatory barriers to investment. The Minister of Trade and Industry is doing that at the moment. We are aligning government fiscal policy to the Central Bank monetary policy; so that the Governor of the Central Bank does not have to tell us that we are overheating the economy and driving the inflation rate up. Our fiscal policies are in tandem with the monetary policies of the Central Bank. We have created an investment environment. We are now spending money on research and innovation. We are balancing our spending and creating an equitable distribution for social justice.

In closing, the last 12 months has been a period of stabilization and consolidation financially and in a number of areas for our People's Partnership Government and for our country. We have set the platform for the next four years, and possibly nine years. We look to the future with great hope and anticipation as the hon. Prime Minister continues to navigate Trinidad and Tobago towards growth and transformation that will redound to the benefit of all citizens.

Thank you.

Mr. Colm Imbert (*Diego Martin North/East*): Mr. Speaker, the Member for Caroni East in all his incarnations has never been good with figures. Poor fellow! He made a number of statements, as is his wont, which are simply not true. Let me pick them off one by one.

The Member for Caroni East boasted that, under the new coalition government, inflation had been reduced to 9 per cent. He boasted that in four months inflation had gone down to 9.7 per cent. Mr. Speaker, I know the Member for Caroni East thinks that he is a jack-of-all-trades, but there is only one Jack in this Parliament and it is not the Member for Caroni East.

I have in my possession, the *Summary Economic Indicator Reports* of the Central Bank of Trinidad and Tobago and I would advise the Member for Caroni East to read them. If the Member reads what is in these documents which are freely available on the Internet—they are published on the Central Bank website. If you do not believe me, check it yourself after this session.

Mr. Speaker, I am reading from the December 2010 report, just about five months ago, Central Bank Report, Summary Economic Indicators. I go to the section “Domestic Prices”, and I quote.

“Headline inflation”—which would be in Trinidad and Tobago—“measured 13.4 per cent on a year-on-year basis to December 2010.”

So in December 2010, inflation was 13.4 per cent. Let us go backwards to December 2009, one year before, when the PNM was in government. I quote from the December 2009 Central Bank of Trinidad and Tobago Summary Economic Indicators:

“Domestic Prices

On a year-on-year basis to November 2009, headline inflation measured 1.5 per cent.”

I know you are raising your eyebrows, you know. Check it yourself. So at the end of 2009, under the PNM, inflation was 1.5 per cent. At the end of 2010, under the UNC coalition, it was 13.4 per cent. So, Mr. Speaker, if it is now 9.7 per cent, it is nine times what it was under the PNM, because it was 1.5 per cent under the PNM. So, I urge the Minister of Education, because he is in charge of

educating children—*[Interruption]* No. Just let me finish my point. I must give way to you. You always give way to me, eventually.

So in December 2009, inflation was 1.5 per cent under the PNM; December 2010, inflation 13.4 per cent under the UNC. So how could a change from 1.5 per cent—it is all right; I have the figures in January, February and March as well—to 9.7 per cent be a reduction? What kind of mathematics is that?

Dr. Gopeesingh: Mr. Speaker, thank you for giving way, hon. Member. I am happy about your change in approach in Parliament. You would remember, under your regime, the core inflation had gone beyond 13 per cent and food price inflation had gone to almost 37 per cent. What I mentioned here was that within the last four months of 2011, the core inflation went down to about 9.4 per cent. You quoted from the December 2010 report, but what I was speaking about was in 2011. Remember we just had a few months.

Mr. C. Imbert: Mr. Speaker, I have in my possession, March 2011. Close enough for you? Headline inflation measured 9.4 per cent on a year-on-year basis to March 2011.

Let us go to December 2009 again. Under the PNM, inflation was 1.5 per cent. There has never been a period in Trinidad and Tobago's recent history, within the last 60 years, because 60 is a figure that is fashionable on that side. So, let us say that within the last 60 or within the last 16, there has never been a situation where headline inflation was 1.5 per cent. It was 1.5 per cent at the end of 2009.

How can a change from 1.5 per cent to 9 per cent be a reduction? It is impossible and I give way now to the Member for D'Abadie/O'Meara.

Mr. Roberts: Member for Diego Martin North/East, please! It is absolutely not factual. I would like to double and triple check what statistics you are reading from. In December 2009, the headline inflation rate was 11.5 per cent; core

inflation was at 4.3 per cent. No time in recent history, since 1986, has headline inflation been ever at 1.5 and I cannot let you stand here and say that. Please!

Mr. C. Imbert: Mr. Speaker, I know that the Member for D'Abadie/O'Meara sometimes gets his facts wrong. In fact he hears things that other people hear differently. He has a problem; but I am reading from the official Central Bank of Trinidad and Tobago Report, December 2009, Summary of Economic Indicators: headline inflation, 1.5 per cent. The Members of the Government can jump high or low. Those are the facts. I do not understand what their problem is.

Mr. Speaker, since the Member does not believe, I will send it to him. Let me fast-forward to a statement made by the Minister of Finance. The Minister of Finance, in his contribution here today, spoke proudly about the unemployment rate in Trinidad and Tobago in June 2010. But let me tell you the facts. I am reading now from the Central Bank of Trinidad and Tobago, main highlights from the Monetary Policy Report, April 2011, Press Brief, Tuesday, May 03, 2011. That is four weeks ago. They state as follows:

“(c) Domestic Economy

The unemployment rate fell to 4.8 per cent in the second quarter of 2010 from 6.7 per cent in the first quarter, following temporary job creation in the wake of the general elections held in May 2010.”

Mr. Speaker, the general election was on May 24, 2010. My memory tells me that the first Cabinet meeting was either at the end of May or sometime in June. Am I right? The first stimulus with respect to the unemployment rate would therefore have occurred several months after that.

According to this Central Bank Report, the decline in the unemployment rate to 4.8 per cent by the end of the second quarter in 2010 is wholly, solely, exclusively attributed to the work of the People's National Movement government.

[*Desk thumping*]

5.35 p.m.

But the Minister of Finance came into the Parliament and said proudly—*[Interruption]*—you are disturbing me man—that this is the work of the People’s Partnership Government, that the unemployment rate declined to 4.8 per cent in June 2010. *[Interruption]* Sure, Minister.

Mr. Dookeran: I thank the Member for giving way. I wonder if the Member could have continued his quote on that very same topic, which says that:

“The period of heavy job loss seems to have ended based on a significant decline in the number of persons retrenched in 2010 and the large increase in the number of job vacancy advertisements published in the daily newspapers during the first quarter of 2011.”

Mr. C. Imbert: Mr. Speaker, the Member has quoted correctly. The point is, as the Member for Diego Martin West pointed out, where are the figures from the Central Statistical Office? We have not had—the Central Bank and the Member for Tunapuna was a former governor of the Central Bank, so he knows that what I am about to say is correct.

The Central Bank relies on the Central Statistical Office for its unemployment data. The Central Bank does not gather employment data on its own, it takes the information from the CSO. The last piece of information we have from the Central Statistical Office is the 4.8 per cent unemployment rate in June 2010, which is wholly, solely and exclusively attributed to the People’s National Movement government. And I would like to know now—because we had a Minister of Planning that we have no longer. We had a Minister of Planning, and the CSO is in the Ministry of Planning. What was that Minister doing?

Normally, you have labour bulletins come out every quarter, so we should have a labour bulletin for September 2010, December 2010, March 2011, but we

do not have it. And I would like the Minister of Finance to tell us, if he can, when he is winding up, why is the Central Statistical Office not publishing labour force bulletins on a timely basis? What happened in that 12 months that that Minister of Planning was in that ministry? Was it that the focus was on something else, and the focus was not on ensuring that the country is properly informed with respect to unemployment, with respect to the labour force, with respect to the increase or decline in the participation rate? What went on in that ministry for 12 months so that we cannot get labour force bulletins? So that the unfortunate Minister of Finance has to come into the Parliament and quote an unemployment rate which is a PNM unemployment rate. Twelve months in power and the Minister is unable to access data which would tell us what has occurred since the general election of May 2010. [*Interruption*] This is the last time I am giving way to you.

Mr. Roberts: Thank you very much, Diego Martin North/East. Before you move on to your next point, granted what you are saying is true, and you would agree that there is a time lag with the CSO's statistics, so to even bolster your point a bit, that the 4.8 was more PNM, it was even further back, right? It was all PNM. But then, would you now agree that it is absolutely, economically impossible to have an inflation rate of 1.5 per cent, yet be at full employment? Once you are at full employment one of the absolute facts that occur at that time with more money chasing fewer goods, is that you have high inflation.

Mr. C. Imbert: Mr. Speaker, if the Member for D'Abadie/O'Meara and any other Member of the Government has a problem with the official bulletin from the Central Bank of Trinidad and Tobago, published on the website of Trinidad and Tobago, under the seal of the Governor of the Central Bank of Trinidad and Tobago, has been outside there in the public domain for more than one year, stating that the headline inflation measured 1.5 per cent at the end of 2009—this document, these figures have been in the system for more than one year—and if

the Member for D'Abadie/O'Meara is now saying that this is a bogus document, that this document that I took off the Central Bank website is bogus, then I suggest the Members of the Government who are having problems understanding reality, take that up with the Central Bank.

5.40 p.m.

Hon. Member: Misprint!

Mr. C. Imbert: Misprint! "Is all yuh does misprint." So, Mr. Speaker, I think it is unfortunate that the Minister had to come into this Parliament and boast about an unemployment rate of 4.8 per cent, and claim it for the People's Partnership Government, or whatever they call themselves, and it is really a PNM achievement and a PNM statistic, but let us go back to the Member for Caroni East. As I said, poor fellow; not good with figures! He is always coming into this Parliament not understanding the economic realities, and the expenditure and income patterns in Trinidad and Tobago.

Now, you see this document, *Facing the Issues Turning the Economy Around*—Partnering with all our People—Review of the Economy 2010. Now, do you recognize this document? [*Document in hand*] This was published by you. This is not a PNM publication. This was laid in this House by the hon. Minister of Finance. I shall go to page 71, at Appendix 21 which is headed, "Central Government Fiscal Operations \$TT millions". At the top of the table—[*Crosstalk*] Mr. Speaker, could—

Mr. Speaker: You have my full protection.

Mr. C. Imbert: I mean, even the Prime Minister is disturbing me.

Mr. Speaker: Yes, you have my protection.

Mr. C. Imbert: The Prime Minister just came in, and she is disturbing me. Now, Appendix 21—[*Crosstalk*—anytime you talk, I have to listen, so you are disturbing me when you talk—Review of the Economy 2010—Central Government Fiscal Operations—fiscal year October 2004/September 2005. Total revenue, \$29 billion; total expenditure, \$27 billion and, therefore, revenue was more than expenditure. [*Crosstalk*] Hold on! “Hurry dog eat raw meat.” In 2005/2006, this is what the Member for Tunapuna, the Minister of Finance is telling us: Total revenue, \$38.9 billion; total expenditure, \$37 billion. Again, \$38.9 billion is more than \$37 billion. In 2006/2007—that is the year you wanted to know—total revenue, \$40 billion; total expenditure \$39 billion. Is 40 more than 39? No, no.

Mr. Speaker, the Member for Caroni East does not understand the fiscal accounts of Trinidad and Tobago. I do not know if he is a Member of the Public Accounts Committee. I hope that if he is not he will become one, because we are about to hire a financial expert to explain to persons such as the Member for Caroni East, how to interpret the public accounts of Trinidad and Tobago, but let us move on.

In 2007/2008—[*Crosstalk*] Mr. Speaker, he is disturbing me—revenue, \$56 billion; expenditure \$53 billion. Do you want me to go on? [*Crosstalk*] So this is not authentic! Mr. Speaker, if the Member for Caroni East is telling me that his document is authentic and this is not, then I would suggest that he speak to the Minister of Finance, the Member for Tunapuna, under the UNC-coalition Government, because this was laid in this Parliament by the present Government [*Desk thumping*] and it shows—

Dr. Gopeesingh: Will you give way?

Mr. C. Imbert: “No, I am not giving way man, stop it!” I will give way in a while. Take it easy, you are breaking—Mr. Speaker, I know the tactic you know. “They want to break meh stride.” You cannot do it.

I have heard this speech from the Member for Caroni East year after year. If he applied that same logic to this fiscal year, then the deficit of the Minister of Finance would be about \$20 billion, if he applies his logic, because what he does not understand is that document does not give you the whole picture. [*Crosstalk*] That is only a certain portion of the revenue of Trinidad and Tobago. There are elements of our revenue that are not in that document.

Mr. Speaker, the Auditor General only audits what she is presented with. She is only entitled to audit certain accounts, not all of them. We have explained this to the Member for Caroni Central over and over again. If he was right, then Trinidad and Tobago would be going to—I cannot use bad language—somewhere in a hand basket. We would be burning in flames, because we would already be in a deficit of about \$20 billion if he was right, but he is wrong, and he keeps bringing this inaccurate information into this Parliament and embarrassing himself.

Dr. Gopeesingh: Will you give way now?

Mr. C. Imbert: No, in due course. I would give way in due course, but not now, Mr. Speaker.

You know, one of the comments he made that just jumped out at me was how prudent the Government is—their budget for 2011 was only \$41 billion. Poor fellow! Let me go again to the budget speech of the hon. Member for Tunapuna, *Facing the Issues Turning—the Economy Around*. This is the budget statement of

2011. This is not a PNM document; this is a document from the Minister of Finance. You know, I just do not understand why the hon. Member cannot interpret data. He has all sorts of degrees or so they say. You are a highly lettered man. I read somewhere where you have five degrees or something like that. At least, you have more than one degree from an institute of tertiary education.

Let us go and take a look and see what it says. On page 31 of the budget statement read in this House last year, by the hon. Member for Tunapuna, the Minister of Finance, what does it say?

“Total revenue is fixed at \$41.3 billion...while total expenditure is projected at \$49 billion.”

It is \$49 billion, not \$41 billion. So the revenue is \$41 billion, the expenditure is \$49 billion and, therefore, the budget is \$49 billion, because there is something called a deficit. A deficit is the difference between what you earn and what you spend. So that the Government was projected to spend \$49 billion and earn \$41 billion more or less, which is why we had an initial deficit of \$8 billion. So, I am hoping, as I said, that if the Member is not on the Public Accounts Committee, we will get him there, because we have to educate him, because these statements he keeps making are an embarrassment.

From what the Member for Tunapuna had said, when you add the additional expenditure, our budget this year is going to be about \$52 billion, for your information; \$52 billion, not \$42 billion. Our deficit is going from \$7.7 billion to \$8.9 billion. This is no laughing matter. We are talking about this very glibly, but a deficit of \$8.9 billion is a lot of money. This country cannot afford to continue running fiscal deficit of that magnitude; \$8.9 billion! I heard the Member for

Tunapuna deliver it as if it is no big thing, but it is very serious. Almost \$9 billion in deficit, Mr. Speaker! There is another point—I do not want to spend any more time on the Member for Caroni East. Poor fellow, he just does not understand the numbers.

Mr. Speaker, let me go now to the Minister of Finance. If you read the budget statement of the Minister of Finance for 2011, the Minister of Finance then on September 08, 2010, told us that the growth in the economy for fiscal 2010 would be 2.5 per cent. Now, we are hearing all kinds of numbers bandied about, and the Member for Diego Martin West was quite right to say that Government Ministers are saying different things, because in this same speech from the Member for Chaguanas East that he has been so kind to provide us with, in an attempt to show us that he meant 16 instead of 60; and 2.5 instead of 5—*[Crosstalk]* How would I know? I was not there.

Mr. Speaker, the Member for Chaguanas East told us that we recorded growth of approximately 1.2 per cent for 2010, but in the budget statement, the Minister of Finance said that the growth for 2010 was 2.5 per cent. Who is telling the truth? Who has the correct figure? This was laid in this Parliament; growth in 2010 of 2.5 per cent. The Ministry of Trade and Industry says that it is 1.2 per cent. Who is correct? The Minister of Trade and Industry went on to say that the projection are for 2.5 per cent growth for 2011. Wrong!

When you go to the Central Bank of Trinidad and Tobago: Main Highlights from the Monetary Policy Report, April 2011, this is what the Central Bank had to say. This was before. He spoke on May 31, 2011 and this was published on May 03, 2011 before, so he should know better. What did the Central Bank have to

say? I read from page 5:

“Short term Outlook

Domestic Economy

- Economic developments so far are unlikely to be able to support the pace of economic recovery that was originally envisaged (2-3 per cent growth in 2011). Real GDP growth could now be in the region of 1-2 per cent.”

So, what is going on in that Government? The Central Bank is predicting growth of somewhere between 1—1½ per cent, let us say, but the Minister of Trade and Industry is telling us it is 2.5 per cent.

Mr. Speaker, when I go back into this economic report which is just, as I said, May 2011, what this tells us is that the programme that the Minister of Finance has been talking about and the Minister of Education spoke about just did not happen. It is in their imagination. Listen to this statement again on page 4 of this policy report! It says:

- “The preliminary fiscal outturn for the first half of FY 2011 showed that, because of lower than projected capital spending, the fiscal accounts recorded a small deficit of \$207.5 million compared to a budgeted deficit of \$3.3 billion.”

Now, let me put that into layman’s language. If the Government had been spending money on construction of schools, hospitals, police stations, courthouses and roads, you name it—if the Government had been doing what it planned to do, this document, the Public Sector Investment Programme document, which was laid in this Parliament in September 2010, then by the first half of fiscal 2011, the end of March, you would have spent \$3.3 billion on capital projects, but you spent

\$200 million. You have a shortfall in expenditure on capital development of \$3 billion, and it is not me saying so. It is the Central Bank saying so. That is why they have revised their projections for economic growth downwards. Member for Caroni East, from two to one is down, not like yours from one to nine is down. This is a real down. So, the Central Bank has revised its projections for economic growth downwards to 1½ per cent, and it is because you are not spending money. I heard the Minister say that this is the norm. I beg to differ; I most certainly beg to differ.

The rainy season is upon us, Mr. Speaker, and whilst the Minister of Works and Transport, the Member for Chaguanas West, is defending his honour in Zurich, a little shower of rain fell in Port of Spain yesterday—any one of you who watched the news last night; flood in Port of Spain!

Hon. Member: Ohooo!

Mr. C. Imbert: Flood in Port of Spain! A small shower of rain; flood in Port of Spain, Mr. Speaker! [*Interruption*] You know, I am hearing the noise. The Members opposite have had between May—December 2010 and between January—June 2011 to address issues of flooding. They have had 12 months to address the issue of flooding. What have they done? Nothing! You see, when you put all these documents together—you put the statement from the Central Bank saying that the deficit was only \$207 million instead of \$3.3 billion and you recognize that they had a PSIP of \$7 billion of which they have spent barely \$700 million—That is what the Minister said.

5.55 p.m.

He has revised the figures from April to June from \$200 million to \$700 million, so out of a capital development programme of \$7 billion, in about eight

months, they have spent \$700 million. So out of a projected expenditure pattern, as I said, on schools, hospitals, police stations, courthouses, drainage projects, road projects, et cetera, where they were supposed to spend \$7 billion in fiscal 2011, they have spent \$700 million—10 per cent of the capital development programme has been spent in eight out of 12 months.

The point I made about the rainy season, I do not know why they are getting so jittery. When rain fell under PNM it was PNM's fault, so when rain falls under UNC is it PNM's fault too? I mean, come on! Mr. Speaker, those tired techniques, those strategies, those tricks of the trade where, you know, you could just keep blaming the Members on this side for everything under the sun, that is getting tired, people are becoming tired of it. But I made the point that a little shower of rain in Port of Spain, and I saw water up to the windshield of a car in Port of Spain. And the point I am making, if the Government had been spending money on its development programme, as it should have, if the Minister of Works was in Trinidad instead of in Switzerland—and you know, that is something that is of concern.

Imagine a foreign organization summons a Cabinet Minister of Trinidad and Tobago to Switzerland and he goes—the Prime Minister cannot do that, you know! This is a very, very serious matter, you know we are all making joke about this whole thing. But our Minister of Works has been out of the country since the weekend, as I said, defending his honour in Switzerland. I am not getting into who say what and who guilty and who do this—I am not going there. I am just making the point—the rainy season is upon us and our Minister of Works is not here; he is somewhere else. I am urging the Government—I mean the statements made by the Minister of Finance are really pie in the sky. I mean, it is unreasonable to accept that in the last three months of the fiscal year, you are going to spend 10 times what you spent in the first nine months of the fiscal year—come on, with rain

falling! I mean, what happen? We are going the give the construction workers scuba gear—is that what is going to happen now? They will swim underneath and cast concrete, and so on.

As the Member for Diego Martin West said, we changed the fiscal year so that it gives the Ministry three months to mobilize, between September and December, so that they could start construction work with a bang in January, so by the time June or July reaches, the bulk of the construction activity is completed because you know that July is one of the rainiest months of the year. They know that you know; they know the weather just as good as me, you know. July is one of the rainiest months of the year. The other very rainy month in the year is November, but July is a terrible month, as is August. So the Minister of Finance cannot be serious. He is trying to get us to believe on this side, that having spent \$700 million in nine months, they will spend \$7 billion in three months—come on, I mean, it is not a serious projection. And it is obvious that is not a serious projection and it is obvious that the outturn in terms of capital expenditure for fiscal 2011 is going to be an underperformance, Mr. Speaker. The projects are not going to be done.

I mean, if you go through this list of all the projects that they said they were going to do in fiscal 2011, 90 per cent of them have not even started. You look at the PSIP, the projects have not even begun; projects in the agriculture sector, projects in the health sector; projects in basic infrastructure, they have not even started, Mr. Speaker. I would go through the whole list of them. And having not started projects in the first nine months, how on earth are you going to start them in the last three months and finish all of them in a period of 90 days in the rainy season? In the rainy season, Mr. Speaker? You could not be serious!

6.00 p.m.

And the Minister can pull out whatever documents he wants, the fact of it,

anybody who lives Trinidad and Tobago, and does not live in an ivory tower, anybody who lives in the real world, who goes out there and walks with ordinary people and goes on construction sites, and is familiar with how construction is implemented in this country, will know that within the next three months very little will be done in this country by way of construction.

And that brings me now to what we are doing here today. I heard the Minister say that this \$2.7 billion is going to stimulate the economy. What did he say?— “get the economy safe and then put it on a path for growth”? But most of the money is recurrent expenditure; \$643 million alone in industrial relations agreements, back pay and so on. That is not money to be spent on job creation. *[Interruption]* You heard this? So let us not have a capital programme in Trinidad and Tobago then? So, what is the purpose of the capital development programme?

Mr. Speaker, most of this money is for recurrent expenditure, how is this going to stimulate the economy? How? I mean, the Minister knows that what I am talking about is true—\$100 million for housing, that is one project. And you know, I heard the Member for Caroni East talk about cost—I think you better have a chat with the Minister of Housing, because one little HDC house costing \$500,000. One little 600 sq ft, 700—yes, go and have a little chat with Minister of Housing— one little HDC house costing \$500,000. *[Crosstalk]* No now, now, Mr. Speaker, that is the price that the HDC is charging for houses—\$500,000. So, when I hear that, and I hear the Minister telling me that he is building a pre-school for \$500,000—how big is that pre-school?

Mr. Speaker, I took notes of what the Member for Caroni East said. Mr. Speaker, he said, and I quote, that: “we are building early childhood centres between a cost of half a million and one million dollars”. He said so.

Hon. Dr. Gopeesingh: Centres not schools, that is a difference.

Mr. C. Imbert: Whatever. That is what they are, they are early childhood and

continuing education centres. What do you think the “C” in ECCE stands for? Centre! But, Mr. Speaker, the point is, I am hearing some numbers here, ½ million for an early childhood centre, \$5 million for a primary school—I am hearing it. Mr. Speaker, all power to the Minister of Education if he could build an early childhood centre for \$500,000, you know. If he could do that, I take my hat off to him. But, Mr. Speaker, I do not believe it, because I know what the cost of construction is in Trinidad and Tobago, and I know the size of an early childhood centre—it is about 3,000 to 4,000 sq ft. So how is the Minister building a 3,000 or 4,000 sq ft early childhood centre? How is he doing that? *[Interruption]* Mr. Speaker, he had his chance; I will give way to all to them, no man, enough is enough! Enough is enough! I gave way enough to you!

How is the Minister building a 3,000 or 4,000 sq ft early childhood centre for \$500,000? There are two conclusions that one can draw; you are building a box, no floor, no windows, no doors, no plumbing, no electrical—that is one conclusion one could come to, or, Mr. Speaker, they have reduced the centre into a little matchbox. There are only two conclusions you could come to if the Minister’s figures are right, Mr. Speaker.

A pre-engineered primary school for \$5 million. How many children are going to that school, 50? Because, Mr. Speaker, your typical primary school would have 300 or 400 children in it. I mean, you are going to fit 400 children, classrooms, labs, staffroom, assembly hall. Mr. Speaker, assembly hall, classrooms, staffroom, bathroom, toilet and all the facilities that you require in a modern 21st Century primary school, you are going to fit into something for \$5 million? Impossible! Again, the only conclusion that one can draw is a box, no window, no door, no floor or, Mr. Speaker, it is a little matchbox.

6.05 p.m.

Hon. Member: It is a shed.

Mr. C. Imbert: It is a shed. Mr. Speaker, in fact he said one cost \$3.5 million.

Mr. Speaker, I do not know what kind of house you are living in—I do not want to cast aspersions at you, but I am sure your house is worth more than \$3.5 million, whichever house you are in. [*Interruption*] And, Mr. Speaker, you are going to tell me that in Trinidad and Tobago where the cost of construction is between \$500 and \$600 a sq ft, you could build a primary school for 400 children with all of the facilities to meet the curriculum requirements of Trinidad and Tobago; with laboratories, audio visual room, medical room and sick room: all that, you are going to build that for \$5 million?

Hon. Member: You cannot believe it?

Mr. C. Imbert: Sorry, for \$3.5 million, he actually said \$3.5 million. [*Interruption*]

Mr. Speaker, if the Minister can build a modern school meeting all of the OSHA requirements, meeting all of the curriculum requirements, with an assembly hall for 400 children for \$3.5 million, I take my hat off to him. But it is not true and it is not possible. As I said, the Member for Caroni East is not good with figures; he is not good with figures. “Poor fella, not good with figures.” But, I have to continue because I heard some comments made by the Member for Caroni East, boasting, and I want to read into the record another document, “Facing the Issues; Turning the Economy Around Public Sector Investment Programme 2011”. [*Shows document*] This is not a PNM document. This was put here by the UNC or the COP, Minister of Finance. Let me read for you, and I am reading what happened in 2010 under the PNM as you have claimed in this Parliament, page 20, “Roads and Bridges”. This is under the PNM. This is looking backwards to 2010 not going forward to 2011:

- “commencements of improvement works on the Churchill Roosevelt Highway from O’Meara Road to Wallerfield.”

Mr. Speaker, I did not need to go there, because I asked a question in this Parliament of the Member for Chaguanas West. I asked about three projects. Just three. I asked about the Diego Martin Highway, I asked about the Aranguéz flyover and I asked about the Churchill Roosevelt Highway—

Hon. Member: There was also Saddle Road. You asked about the Saddle Road project.

Mr. C. Imbert: No, no, I did not ask—yes, you are quite right, I asked about Saddle Road, it is four projects.

I asked about the highway at O’Meara, I asked about the Aranguéz flyover and I asked about the Maraval access improvement. And what did the Minister say? In each case the Minister confirmed that the projects were started long before the May 2010 general election. In each case, it is in *Hansard*. It is in *Hansard*, Mr. Speaker.

Hon. Member: No! [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. C. Imbert: Mr. Speaker, let me read into the record, page 21, item 60:

“The Port of Spain East/West Corridor Transportation project utilized \$90 million from the allocated \$260 million. The construction of the Aranguéz Overpass commenced in November 2009”—not 2010—“following the award of a contract in the sum of \$214.8 million to Vinci Construction Grands Projects, with local subcontracting firm Junior Sammy Construction. The overpass will consist of...”

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, the speaking time of the Member for Diego Martin North/East has expired.

Motion made, That the hon. Member’s speaking time be extended by 30 minutes. [*Mr. N. Hypolite*]

Question put and agreed to.

Mr. C. Imbert: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As I said, construction of the overpass

commenced November 2009:

“a 54-metre long, single-span composite deck bridge, with two associated ramps...the removal of traffic lights at both the Aranguetz and El Socorro intersections, through construction of associated parallel roads on the north and south sides of the highway to be constructed under the Programme for Upgrading Roads Efficiency (PURE) of the MWT. Work is expected to be completed by November 2010.”

So it started in November 2009; it had a one-year construction period; it was supposed to be completed November 2010—everything, including the service road, land acquisition, et cetera. The total cost of the project is estimated at \$393 million, inclusive of design, construction of the overpass and access roads, utility relocation, property acquisition, project management cost.

So, according to this document laid here by the UNC, the Aranguetz flyover began in November 2009 and was supposed to be completed in November 2010, including access roads. What happened? It finished in April 2011, six months behind schedule. Yet I have to hear and the whole population has to hear about how fast you are working. Now if a project is supposed to be completed in 12 months and it is completed in 18 months—when I went to school 18 was more than 12. If it was supposed to be finished in November 2010 and it finished in April 2011, when I went to school that was a six-month delay. And every single one of these projects that we are talking about—the resumption of work on the O’Meara part of the CRH, that was supposed to be finished in October 2010, it finished in April 2011.

Hon. Member: Within budget.

Mr. C. Imbert: Mr. Speaker, I think the Members opposite have to understand what is going on, it is a matrix, you have to tie it back in, because if the work was supposed to finish in November 2010 and it finished in April 2011, then the rate of

expenditure was much slower than anticipated.

We are not talking politics here we are talking economics, so that if the construction industry was supposed to get an injection of \$393 million over a 12-month period and that stretched to 18 months, that is why the Central Bank has revised its forecast for economic growth for 2011, because the projects are taking much too long to be completed. I am not going to get into the PR. There are people on that side, they are magicians, I mean that is obvious to me. They can take something that is supposed to finish in November 2010, finish it in April 2011 and then say, “Look how fast I do it.” I mean, only a magician could do that. I do not have those qualities of a master of disguise. I cannot create that kind of illusion. I cannot pull out my hand here and out comes a pigeon or a bunny rabbit. I cannot do that. I am not capable of that level of illusion, but you have to understand what is happening in this economy. If you go into the Public Sector Investment Programme you will see a number of completion dates for projects and none of them have been met.

The computerization of the Licensing Office, for example—we signed a contract with the provincial government of Nova Scotia in 2008. We had a number of milestones that were being met and the first roll-out of that programme which would have been registration of new vehicles and issue of new drivers’ permits were scheduled for July 2010, using the Nova Scotia system, using the new system of personalized licensing plates which would be personal to you, using the new tamper-proof drivers’ permits—roll-out of that system scheduled for July 2010; the full system where both old and new drivers’ permits and vehicle registration would be fully online and automated, October 2010. Where are we? June 2011? Where are we with that project? Halfway through.

It is no wonder, Mr. Speaker, that you are not seeing the level of expenditure. It is no wonder that only \$700 million has been spent instead of \$7

billion. And if you go into every aspect of the PSIP for 2011 you are going to see that every single project is behind schedule. Every single one! So do not fool yourself, “don’t fool yourself”, because the economy is hurting. You know, what bothers me? Do the Members opposite talk to anybody? Do they talk to anybody? You talk to any businessman in this country, “things bad, it’s not good, it’s bad, they have to reduce”—

Mr. Sharma: Mr. Elias is not saying that.

Mr. C. Imbert: Yes, because he is getting contracts under you. [*Interruption*] He is getting a lot of contracts under you.

Mr. Speaker: Please! Please!

Mr. C. Imbert: So, Mr. Speaker, you talk to any businessman, they have had to reduce their employment levels, they have had to curtail their business, they have had to contract. They have had to control expenditure because between June of 2010 and March of 2011, the money has just not been going into the system, Mr. Speaker. Money has not been going into the system.

Mr. Speaker, you see, they talk about us and them; all of us have to live in Trinidad and Tobago, all of us have to deal with this issue, all of us have to deal with the economic realities. And I would read again, page 4, Central Bank Policy Report, April 2011:

“The fiscal stimulus...did not materialize as originally envisaged.”

It did not. And look at what happened to the economy in the last quarter of 2010, because I urge Members opposite, go and read these documents; you are educated people, most of you. Most of you are highly qualified; some of you have multiple degrees. I see the Member for Cumuto/Manzanilla is nodding his head, another man with about five degrees, just like the Member for Caroni East. Go and read! Just like me, you could go online and pull this thing down, it is downloadable; it is in a PDF format. If you have adobe acrobat you could read it instantly. But let me

quote from this document so you would have an understanding of what is really happening in Trinidad and Tobago, “The economy contracted by 0.6 per cent”—I am reading now from page 2, *Economic Growth and Development*:

“Real GDP is estimated to have declined by 0.6 per cent in 2010...”

Now how did this happen? If in September 2010, the Minister of Finance was telling us that the outturn for fiscal 2010, September 2009 to September 2010 was growth of 2.5 per cent, how did we end up with a decline in economic growth at the end of fiscal 2010? This is what they are telling us here. The economy contracted. How could the economy move from growing to contraction and everything add up? You are not spending money, your objects are not being done or not being done on time, the economic stimulus is not materializing and this is why you have this, somewhat, gloomy outlook.

Mr. Speaker, if the Minister of Finance really believes that he could spend \$7,000 million in three months after having spent \$700 million in nine months and in those nine months are six months of the dry season and you have three months of the rainy season, and if you truly believe you could do that, well, you too would be a magician, Sir, because that is just not going to happen. You know they have statistics, half-truths and outright lies, and I am not saying for a minute that the Minister is lying. I am just saying that sometimes people who want to please you, will present you with information that is not accurate, because they do not want to tell you what the truth is.

Our economy is not doing well; it is not, based on this information. The Minister says he is going to stimulate the economy—you could spend \$7 billion by the end of this fiscal year; well I would be happy if you can in fact do that, I would be happy, because all of us in this country are affected by it, Mr. Speaker.

Now, before I conclude, Mr. Speaker, let me go back to something that the Minister spoke about. The Minister spoke about the wonderful things that he did

to deal with the Clico problems and I took some notes here. Essentially, the Minister of Finance said he fixed Clico— How much time do I have, Mr. Speaker?

Mr. Speaker: You have until 6.39 p.m.

Mr. C. Imbert: Twenty minutes? Thank you—and that the international agencies have told him what a wonderful job he has done. Well, I do not think the 15,000 policyholders think you have done a wonderful job and I do not think the international agencies vote. They do not vote. They are not listen to what Trinidadians and Tobagonians are saying as well.

He says now, he paid 8,000 people \$75,000; they have a compassionate window of \$250,000 and you have liquidity support for credit unions, somewhere between \$700 million and \$800 million. The Minister, however, conceded that he has not yet solved the problem of the 15,000 policyholders who hold polices in excess of \$75,000.

6.20 p.m.

Mr. Speaker, last week on a matter on the adjournment, I indicated that I had been told that an organization had made an offer to the Government of Trinidad and Tobago, which, on the face of it, appeared to be a good solution to the Clico problem. And I repeat this offer, Mr. Speaker, because part of the challenge the Minister is grappling with—and every time he speaks economics in this House he talks about the Clico issue and he spoke about it today. So I will speak about it too. I will repeat: This organization has made an offer of a credit facility of up to US \$3 billion in the form of a term loan to CL Financial, without a government guarantee. That is what I am told. I am told, Mr. Speaker, that this facility of US \$3 billion will be used to repay the Government the TT \$7 billion it has put into the system, to pay off the policyholders that are owed about \$10 billion and to settle other liabilities of CL and Clico. That is what I am told.

The question—and I have seen something in the papers: the Cabinet is skeptical because they are of the view that this is not a real offer. Well, I got some more information today. I received some documents, which I am going to hand over to the Minister of Finance. One of them is a letter, and he can check them for authenticity. I will give it to him. One of them is a letter from Barclays Wealth which is, as far as I am aware, affiliated with Barclays Bank, which is a very large international bank, Mr. Speaker. And this letter indicates that they are familiar with one of the parties that is willing to assist with this financing proposal, and that there is a good business relationship.

I also have a proposal from this company—Leybourne Holdings is the company that is supported by Barclays Wealth. And in this document—it is November 2009 document—it speaks to a credit facility of €3 billion Euros with respect to a particular project. So what I have here is a letter from Barclays Wealth indicating that they are vouching for this company called Leybourne Holdings I have another document from Leybourne which appears to provide some evidence that they can or have raised €3 billion for a project in another part of the world. What I have heard about this proposal is that the Minister of Finance—the Government has been told, do not touch it because these people are not credible. They do not have the money; they cannot get access to the money and so on.

Mr. Speaker, from what I have seen, I think it is worth investigating. I am going to hand these documents over to the Minister of Finance. I would ask him to investigate the companies involved, Barclays Wealth, Leybourne Holdings Limited, et cetera, that are in this document and see whether they can in fact access the US \$3 billion that they say they can. Because if they can, Mr. Speaker, then it appears that this offer is a good solution to the Clico problem. And that is all I would say about Clico for now. The Minister for some reason seems to believe that he has done something good with respect to Clico. From an academic point of

view perhaps, maybe, but not from a people point of view, Mr. Speaker.

I need to stress, there are 15,000 persons, many of them elderly, many of them ill, some on dialysis who are depending, who were depending on the income from their policies to live, to pay their medical expenses. I know of persons who are in nursing homes suffering from Alzheimer's and the cost of their medical care was being paid for by the income from their policies at Colonial Life. Now the families of those people have to find this money, \$6000 to \$7000 a month. I do not know if you know how much it costs in a nursing home when a person has Alzheimer's, Mr. Speaker. I am urging the Government; eight months these people have been without income. I am told, I do not know how true it is, but I am told that some of them have committed suicide already and some are contemplating suicide. I have names; I have been given names. I am willing to be tested on this. I have been given names of persons, Mr. Speaker. So I am urging the Government to think carefully about what they are doing.

6.25 p.m.

The impression I get with them on this Clico thing, is that they wish it would go away. They wish these 15,000 persons would just disappear or they wish that they would just accept the offer.

Mr. Roberts: Standing Order 36(3). This was a substantive Motion already debated and concluded.

Mr. Speaker: Continue!

Mr. C. Imbert: Of course, Mr. Speaker. The Minister of Finance came here and told us what he is doing about Colonial Life. But if that—thank you, Mr. Speaker—were correct, then the Minister of Finance could not talk in this House on Clico.

Mr. Speaker: I am saying I have ruled, so continue.

Mr. C. Imbert: Thank you so much, Mr. Speaker. Good ruling, as all your

rulings are. I would like the Minister of Finance to come clean with us, please, and tell us how he is going to spend \$7 billion in three months on capital projects in the rainy season. Tell us that! [*Interruption*] I could repeat all I want. I want him to tell us how he is going to achieve the targeted economic growth of 2.5 per cent, when the Central Bank is predicting growth of 1.5 per cent? I want him to tell us that. I want the Minister of Finance to explain why the Government has not spent money on construction projects, capital development projects and infrastructure projects for the first 12 months of his existence?

They have been in power for 12 months, why did they say they had all the answers? That is what they campaigned on: that it would be a smooth, seamless transition that the country would not even notice, except that everything would just explode and there would be honey and milk, and manna would fall from heaven. That is what they told the population when they took over. Now, we are looking at the facts. So, I would like the Minister of Finance to tell us exactly how he is going to meet his projected targets in terms of economic growth; how he is going to stimulate the economy. I do not want any gobbledegook, Mr. Speaker. I do not want any gobbledegook. It is a word. Gobbledegook is a word. Go and check the dictionary. I do not want the Minister to come here with a lot of jargon. I would like him to lay it out in layman's language: how are we going to take the economy from the slump; how are we going to take the economy from the decline that it is in, stimulate the economy and put people back in work, create economic activity and restore business confidence in this country?

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

The Minister of Labour, Small and Micro Enterprise Development (Hon. Errol McLeod): Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I listened very carefully to Members opposite and, as you might have noted, that after so many years in office, the Members behaved like ones visiting a particular business place. They find

themselves on the inside of the business place and they see that renovations have been done to infrastructure that they would have left in place, and it is only when they are conducted outside of the business place and shown the sign that is written over the entrance they come to terms with it being under new management. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Imbert: I will take that.

Hon. E. McLeod: We have been in office for 12 months, and we are expected by Members opposite to have dealt with all of the problems of flooding, the high incidence of crime—[*Interruption*]

Mr. Imbert: Correct!

Hon. E. McLeod:—unemployment, corruption—I am not hearing you—moral and ethical decline and almost decay, and one asks: what did they do? The Member for Diego Martin North/East talked about the flooding in Port of Spain two days ago. [*Interruption*]

Mr. Imbert: Yesterday.

Hon. E. McLeod: Was it yesterday?

Mr. Imbert: Yes. That is a fact.

Hon. E. McLeod: It is a fact. There were heavy rains and he said we were responsible for that flooding. But one would recall during their tenure in office, that the rain needed only to set up and Port of Spain was flooded. [*Desk thumping and laughter*]

Mr. Speaker, they did everything wrong. One is reminded sometimes—I mean no offence; I am not casting any aspersions—of the licentious farmers, who would have gone about town on a Friday night and Saturday night, spreading their seeds, and then on Sunday morning they would run to church praying fervently for a crop failure—the other side.

Mr. Imbert: It sounds familiar.

Hon. E. Mc Leod: All we have heard really were regurgitations of numbers, figures, dollars and cents, and we have hardly heard anything that deals with the fundamentals of planning and development—[*Interruption*]

Mr. Imbert: I have a lot more.

Hon. E. Mc Leod:—as budgeting finances will relate to planning and development.

The reality, however, Mr. Speaker, is that we have saved a situation when our earlier fortunes were adversely affected by the global economic downturn and, very seriously, that economic downturn as it affected Trinidad and Tobago, was very seriously exacerbated by the mismanagement of the last regime. We saved this country and we are still in the process of rescuing this country [*Desk thumping*] from the PNM coalition you called it. Ha ha!

Ms. Mc Donald: PNM coalition?

Hon. E. Mc Leod: “That is what all yuh have.” [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Roberts: “All yuh need a Chaguaramas declaration.” [*Laughter*]

Hon. E. Mc Leod: Or is it a fracture? Or the PNM fracture, more correctly put. Mr. Speaker, it is only on occasions when you have submissions, you have presentations, such as we were treated to last Friday by the hon. Member for Port of Spain South—yes, you were fundamental, and you won friends and supporters on this side when you made your presentation last time. Otherwise, we hardly hear anything that will satisfy us as to the investment of the time we spend here. Sometimes, we would prefer to be more usefully engaged rather than to hear some of the regurgitations of some Members opposite. I say that with respect.

Today, the Leader of the Opposition, I think, further disqualified himself as having any ability to take this country forward. We heard absolutely nothing new, nothing that made any real sense. What we were able to identify was a continuation of old colonial clothes and “watchicong” that have been marching the

streets from the Red House to the Town Hall in San Fernando. You heard talk about the politics in the allocation of resources, and the Member stopped short to saying, that resources have been applied to the development of particular areas and particular constituents in our country, as against others in areas that do not belong. When we do that, Mr. Speaker, we only add to the divisive nature of the politics that had been allowed to develop over the past how many years.

The fact of the matter is, this country—and let us be very objective about it—has lacked for a long time proper management and motivating leadership. It has lacked that for a very long time and, we are essentially called upon to deal with an economy that has not changed, that has not been yet reorganized to suit the development path that we ought to take as a country. The price of oil and gas—which price we have absolutely no control over as a small country—will continue to be the basis on which we will continue to do our budgeting as we have done over the past three to four decades. Except that under new management, we intend to exploit our oil and gas reserves as the tool that we will use for the diversification of this economy, so that when these depleting assets, these wasting assets of oil and gas are no more, we will continue to have a sustainable economy in Trinidad and Tobago providing for all of our people.

So, we are still very much at the crossroads of the reorganization of the Trinidad and Tobago economy—

Mrs. Gopee-Scoon: A whole year?

Hon. E. McLeod: Yes, a whole year. One year is a very short time in terms of reorganizing any economy, however small that economy might be. [*Desk thumping*] And anybody who raises questions about the timing insofar as this is concerned, it is somebody who does not understand one iota of what governance is all about. [*Interruption*] No, you do not understand it. Clearly, you do not understand it and I do not expect you to ever come to terms with it. [*Interruption*]

Mrs. Gopee-Scoon: Insulting.

Hon. E. McLeod: Be that as it may, if we are going to go forward, the economy of Trinidad and Tobago must see us reversing the last regime's abandonment of serious E and P, that is, exploration and production activities in the oil and gas sectors.

6.40 p.m.

Those of us who understand the industry, Mr. Speaker, will continue to ask questions about our having put so much in store, insofar as gas is concerned, and more particularly, insofar as LNG is concerned as against our doing a greater investment in oil exploration and production. Very, very large sums of money had been expended on refinery upgrades, and I am sure that one can justify that—I can help to justify that, I have come from that sector. But we were taking some serious chances, we were gambling a little bit too much insofar as our excursion into the GTL market was concerned especially with the acquisition of used, badly used equipment, and the kind of arrangement that we would have gotten into with World GTL. And because I think that that is up for arbitration or trial in the US court, I would not want to say too much about it at this time for fear that one might be causing a prejudice in the issue. But a fraction of the money that we would have put behind that particular project, had it been invested in more exploration to find new reservoirs of oil reserves, today we would be benefiting a lot more from the prevailing prices.

So that while some of us may have rejoiced—and I am sure it would have brought a measure of comfort to the Minister of Finance—the reality is that the high price that oil is now fetching on the international market is not benefiting Trinidad and Tobago to the extent that we would have benefited if we had engaged in greater exploration; if we had found that oil, today we would be filling out our Point-e-Pierre refinery with indigenous crude and thereby increasing the gross

margin.

But, we were engaging in a whole lot of ambitious projects that we would have read about in some magazine and without understanding very clearly what we ought to have been doing. When we talk for instance about building physical infrastructure, there are those of us occupying seats in this Parliament who thought that we should invest in high-rise buildings, glossy government edifices, five star hotels and so on, rather than engage in doing the kind of civil and other works that would avoid flooding in Port of Spain when there is a little drizzle of rain. And we declined to invest in the development of our social infrastructure also.

6.45 p.m.

So that when we talk about increasing the allocations for the Ministry of the People and Social Development, so that more food cards can be handed out to those who could not do otherwise, it would seem, all these are indications of a society that did not invest properly in the development of social infrastructural projects that would see as a straight line kind of application, the development of people.

The hospital has been collapsing, our school system has not kept in tandem with modern development. And Members opposite will come here and with every project that we would have completed that might have something positive about it, is a project that we have stolen from the last regime, that was on the books, that was in the pipeline, and that was created by the PNM. But if you look in today's newspapers you are likely to see a comparison between the murder rate at this time and that which existed for the corresponding period a year or so ago. Today, it is 163, June 2011—is today the 1st?—163, and last year for the corresponding period it was 219. Now, insofar as I am concerned, what has been registered as the statistic for June 2010, is as a result of what the last government did or failed to do. Now, they can have that if they wish, claim that as yours, we are not going to deny

you that. What did you say?

Miss Cox: The fact that persons blame the Government for that means that it would take a lot more, it would take the church, school, all of us to deal with crime. What are we telling the public?

Hon. E. McLeod: So it is not just the Government?

Mr. Sharma: How convenient your story is.

Hon. E. McLeod: Well, if I might just get back to the question of oil and gas. I think it is very important that we take note of what is happening as we are made to put heavy store on gas, we are going forward with gas, we have abandoned oil, and prices at Henry Hub and other places where they would have determined what producers will get. We did not pay attention to developments that were taking place almost all over the world, and we tied ourselves up with long-term arrangements in the US market.

Shale gas is going to obliterate Trinidad and Tobago's presence in the US market insofar as gas is concerned. Indeed, the regasification and receiving facilities in the United States are being transformed to include exporting facilities and I think Members understand what I am saying. The facilities at which they would have received our LNG in the United States, which facilities included regasification machinery, those facilities are now being transformed to include exporting facilities. So that just now they will no longer be in receipt of gas from Trinidad and Tobago.

6.50 p.m.

Not only that, they are already organizing to cover other markets that will be depending on gas and, on the sheer basis of their size and their international relationships, Trinidad and Tobago might hardly be able to compete.

Insofar as our oil is concerned, even as they are exploring Alaskan reserves, we would still for some time be able to deposit petroleum products on the east

coast of the United States of America. We need only check with experts in the market, and they are in abundance. We should not be short of information as we plot where we want to go and as we determine how we are going to get there.

I was making the point that even with what one might call astronomic prices these days, we have been benefiting only a small fraction of what normally we would have earned had we continued the exploitation of our oil reserves as we pursue a policy of diversification away from these naturally wasting assets of oil and gas.

I think we have also had the benefit of a reasonably—I want to be careful here about what I say—stable state of industrial relations in the country. Apart from the demonstrations and the protests; and now one needs to delineate legitimate workers and industrial relations protests, even as those workers pound the asphalt, as we would have said in earlier incarnations. There are those now who are copying the workers and wanting to beat and pound more asphalt than the workers are accustomed to doing. They have all kinds of grouses. They will take the Parliament to court; except that they could not take the Parliament to the Industrial Court because a union must take the case to the Industrial Court whether such case has to do with the suspension or dismissal from one's particular occupation. So some people will walk and hope that they can engage the support of workers who have become disgruntled in one way or the other.

We hear, for instance, that workers are being discriminated against and there are all kinds of cleansing and so on in the society, so that URP workers have been discriminated against because they have been terminated because of their political affiliation one way or the other.

I want us to re-examine the purpose of the Unemployment Relief Programme. This side did not develop the philosophical underpinnings of that social programme, the URP. Indeed, I am informed, Mr. Speaker, or reminded,

that following the election of 2002, all of the workers, if not all, the great majority of the workers in the URP were given marching orders and were told: new government in power, new rules, new organization, new URP employee; and everybody else was shown the door. They could have argued—that is those who were in power—that the programme was designed to provide short-term employment so that one could catch one's feet, and for the daily-paid employees in that programme. The thing was organized on a rotation basis, three fortnights in every six—am I correct, Rudy?—so that the thing could be spread around. But there were those who were handpicked to occupy positions in the programme and to cultivate a career in the programme, so that today you will hear some complaining that, “I had been in the programme for 11 years”; “I was there for eight years and they just come so and terminate me.

While some were in the programme for eight and 11 years, there were others who could not get employment anywhere else and were denied a fortnight or two or three in the URP. It is ridiculous that they will complain about something over which they have absolutely no moral authority to open their mouths.

In the whole transformation that we are alluding to, we seek to more properly position the economy of Trinidad and Tobago and prepare the kind of social infrastructure that would allow the citizens of this country, particularly those less able to afford otherwise, to believe that they are considered; that they have a role to play and that they are included in the whole development thrust. The transformation is taking place, perhaps a little too slowly, but it is taking place and we are venturing into URP labour being engaged in food and agricultural production; albeit in some cases on a subsidized basis.

Let me explain. Many of our farmers, with a lot of potential to contribute, more than they have been doing, to the reduction of our high food import bill, have complained about their inability to meet the cost of labour as they would require to

come to their fullest production potential. Some of them have organized and approached the URP and we have engaged, over the past however many months, in broad-based discussions, and with some of them we have engaged in negotiations that have brought us to the point where we are close to presenting to the Cabinet a position that will see us directing some of the URP human resources to work on farms, developing food crops and other agriculture.

On a rotation basis also, except that it is going to be for a longer time and more regular work, there is the proposal that the URP will contribute a certain percentage of the labour cost that will be matched by the farmer. The consumer of the particular food will, as a taxpayer, also benefit from that contribution that we will be making via the URP. An example of that is in pineapple production, for instance. The farmers have said to us, after a rough calculation, and it is still rough, on the formula that we have deliberated over, the price of the pineapple per pound to the consumer will be reduced by 39 cents. Now, in the history of the Unemployment Relief Programme, and the growth and development of food and agriculture in Trinidad and Tobago, if anything can be considered revolutionary, it will be this after the Cabinet has decided upon it and we put it into effect. [*Desk thumping*]

That is aimed, too, Mr. Speaker, at reducing to the point of eliminating over time the dependency syndrome we have allowed to develop in Trinidad and Tobago. Men, and women too, are bringing their children into the URP. Some of them are even bringing grandchildren into the URP when better can be done. There are quite a few training programmes under the aegis of the Ministry of Science, Technology and Tertiary Education and we have a number of people who have decided that they are not going to those programmes. They prefer to go to the URP where little work is done; where there has been little accountability for anything at all; and where people would have been so abused that they will be

ordered by their supervisors, regional managers and others that the bus is going to be at so-and-so corner by six o'clock; make sure and be there. Board the bus with your red shirt or red jersey. We are looking for you at Piggott's Corner.

7.05 p.m.

[Interruption]

Mrs. Gopee-Scoon: But you all did that last week.

Hon. E. McLeod: Did what last week? *[Crosstalk]*

Mr. Sharma: Why you so childish?

Mrs. Gopee-Scoon: You all did that last week—

Hon. E. McLeod: That is how people have been abused. *[Crosstalk]* and we are going to correct that. *[Desk thumping]* Already, the URP and CEPEP workers have begun to exercise a measure of self-determination and dignity and they are not going to be used and abused as they were used and abused previously.

In addition, Mr. Speaker, small businesses in communities will have an opportunity to be included in the kinds of programmes that will fall under the aegis of the URP. Small contractors who could not compete with middle level and large contractors are going to have an opportunity now to bid for the construction of shelters, the construction of pan theatres, walkways, box drains. They are going to be transformed into an organization that will include units comprising various skills that can, themselves, tender for projects in the private sector, and make themselves more marketable, more employable and, perhaps, turn around “ah gimme gimme something” into something that earns its keep. Because we believe, Mr. Speaker, in the philosophy that you help and develop the person for a lifetime if you teach him to fish, than to feed him only for a day by giving him a fish. That is the new thrust, that is the new philosophy that will attend our expenditure of Government revenue. Indeed, the people's money—that is what we intend to do.

We are going very boldly—not to just reduce poverty, but to alleviate

poverty. Over the past couple of months we engaged experts in the field of small business development, experts from India. We were visited on our invitation by three of them and they have met with almost every important agency: University of Trinidad and Tobago, the TTMA, the Chamber of Commerce, particular ministries of Government and so on, as we sought to learn from them, from their experience, their expertise to have us ourselves engaged in business incubation development in Trinidad and Tobago.

7.10 p.m.

We are committed. Indeed, the Ministry of Labour and Small and Micro Enterprise Development is committed to the Minister of Finance to establishing, at least, three business incubators by the close of this fiscal year. These business incubators are going to train people, not just how to be a good employee or a good manager, but more than that, to be a good employer.

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. T. Gopeesingh*]

Question put and agreed to.

Hon. E. McLeod: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you colleagues. I was on the point of our intending to develop an entrepreneurial skill attitude perspective of our people. So, rather than our people being trained to be the next good employee, in addition to that we are talking about providing a new breed of business people, people with entrepreneurial spirit and tendencies and so on.

The Indians are considered experts in the field, Mr. Speaker, especially on the basis that an entire ministry exists in India to deal with small and micro business enterprise, and there are these small and micro enterprise entities that are today contributing some 25 to 30 per cent of India's GDP, and you know the force that India represents in the world of business and economics these days.

A survey done I think in 2008 or 2009, thereabouts, identified that there were registered some 20,000 to 30,000 businesses in Trinidad and Tobago, 87 per cent of which can be considered as small and micro enterprises on the basis that each of them employed below 25 workers. I think that is what it is. Yes, I am sure that is what it is.

This morning I was opening another of our consultations. The Ministry of Labour and Small and Micro Enterprise Development, in an attempt to discharge our mandate, we are engaging our stakeholders—whether we are dealing with reforming workmen’s compensation; giving effect to our commitment to improving the terms of the Maternity Protection Ordinance; amendments to the Industrial Relations Act, all of these issues that have to do with labour, as labour makes its contribution to the building and transformation of the economy and everything else that is people-oriented in Trinidad and Tobago—and social partners. This morning we were engaging those stakeholders associated with small and micro enterprise development in an attempt to formulate our policy on business incubators, and the development of this aspect of small business enterprises. It was very well attended. There were about 200 or so persons this morning at the Hyatt when we launched that particular programme.

We are brimming with enthusiasm. We feel certain that having saved and having rescued—yes, my colleague, the Member for Laventille West—this country so far, we have to be eternally watchful. You know, sometimes you win in a battle and depending on how hard your might have fought in the battle, you win and then you are engaged in a kind of euphoria sometimes, and you begin to beat your chest and sit back on your laurels, and those whom you would have conquered, they do not go to sleep immediately. When we examine the other side in this House, we realize that some of them are not content with just licking their bruises and so on; they are always engaged in some way or the other to dislodge us and to raise all

kinds of issues sometimes that might divert our attention from the real prize which we are pursuing.

I know that the Member for Laventille West would have done quite a lot of work himself in trying to transform the URP, to the extent where he almost threw his hands up in the air and said to his Prime Minister then, “That this thing is so awesome, I am not sure I am able with it. Chief yuh better give this to the church to run.” [*Crosstalk*] “Ent you try to get the church to run it?” Well, the church say that they are not going to engage in sin. [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Speaker, now in the \$2.7 billion that we have come to this House for, the Ministry of Labour and Small and Micro Enterprise Development is going to account for just \$1,633,000. There is a lot more that we will be going to the Minister of Finance for as we begin to develop our programme for fiscal 2011/2012, but I feel certain that this House is going to be pleased by the end of this particular fiscal period—it may not be completely satisfied—that the Government, the People’s Partnership Government, and that part of the Government’s responsibility that I am entrusted with—our relationship with the workers; our attempts to lift people out of their states of dependency; our commitment to contributing to the eradication of poverty; and our lifting the levels of competitiveness of our producers of goods and services in this country, I am sure that we will give a very good account of ourselves in that regard.

Mr. Speaker, it is with this brief contribution, that I want to thank and congratulate the hon. Minister of Finance and Member for Tunapuna, for the kind of fiscal and other management and leadership that he has brought to organizing from a state of almost complete disorganization, the finances and broader economic well-being of Trinidad and Tobago. I am sure that in short measure, he will copy from those of us who have come from the trade union movement, when he makes his next presentation and will end with: “Forward ever backward never”.

Thank you very much. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Fitzgerald Jeffrey (La Brea): Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Before I commence my contribution, I just want to deal with some of the criticisms that have been levelled against us. First and foremost, I want to deal with this whole question of the murder rate.

Last year, in the other place, I remember somebody talking about the rate of murder when it went down that it was basically because of the People's Partnership. Later down in that same year when the murder rate went back up, they said it was because of the People's National Movement. Mr. Speaker, we know quite well that the decline in murders or homicides did not begin with the People's Partnership. As a matter of fact, 2008 was the year with the highest figure and it declined thereafter. I think, Mr. Speaker, the then Acting Commissioner, James Philbert, and his team of senior officers have to be credited for that reduction in the crime rate. We can say what we want and give the credit to Commissioner Dwayne Gibbs to their own peril, but we all know exactly why the then Acting Commissioner, James Philbert, was hurriedly removed from office. I am not going to deal with that here today.

Mr. Speaker—[*Crosstalk*]—Listen and learn something! Mr. Speaker, we talk about the whole question of the minimum wage and the senior citizens' grant. I do not know how people could be so brave and raise those two issues again, because the national community knows quite well on the campaign trail when they were bargaining for this \$20 an hour, we know quite well on page 41 of this document, as well as the advertisements about the whole question of \$3,000 old age pension without any qualification and so on. That is no argument and, therefore, it is very dishonest to use that as some great thing that the People's Partnership has done.

Mr. Speaker, they mentioned corruption and I am so glad that they talked about that. I just want to take some quotations from the newspapers.

7.25 p.m.

The highly respected Ria Taitt, on page 3, Wednesday, May 25, 2011, she was covering the People's Partnership's first anniversary and this she had to say, she quoted the hon. Prime Minister as saying:

“...We are held up by a higher standards than any government has ever been in the history of our land.”

Secondly, she says on May 25, 2011, again, in *Newsday* on page 3:

“I am proud that following the elections, standards have changed in this country.”

But, Mr. Speaker, when we looked at the *Antigua Observer* newspaper, the highly respected Martin Daly had this to say:

“My disappointment doubles every time the Government is caught uncomfortably and unaccountably close to the cookie jar, or as I have dubbed it, the national cash register, and its spokesmen respond by saying the other side did it too.”

Mr. Speaker, the other leader in the People's Partnership, Makandal Daaga, the leader of the National Joint Action Committee, which is a member of the five-member coalition, said he was concerned over the level of corruption in the country. Speaking at the founding congress of the Movement for Social Justice, another coalition partner earlier this month, Dagger called on the Government to jail those involved in corrupt activities.

“In my whole 40 or 50 or 60 years, I have never heard so much corruption in my land as I have heard in this country over the last few days. I can't understand why we cannot open our jail doors and pack them in.”

This is Makandal Daaga, one of their co-members.

Mr. Speaker, the spoke about the whole question of the property tax, how they rescinded the property tax, but, Mr. Speaker, a rose by any other name is still

a rose. [*Desk thumping*] You could call it lands and buildings taxes, what we do know, is that there will be a revaluation of people's property and the tax will be higher than what was proposed in the property tax. We wait with bated breath.

The Member for Caroni East spoke about why put a UTT campus in O'Meara or Tamana Park, as the case might be. Who will go there? I could not believe that the Minister of Education could have made that statement. We have people from Cedros, Erin, Mayaro who used to go to UWI, and we know that a university in Trinidad and Tobago will cost far less to a person in Trinidad and Tobago than if they had to go overseas. Therefore, I do not really understand that piece of argument at all.

The Member for Caroni East also mentioned, Alutrin, Alutech, asking how can we compete with the outside world with "mag rims" and so on. Mr. Speaker, I ask the question, what is in Trinidad and Tobago that we can produce that could compete with those mega corporations outside? And therefore, we need to understand that this debate is something that is extremely serious.

We heard as well, accusations being levelled against the People's National Movement, in terms of URP and CEPEP—when they had any kind of function, they had to wear their red jersey. I know for a fact that there were people down in the deep south who were told, who were mandated to go to the People's Partnership anniversary or else. And this has not come from one quarter or two quarters, I could call at least about a dozen persons, who would have told me that from different parts of the deep south. So I do not know where this thing is coming from.

7.30 p.m.

Mr. Speaker, I am a man about serious business here. I am about serious business. We on this side will continue to be very constructive as an Opposition. We want this beautiful country of ours to develop. We will give credit and praise

to this Government, where praise and credit are due, but we will constructively criticize whenever they fall short or are misleading the nation. I give you that assurance.

Since the UNC-led coalition Government came to office, I have been at pains to find out what is the vision of this Government. I listened to the 2011 budget presentation. I look at their performance in Government, and now again in the 2011 Supplementation of Appropriation, and I wonder: where is their vision?

In Matthew 7: 16 it says that by their fruits you would know them. [*Crosstalk*] But what are their fruits? It is not so much as what you say, but it is what you do. You can produce a glossy yellow manifesto, with smiling faces, but if you have empty promises, you are just mamaguying. [*Crosstalk*] This Government lacks a vision for this country, and the only vision that is apparent in the UNC faction of the Government is to try to destroy the PNM, the COP, the TOP, the MSJ and the NJAC. While they might be successful in their desire to destroy the COP, the TOP, NJAC or the MSJ, the PNM is a different kettle of fish.

Those in rural areas could tell you what happens when a bush fire passes where there are Balisier; or if you have a severe drought, the Balisier may seem to die, but after the first shower, you see luscious, green leaves appearing, and later on the Balisier blooms. [*Desk thumping*] Mr. Speaker, in 1986—1991, 1995—2001 and 2010 to a maximum of 2015, that would have been our bush fire and our drought, and we will bloom once more.

Our vision is that we want to see this country develop by the year 2020. I want to ask the other side whether or not they are really serious or interested in this country achieving developed nation status, because we see in our Vision 2020, Trinidad and Tobago becoming a united, resilient, productive innovative and prosperous nation with a disciplined, caring, fun loving society, comprising of healthy, happy and well educated people, built on the enduring attributes of self-

reliance, respect, tolerance, equity and integrity. The whole question of discipline, caring, integrity and tolerance are extremely important for this country's development.

To this People's Partnership Government, that does not seem to matter. Favouritism, vindictiveness, dishonesty, selfishness and immorality are the hallmark of this UNC-led coalition, and I will demonstrate that to you later.

Dr. Moonilal: How late?

Mr. F. Jeffrey: In this Parliament we are asked to approve an additional \$2,735,743,695 to fund urgent and recurrent capital expenditure, up to September 30, 2011, in areas that are critical, where insufficient allocation was provided. These figures mean very little to the poor, the unemployed and the marginalized citizens in this country, if they are not going to get a piece of the action, if they will see that the resources spent in other areas that are already well taken care of, while their plight is not being addressed.

An additional \$146.16 million is requested by the Ministry of National Security, and the Trinidad and Tobago Police Service has an additional allocation of \$69 million. One might be tempted to say, "Bravo, bravo," but according to the *Newsday* of Thursday, May 26, 2011, Page 18, in a Nalini Seelal story the *Newsday* understands that on May 17 Police Commissioner Dwayne Gibbs sent out messages to all police divisions that all marijuana eradication exercises in forested areas should cease with immediate effect.

Sergeant Roger Alexander, who is head of the North Eastern Division Task Force, was given a letter by ASP Campbell which said:

"Pursuant to Regulation 156 (ii) Police Service Regulations 2007, you are hereby warned of the following report of allegation that has been made against you, that you, a Police Sergeant attached to the Northeastern Division Task Force based at the Morvant Police Station did commit an

offence against discipline, ‘that is to say, you a Police Sergeant disobeyed a lawful order given by the Commissioner of Police to all police officers on May 17 2011, that all narcotic eradication exercises in forested areas are ceased, an order you failed to comply with...’”

But it is more than that. I happened to do some investigation about where the house at which they made that seizure of the \$1 million worth of Arizona marijuana was located. There are no forests in the vicinity of that house.

I ask the question: most of our homicides in this country are drug related. So two things are involved: one, in our marine environment and our aerial environment, you have to try and curtail the importation of drugs in the country; that is one, and two, the domestic production of drugs in this country you will also have to deal with that. If you are sending out instructions that police officers are not to go after marijuana cultivation, whose turf are we trying to protect? We want to deal with homicides, we want to bring down crime, but here you are telling officers not to go after the drugs.

You see, Mr. Speaker, according to Sergeant Alexander, on the 555 Hotline he got a tip-off of the drugs at this house in Claxton Bay, and he went there. He got clearance, he said, from a First Division Officer, who gave him the all clear. He went, and yet now he is brought over the coals. This is indeed a very serious matter. I do hope that the Commissioner of Police would really and truly rethink this matter, because we know how much marijuana is cultivated in the Northern Range, in central and also in the deep south.

We need to understand that the curtailing of drugs must be something that we must give heavy emphasis to. I believe that some \$146 million should be spent on more protective gear and surveillance equipment for hard-working police officers.

I come now to the La Brea Police Station. I have visited that station, and it

is indeed a very cramped space in which our hard-working officers have to operate. I worked at that said building as a bank teller in 1971. There has been no expansion of the facilities there. When you go into the La Brea Police Station and you see where our police officers have to sleep, tears will run down your eyes. [*Crosstalk*] I think it is extremely important that urgent attention be given. [*Interruption*]

Mr. Roberts: What were you doing all the time? [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. F. Jeffrey: Mr. Speaker, I beg for your protection, please.

Mr. Speaker: Members, please.

Mr. F. Jeffrey: The Ministry of National Security needs to look into the plight of those hardworking police officers in La Brea. We must not only talk the talk, but we must walk the walk. The \$1,000 allowance for police officers will evaporate in expensive upkeep of the motor vehicles belonging to officers, who have to traverse those treacherous roads in La Brea. We really and truly need to address the problems of the police officers in La Brea.

The Office of the Prime Minister is allocated an additional \$4.5 million. While I compliment our hon. Prime Minister for renaming the Crown Point Airport, the ANR Robinson Airport after the very distinguished former Prime Minister and former President of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago, I would like to ask the hon. Prime Minister to rename the University of Trinidad and Tobago, the Eric Williams University, after the very distinguished and outstanding Prime Minister of Trinidad and Tobago. [*Crosstalk*]

Eric Williams happens to be our first premier, our first Prime Minister and an outstanding academic. His contribution to education cannot be challenged. This year, 2011, is the centenary year of Dr. Eric Williams, and I would strongly like to recommend to rename the University of Trinidad and Tobago. It is in the spirit of goodwill if we are serious about really and truly doing justice to somebody

who made an outstanding contribution to Trinidad and Tobago.

Hon. Member: “Why you all did not do it when all yuh was in office?”

Mr. F. Jeffrey: Mr. Speaker, 2011 would be 100 years; it is the centenary year.

[*Crosstalk*] [*Interruption*]

Mr. McLeod: Can I?

Mr. F. Jeffrey: I did not disturb you. Let me finish.

The 2011 Appropriation Bills means nothing if there is equity in the distribution, if one region is being favoured, to the exclusion of the other regions in this country. In the UNC governance of this country, between 1995 and 2001, the UNC built a drilling institute in Couva, where there were no oilfields, and they neglected to build any drilling institute in the oil rich southern areas of Fyzabad, La Brea, Point Fortin or Guayaguayare. I believe that with the sugar belt in central Trinidad, then deep south should have been selected for a sugar research institute, but the deep south got nothing. [*Crosstalk*]

The Ministry of Science, Technology and Tertiary Education is allocated \$3.6 million. Here is a classic example of the over-concentration of spending in the UNC-led stronghold and the deprivation of other areas.

7.45 p.m.

Mr. Speaker, let us look at what is emerging, it is a case of giving the UNC stronghold everything, while the PNM, MSJ and COP strongholds are being neglected.

Mr. Speaker, a UWI campus will be built in Debe, the stronghold of the Prime Minister as well as the Member for Oropouche East. I have no problem with a campus being built in Debe, Penal. I was a teacher, and a lot of my students live in Debe and Penal and I want them to get the best, and therefore, if a campus could be built in Debe, hats off to them. But, Mr. Speaker, I ask the question, why then in Point Fortin where there was supposed to be a UTT campus, why—

Miss McDonald: Mr. Speaker, 40(b) and (c), please.

Mr. Speaker: Member for La Brea. May I appeal to Members, especially on the Government Bench to allow the hon. Member for La Brea to speak in silence. I think the hon. Member has quoted the relevant Standing Order that we should all observe, continue.

Mr. F. Jeffrey: Why, Mr. Speaker, was the idea of a UTT campus in Point Fortin shelved? That is a question that I would like answered. A UTT campus will be built in Caripichaima, as well as the construction of an airport and an upgraded institute to teach aviation at Camden in Couva.

Mr. Speaker, the hon. Prime Minister, as part of her justification said that the airport at Camden would relieve the traffic since the people from south could use it. I want to ask the simple question; there is an abandoned airstrip as well in Point Fortin, people from Cedros, people from Fyzabad, people Siparia, people from Oropouche, people from San Fernando—an airport in the deep south would have done more service than to build one in central Trinidad.

Mr. Speaker, it seems as though the Prime Minister is Prime Minister of only UNC stronghold areas. I believe that the Prime Minister is Prime Minister for the whole of Trinidad and Tobago and therefore, PNM stronghold areas should not be neglected. [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Speaker, they plan to discontinue the El Dorado Girl's Youth Camp, and its conversion to alternative use worries me. One can recall what had happened to the youth camps: Mount St. George, Chaguaramas, Chatham, Presto Praesto as well as San Fernando Technical Institute and John Donaldson under the last incarnation of the UNC, where those institutes were deprived of funds making them non-functional. I believe the same thing is about to happen again.

We hear about the restructuring of the MuST Programme, and I understand that while MuST was transferred from the Ministry of Science, Technology and

Tertiary Education to MIC, no money has been transferred from MSTTE to MIC. This has resulted in the MuST cycle 131—hospitality trainees were not paid for four cycles each because of a lack of funds.

Mrs. Gopee-Scoon: They are going to close it down.

Mr. F. Jeffrey: Okay, cycle 132 and 134—

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, a procedural Motion; hon. Leader of the House.

PROCEDURAL MOTION

The Minister of Housing and the Environment (Hon. Dr. Roodal Moonilal):

Mr. Speaker, I beg to move that this House continue to sit, pursuant to Standing Order 10(11) until the conclusion of the debate on the Motion before us and Bill no. 1 the Finance (Supplementary Appropriation) Bill 2011. I beg to move.

Question put and agreed to.

7.50 p.m.

Mr. F. Jeffrey: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Cycles 132—

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, pardon me. Hon. Members, this House will continue to sit until the conclusion of Motion No. 1 under “Government Business” as well as the Finance (Supplementary) Appropriation Bill 2011. You may now continue, hon. Member.

Mr. F. Jeffrey:—and 134 which on April 26, I understand, no approval has been granted for the hospitality instructors to get paid. That is since April.

Mr. Speaker, the hon. Minister of Science, Technology and Tertiary Education, as well intentioned as he may be, adequate funding for that Ministry is indeed, critical. The PNM built the Pt. Lisas Industrial Estate in UNC stronghold. The decision on the Pt. Lisas Industrial Estate was based on geographical, economic and social consideration. Politics had nothing to do with that decision. Like the old Tatil slogan, Mr. Speaker, in the PNM we believe that people are

people.

The Ministry of the People and Social Development was allocated an increase of \$455.5 million and the Ministry of Housing and the Environment \$164.8 million. These figures to the casual observer sound nice. They look impressive. But to many poor, dispossessed residents in PNM-controlled constituencies, these figures mean nothing to them. No benefit, no hope from these figures. Mr. Speaker, I challenge the Minister of the People and Social Development as well as the Minister of Housing and the Environment to not only give us figures, give us the names of people from the La Brea constituency where they extend from Aripo in the north to Salazar Trace in the south and Quarry to Erin on the other side—who were beneficiaries from the programmes? How many people from the La Brea constituency were allocated houses? How many people from the La Brea constituency were able to access the house repair grant? How many of those people? Mr. Speaker, it is not only a question of how much money is allocated, it is the distribution and that is something that worries me.

We know only too well that whenever there is a flood some of those illegal dwellings on river banks—they get houses very easily. I have no problem with that, you have to help out the people and so on, but what about the people from La Brea, who, were legal dwellers. They got their house destroyed by fire and they want access. I could tell you of some people who up to now nothing. I want to place on record, people like Elizabeth Suite, Michael Mohammed, Elizabeth Silvan, Suzanne Jerome, Chioma Benjamin; all of those people, their houses were destroyed by fire, they applied for housing and nothing, nothing, nothing.

Mr. Speaker, “who say it eh” have discrimination? Who say so? It is sad, sad, sad. What about those CEPEP workers who were fired after seven or eight years service and went home without any severance? [*Interruption*] Those CEPEP workers, they got vacation with pay, and therefore, it tells us that

termination packages are due to those fired CEPEP workers. I am asking that some of that \$164.8 million should be used to prepare and distribute termination packages; it is the humanitarian thing to do. You see, it is all well and good to rock back and talk, but when you put yourself into the household of those single parents who were working, who were depending on an income from CEPEP to send their children to school, it is a different matter.

Mr. Speaker, I am glad the Member for Pointe-a-Pierre is on the other side experiencing the labour situation and I trust that good sense would prevail and those poor-single parent mothers, that some kind of termination packages be made available to them. If you really care about the poor and the dispossessed, this is one time.

The Ministry of Sport and Youth Affairs—

Mr. Mc Leod: What you did in 2002?

Mr. F. Jeffrey: I was not there in 2002.

Mr. Mc Leod: The PNM was there, right?

Mr. F. Jeffrey:—had an increased allocation of \$67.8 million and the Ministry of Public Utilities had an increased allocation of \$202 million. Mr. Speaker, under the last administration a series of recreation grounds were scheduled to be upgraded with flood lights—

Mr. Sharma: Only PNM areas.

Mr. F. Jeffrey:—pavilion, bathroom facilities and basketball courts.

[*Interruption*] I will call the grounds.

Mr. Sharma: Yes.

Mr. F. Jeffrey: Aripo—

Mr. Sharma: PNM.

Mr. F. Jeffrey: Salazar Trace—

Mr. Sharma: PNM.

Mr. F. Jeffrey: Quarry—

Mr. Sharma: PNM, nothing new.

Mr. F. Jeffrey: Pt. D’or, La Brea, Sobo, Sunlight Park—

Mr. Sharma: PNM, PNM.

Miss Cox: You are boasting about “all yuh” behaviour.

Mr. Sharma: You see no mix.

Mr. F. Jeffrey: Mr. Speaker, Vance River, Catieo, Cochrane Erin, Rancho Quemado, Palo Seco, Santa Flora, D’Harries Village, and I called Quarry.

Mr. Sharma: You see what I mean. “You ain’t shame?”

Mr. F. Jeffrey: Mr. Speaker, those areas were due in the first phase to get lights. They started the lighting programme—Pt. D’or, La Brea, Salazar Trace, [Interruption] Sunlight Park, they were in the first tranche. [Interruption]

Mr. Speaker, the lights were installed and, in particular, in the case of Sunlight Park, it took a long time to get the commissioning of the lights at Sunlight Park. I had to make serious intervention for them to commission the lights so that the people in the area could use it. Nevertheless, the Minister of Public Utilities, they organized the ceremony, the Member of Parliament for La Brea was not informed—

Mr. Sharma: That is not true.

Mr. F. Jeffrey:—neither the councillors of the area were informed. “I ain’t asking, ah telling you. I do not make skylark with this thing here, and Mr. Speaker, this is something that worries me.

Mr. Sharma: That is not true.

Mr. F. Jeffrey: If we are thinking about the people, politics have no part in the whole thing.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to ask the Minister of Sport and Youth Affairs, what is the position with the Brian Lara Stadium?

Hon. Member: “Oh God!”

Mr. F. Jeffrey: Will it be repaired and at what cost or would it be demolished?

Hon. Member: “You ain’t have no shame?”

Mr. F. Jeffrey: You see, you have electricity bill going up and so on, you must come to a decision what it is you are going to do with it. [*Crosstalk*]

In some quarters Trinidad ends by the Caroni bridge. [*Interruption*] In fact, a number of persons from north Trinidad believe that it is shorter for persons to travel from south to north but it the much longer for persons from north Trinidad to travel to south. I do hope that some of the funds allocated to the Ministry of Sport and Youth Affairs will be used to complete the Brian Lara Stadium. South people are people too. It is not passing strange that the deep south has produced highly gifted people like Leroy Damien, Warren Archibald, Selwyn Moreau, Aldwin Ferguson, Brian Williams, Kenny Joseph, Bobby Sookram, et cetera. [*Interruption*] We do not have a single stadium in the deep south.

Mr. Speaker, the Ministry of Works and Transport was allocated \$327.7 million, and what is that \$327.7 million to be used for?

Mr. Sharma: Take a guess.

Mr. F. Jeffrey: Is it for the construction of the ill-advised tunnel from Tunapuna to Maracas? It is to be used as part funding for the second airport in close proximity to the Piarco Airport? I can tell this honourable House as well as the rest of the nation that under the PNM government when I became the Member of Parliament for La Brea different roads were paved in the La Brea constituency in 2007, 2008, 2009, 2010. Since the UNC-led coalition came into Government not a single road was paved in the La Brea constituency. [*Desk thumping*] Not a single road!

Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Works and Transport should have been brought before the Committee of Privileges for telling this House that he paved all the

roads in La Brea. Not a single road in La Brea was paved! [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Sharma: Would you give way? What about the thank you card? [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. F. Jeffrey: Mr. Speaker, all I am asking is for a little piece of the action for my constituency. You can continue the paving, the paving splurge in Siparia, Debe, Penal, Fyzabad, Chaguanas. I am glad for those areas. I am glad. I am glad if the whole of Trinidad and Tobago could get paved, all I am saying is, La Brea constituency should not be deprived of piece of the national pie. [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Sharma: Member, would you give way? [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. F. Jeffrey: Mr. Speaker, I wish to put on record, that while the residents of central contributed to the development of the country—

Mrs. Persad-Bissessar: What about Maraval?

Mr. F. Jeffrey:—people in La Brea, Point Fortin and Fyzabad also made significant contributions to the development of our beautiful island. La Brea people are people too.

Mr. Speaker, I have noticed that the Ministry of Energy and Energy Resources did not get any increased funding while the Ministry of Planning, Economic and Social Restructuring and Gender Affairs got an allocation of \$27 million. How does that translate to the people of La Brea, Point Fortin, Laventille, and indeed, many other PNM constituencies? One of the first hatchet jobs done on the poor marginalized citizens of the deep south was to stop the construction of the Alutrint Smelter that would have offered 3,000 permanent jobs and downstream operation, another 900. Nothing was put in place to compensate the loss of opportunities. The Minister of Energy and Energy Affairs mentioned:

Among these industries are the manufacture of in-organic chemicals, plastic glass manufacture, alternative energy and agro-business. The projects that would replace the smelter would now provide a promise of jobs, it would provide actual jobs, permanent jobs, well-paying jobs, and

actually contribute to the development, not deterioration, of the south western peninsula.

In the context of propylene to plastics we are looking at a capital investment of \$2 billion.

Hear the mamaguy, Mr. Speaker:

“Re-employment opportunities are anticipated to be 5,000 jobs during the construction phase—5,000 during the construction phase: 500 jobs for operation and between 1,500 and 2,000 jobs will be created as a result of downstream activities generated from this project in the context of the integrated glass and photovoltaic cells, this project will require a capital investment of \$2.5 billion.

Hear the mamaguy again:

“For the Silicon, 500 permanent jobs and 800 in the construction phase; for the float glass, in excess of 1,000 permanent jobs, 500 jobs in the construction phase; for PV Wafers, 1,750 permanent jobs and 3,000 jobs in the construction phase; for the PV, 2,000 permanent jobs and 2,000 jobs in the construction phase.

Mr. Speaker, that would give us between 7,250 and 7,750 permanent jobs, whereas 11,300 jobs in the construction phase from an investment of \$4.5 billion. Impressive sounded, we heard the Minister of Energy and Energy Affairs, at least in face value, but do you know what? Not an ounce of concrete, not a single nail has been applied to the construction of any plant on the estate. You do not treat vulnerable people with such contempt and disrespect.

8.05 p.m.

Mr. Speaker, you deliberately stopped the aluminium project that would have provided much needed employment. People in La Brea do not want handouts. What they want is work to earn a living. I think the Minister of Energy and Energy should have said at the commencement, “once upon a time”, before she

made those empty promises, before she skyrocketed the dreams, hopes and aspirations of the financially poor, but ambitious persons in the constituency. Lord Nelson, in one of his favorite calypsos reminded all of us that:

“Teacher Percy say if yuh tell ah lie, you going to hell as soon as yuh die.”

[*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Speaker, I reckon that no increased allocation to the Ministry of Energy means no more nail or pipe will be driven on the Union Estate. You talk about vindictiveness! It was the proverbial Romeo of the UNC Cabinet in 1995/2001, openly boasted that under a UNC Government the LaBidco Estate will never be developed, and so Mississippi Chemicals was unceremoniously transferred from La Brea to Point Lisas. Mr. Speaker, Lake Asphalt was almost privatized into the hands of one of the UNC financiers. Thanks to the very observant leaders in the community that saved the day.

We cannot stop the passage of this Bill. We would, however, like the UNC-led Government to recognize that they have an obligation to equitably share the wealth of this country. The nation’s coffers are not the UNC-led coffers. Mr. Speaker, take it or leave it. The PNM are not the only ones who are going to be affected. The COP—[*Interruption*]

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

Motion made, That the hon. Member’s speaking time be extended by 30 minutes. [*Mr. N. Hypolite*]

Question put and agreed to.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, before you continue, may I inform hon. Members that dinner has arrived. We will not be breaking for dinner. We will ask Members to help themselves whilst we continue our debate. So I just wanted to inform Members. Hon. Member, you may continue.

Mr. F. Jeffrey: Okay, Mr. Speaker. I will not take the whole 30 minutes, maybe about five minutes.

Miss. Cox: Take your time, take your time.

Mr. F. Jeffrey: Mr. Speaker, I want to put this House on notice. The national community is watching the over-concentration of resources in particular areas in this country. The people who are the representatives from the COP areas could close their eyes and shut their mouths if they like. But the people in the national community are starting to raise eyebrows about the over-concentration of resources in particular areas. It is one thing to starve the people of La Brea, but the people in the other parts of this country, and I am saying here, Mr. Speaker, this is no idle talk. You could go to Pointe-a-Pierre, you could go to Tunapuna, Arima, I am certain on the ground that is what we are hearing; I have been in those areas, and we need to understand that in this allocation here, let us try—Mr. Speaker, you know something, the hon. Prime Minister mentioned about the mistakes and so on, and I say right. So in the first year you have made mistakes. Good! Fine! Now, you have this appropriation, this supplementation, now is the time to set it right. You would have misallocated resources in the first year, in this period between now and the next budget; let the other parts of Trinidad and Tobago get a piece of the action.

I thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Minister of the People and Social Development (Hon. Dr. Glenn Ramadharsingh): Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, for the opportunity to contribute to this debate on the Finance (Supplementary Appropriation) Bills 2011, concerning \$2.7 billion to be redistributed to continue the work of the People's Partnership Government. This has become necessary to fuel the progress that is being made by leaps and bounds under the distinguished prime ministership of the Hon. Kamla Persad-Bissessar and the People's Partnership Government. [*Desk*

thumping]

8.10 p.m.

Let me use the opportunity to congratulate the Minister of Finance, a political luminary among us here today and an economy giant in this part of the world for all his contributions in the Parliament recently and also showing the kind of humility that is associated with the very wise leadership that is exemplary in the country. I also praise his contribution today, describing how these additional funds will help to transform or continue to transform the social and economic landscape of our beautiful island of Trinidad and Tobago.

The People's Partnership, as we know, came on a platform, Member for La Brea, of prosperity for all. [*Interruption*]

Hon. Member: That does not help.

Hon. Dr. G. Ramadharsingh: We too had looked for the last eight years at how the distribution of resources had taken place in the country, and having received the signal from the people from Icacos to Siparia, to Pointe-a-Pierre, to Toco, back to Carenage, we intend never to distribute resources unequally in the nation State of Trinidad and Tobago. We will practise the equitable distribution of resources. Equity is easily defined as a cold and dispassionate look at the problems that exist in the society, and then deciding very calmly how to distribute those resources in a manner that will benefit all the persons. So equity will not inevitability mean that if you pave five roads in Laventille West, you must pave five roads in Caroni East or in Moruga/Tableland. But we looked at the problems in the community, the resources available, and practise community, honest government where we go to the people and ask them to tell us what their priorities are and what would be their wishes.

You see, this Government has a growth trajectory as spelt out by the Minister of Finance. There is no ad hoc planning and the enlistment of consultants

from all over the world in a confused manner. We have a plan, we have a manifesto, we have seven interconnected pillars that we built the policy programmes on, and so, the development will take place on a phased basis. But before I go on to deal with some of the comments from the Member for La Brea, who was all over the place attacking from energy to roads, to social development, to education very quickly, and as soon as he got himself in trouble in many of these areas he immediately ran into others very quickly, I want to give him the opportunity to tell this Parliament today, the names of Ministers of Works of Transport to whom he has sent thank you cards in the last 15 years. Hon. Member for Parliament, would you be willing to answer that question?

Mr. Jeffrey: What is that?

Hon. Dr. G. Ramadharsingh: I am asking you if you would like to name the Ministers of Works and Transport to whom you have sent thank you cards in the last 15 years.

Mr. Jeffrey: Obviously, you have to understand what the thank you card is all about. No, no, listen! You have to understand the thank you cards in this scenario. I send thank you cards all the time.

Mr. Sharma: Did you send Minister Warner thank you cards? Yes or no?

Hon. Dr. G. Ramadharsingh: Thank you very much, Member of Parliament. It is instructive that he went on to say nothing in La Brea; no road has been paved for the last 10 years and it is this MP who sent to the People's Partnership Minister of Works and Transport a thank you card for finally doing work in La Brea after he suffered. And he also, I am reliably informed, sent a thank you card to the Minister of Local Government for infrastructural works completed.

Hon. Member: You did that?

Hon. Dr. G. Ramadharsingh: But I share his concern too. We know that La Brea has been neglected under the PNM and we share in your woes. We know, for

example, that the last time the Grant's Road area was paved was 15 years ago. That is the type of rural area neglect that has taken place—Mendez, 14 years. That is the legacy of the PNM. I am sorry that they have put you to deliver a very inaccurate speech like that. It must have taken a lot out of you to say some of those things, knowing full well that when you were a member of the government you never received equitable resources for your community in Rousillac, La Brea, Vessigny and other areas. [*Desk thumping*] I feel sorry that you had to do some of that work.

Mr. Speaker, it was deterioration all around that brought this Government in power in every area of society, from high levels of crime, poor social services delivery and the lack of a proper physical plan for the country. We came on a platform that we would take back government to the people, instead of concentrating our misdirected priorities on high-rise buildings, mansions and so on. We said that the first pillar would be that we would ensure people-centred government where everyone could contribute. We said that we have 1.3 million people in this country, and if we were to bring all of them into the society, social inclusion, we would certainly begin to see human development in the country in the areas of education, learning, skills building.

The second pillar which is closely associated to my Ministry would be poverty eradication and social justice, preference for the poor and the disadvantaged. We told the country that a poverty level of 20 to 30 per cent was unacceptable for an oil and gas rich country, and it brings me back to the point that La Brea—I continue to advocate that La Brea is where we extract asphalt from the ground, and in many instances, we take oil from the ground. I have always said it is a cruel and twisted irony, that where we have extractive industries is where we have the worst forms of poverty. Under the last administration, they continued to say that they were developing the area, bringing smelter which was a threat to the

environment and, at the same time, doing nothing for the levels of poverty.

In fact, the levels of poverty increased in La Brea under the PNM, while they receive a lot of their support from the people of La Brea, Brighton, Vessigny, and those areas. It also applies to areas like Mayaro, and, today, we are attempting to correct that. We are going to build a first-class library for the people of Mayaro, so that it will lift the educational thrust in that community. In my own Ministry, we opened a social services office, a one-stop shop, which sells the concept that there will no longer be any wrong door. Once you walk into a social services office, you can shop at the various departments where you will get the services that you require. All of this work is taking place to undo the damage that has been done to the country by mismanagement under the former regime.

Today, while we come to this Parliament to ask for this supplementary appropriation of funds, it is indeed strange—and many of us are in bewilderment—that we have Members on the other side calling to reinstitute the property tax. In fact, the Leader of the Opposition is saying that the failure to collect the taxes is money down the drain. They failed to realize that the people realized that that burdensome tax was going to push them into poverty, was going to put them in a place where they would not have been able to afford a livelihood that they were properly prepared for, and that is why this Government, sympathetic and caring as it was, took the decision, “No property tax. Axe the tax”, as we began to look at the issue in a constructive manner as to how we would approach it in a way that is humane and that will fit into the development of the country.

The Member for La Brea, sadly, went on to quote Ambassador Makandal Daaga from the newspapers, a policy which you have admonished other Members for. I indeed heard Ambassador Makandal Daaga on record saying that those comments were not made by him and, therefore, they are very inaccurate. At some time I will give you a statement from Ambassador Daaga, completely disavowing

himself from those statements.

This talk about where the resources are going to be placed, sometimes you wonder what is the point really being made. The Member for La Brea said, we are putting resources in areas where we have political support, but I would tend to think that that university in Debe would be accessible to your constituents from San Flora, Palo Seco, La Brea and Rousillac. You should not even speak about that. You should stay very quiet and wait for your constituents to benefit from that and say, “Thank God, we are going to put a university in south”. [*Interruption*]

Mr. Jeffrey: Why UTT?

Hon. Dr. G. Ramadharsingh: You know only too well the horror stories of someone having to travel from Guapo or rent a room in Curepe to be able to get a Bachelor of Science in agriculture or some other field. Think about the amount of money that they spend in travelling, in renting. You are now getting a university where they could take a bus—because we have buses throughout Trinidad and Tobago—[*Desk thumping*]*—to go to Debe, and you are saying that we are siting things in UNC areas. Shame! [Crosstalk]*

We are smarter than that. We are not going to pave all the roads in our constituency alone, because as soon we come out of our constituency it is only bad road. We understand that. We are going to fix all the worse roads in the country, and then we will continue to ensure that the entire country over a period of time reaches a satisfactory level.

There are so many other statements trying to convince—I would ignore some of them— If it is one Government that do not use URP and CEPEP for political campaigning, it is the People’s Partnership Government. [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. Member: That one is not true at all. Not that one.

Hon. Dr. G. Ramadharsingh: If you pass by any rally of the Partnership government yet, you are not going to see a single PTSC bus. We use the resources

of the people. The people provide their own resources. We will not use the resources of State to mobilize for political events. We will not have symposiums—call them symposiums—to deal with smelter, and bus URP and CEPEP gangs from all over the country to come to La Brea to have a consultation. The Prime Minister will not deviate from traffic, run away from a protest in Otaheite; take all the back roads which will take two times the amount of time to reach back to Vessigny; pass through the back. We will not hide from the people of Trinidad and Tobago. We will face the issues, have real symposiums and have real dialogue with the population of Trinidad and Tobago.

The Member for La Brea—I really did not want to come after him. He is my good friend. I have to answer you—[*Interruption*]

Mr. Jeffrey: Come!

Hon. Dr. G. Ramadharsingh: You have challenged me to tell you where the money from the Ministry of the People and Social Development has reached and to call names. I remember coming to La Brea and giving you a cheque for \$1.5 million to finish a home for the aged in La Brea. How could you say that you have not used the resources of Government? That is very unfair. [*Crosstalk*]

The home is one of the more modern homes so anyone going there will be comfortable.

8.25 p.m.

Mr. Speaker, when we came into the social landscape of the country, we recognized that so much had been ignored in the country; that the poverty levels were, in some instances, from 22 to 28 per cent in an oil and gas rich nation. We saw that 38 per cent of the poor households were headed by females, single mothers. The survey of living conditions of 2005 would have told us that 16.7 per cent of the population was poor. That means, Mr. Speaker, almost a quarter million people in our country are living close to the poverty line, and that is the

survey of living conditions of 2005. [*Interruption*] Of course, it was the PNM who were in power at that time and that has been their legacy.

But what was more frightening, Mr. Speaker, is that despite the widespread poverty throughout the country, we found that persons who were most in need were not accessing the services of Government. There was a lack of awareness that there could be relief, that there could be empowerment. Persons were simply unable to access some of these facilities, and there was a belief that the offices were there and would deny people services instead of facilitating them to receive these benefits.

Therefore, what we did, we recognized that we had a mandate under pillar two which was the poverty eradication and social justice. Social justice means that you are entitled to the government assisting you; you are entitled to social justice. And my colleague and friend and another luminary, the hon. Minister of Labour, Small and Micro Enterprise Development, will tell you that social justice is something that we will, one day, be looking to legislate in this country and be protected by legislation.

We decided that we needed to have a direct impact on poverty, and so it would mean that because people felt that the offices would not have helped them, we had to go out to the people, and we began a campaign to go to every constituency which saw us going to 16 constituencies in one week. We were then able to interact with more than 11,000 persons in one week. And when we looked at the figures, Mr. Speaker, we saw that for the entire six months before, the offices, all the offices had just seen 3,000 persons. So immediately we began to see that we had hit a nerve, and we had hit something, and we knew that we could have done more for the people of Trinidad and Tobago, and we carried on that campaign of taking the services to the people throughout the length and breadth of Trinidad and Tobago.

And so the people came out in droves, in whatever part of the country—in Maracas, in Diego Martin—because they thought that what Government would be willing to face the people with the services? We also looked at how these grants were being accessed. We recognized, Mr. Speaker, that these grants can really assist people, they can really help a family to begin to buy proper food, to get medical assistance, to repair their home. They are very, very important tools for empowerment but, as we say, the best surgical instrument is of no use unless in the hands of a skilled surgeon. And the best law book is of no use unless in the hands of a good legal researcher who can give an opinion. And therefore the grants were good but they had to reach the people of the country.

8.30 p.m.

Therefore, it was the direct impact campaign. We do not go into areas without informing the Members of Parliament of whatever political persuasion, and the councillors of whatever political persuasion. That has caused us to interact with the Members of Parliament. *[Interruption]*

Mr. Sharma: How many did La Brea attend?

Hon. Dr. G. Ramadharsingh: The MP for La Brea went on an event with me. I think it would redound to the benefit of the people of La Brea.

The direct impact programme has demystified the Food Card Programme. It seems as if people are quite unsure as to how this programme was being accessed and what the requirements were. We have now educated many of the persons. Interestingly enough, not only have we been able to deliver more than 7,000 new food cards to people throughout Trinidad and Tobago, but we have also—
[Interruption]

Mr. Sharma: You know that word? You from the PNM know that?

Hon. Dr. G. Ramadharsingh:—eliminated more than 2,000 persons from the programme who did not belong, and we did that in partnership with the

Supermarket Association which was pained to see the type of persons who were using those food cards before. I am told stories of persons pulling up with black SUVs, pounding music, stepping out of the car in a suave outfit, picking up groceries, throwing them into a container and swiping a food card and then jumping into the SUV with the best.

Mr. De Coteau: “Dey blinging boy!”

Hon. Dr. G. Ramadharsingh: It is interesting that I sometimes do not make that revelation that they had any PNM party card, because a lot of PNM people have embraced me and said, thank God; they could never have gotten this thing under the PNM. One wonders what was the method; whether it was given through social networks or who knows who, but we have certainly begun to demystify it, and I want to tell you, it is not happening fast enough. We have a lot of work to do to undo and unravel what has taken place before. But we intend to approach it in a programmed manner. Mr. Speaker, the statistics speak loudly as to the work that has taken place.

Between June 2010 and February 2011, over 6,360 persons accessed services and were attended to at the offices throughout the country. When we consider the current submission of approved cards, this figure will increase to 7,122. As I have said, from May, over 7,100 families have benefited from the TT Card. We have now rebranded it “the people’s card” because it is synonymous with our mandate to make the Government people-focused and people-driven, and all our policies are guided by the fact that the services must reach the people. We have called it the “rise up”! We are ensuring that we take away all the smart cards from the smart men.

In any event, I was saying—[*Interruption*]

Mr. Sharma: That is three-quarters of the PNM.

Hon. Dr. G. Ramadharsingh:—we have emphasized on a part of the programme

that is the empowerment part of the programme, a food card is a temporary facility. That is how we see it. That is our concept of the food card; a temporary facility to help individuals to buy food.

As you know, the needs of the human being are food, clothing and shelter; the basic needs. Therefore, we approach the individual who is in a disadvantaged position as if first to say, can you buy food for yourself or your family? If you cannot buy food, the facility is given to you to allow you to buy food. But, as we begin to give you that facility, we say it is a conditional transfer of funds, meaning that we must now examine whether you have taken your children to get immunized, because that can put you into poverty if you have a sick child or whether they have their birth certificates. We have partnered with the Ministry of Legal Affairs. As we go around, we have the TT Connect bus with us, so that they can apply for their identification card immediately online.

We check to see if their children are going to school. We do not use it to take away the card, but as a measure to say you must fulfil these requirements and every three months a check is done on this family to ensure that they are complying with the conditions that are ascribed to the card.

Mr. De Coteau: And also improve.

Hon. Dr. G. Ramadharsingh: And also to improve their living conditions. Therefore, we have called “rise up” part of the programme “the rights of the individual to social and economic security towards universal prosperity.” In this part of the programme, we include counselling; getting persons who can encourage them to develop life skills, and a poverty eradication programme to give them the grant so that they can get into a small business. It is through this “rise up” part that we are seeing successes, that I want to say that 455 clients who have received psychological support in that part will be willing to give up their cards in two weeks’ time. We are also removing people from the programme who have

graduated and are now ready to move on.

Through the poverty reduction programme, we have gone out into the communities. We have not only been satisfied with direct impact, which is taking the resources and services of the Ministry to community centres and schools and inviting the MPs to mobilize and bring out their people, but we have recognized—sometimes I meet elderly persons and I get letters from MPs and when we interview them we would say: “We just had a direct impact in that area, why did you not come?” Sometimes they do not have transport. They had nobody to help them. They have a wheelchair and they cannot be wheeled. Therefore, we now take the poverty reduction programme and all the other resources of the ministry directly to the hardest hit communities in the country.

If we visit an MP we do a walk in that community and we call it a direct effect. Not only do we carry the resources of the Ministry of the Peoples and Social Development but we partner with self-help, we partner with WASA and T&TEC because the needs of the poor are not only money, food and hampers, we recognize that people need water, people need a regular supply of water, we have the WASA officials there. The Ministry of Community Development, through self-help, can fix a little box drain. We can build a community garbage bin that would benefit people where the stray dogs are ripping the rubbish and it is frustrating the community. We can do little things to give the people some hope in that community. That is the value of this direct effect programme.

Through the mirco-enterprise and training grant, which is the grant of \$5,000 given to individuals to establish a micro business to pursue training for employment, we have been able to give \$695,135 to people throughout the country to start their own businesses.

I give you an example, the cerebral palsy children. Today I met some of them in Port of Spain, who were anxious for more resources. When a child has

cerebral palsy the mother has to stay at home. The mother has a job, but she would ask a neighbour to assist for two days and another family member, but after a while she has to leave to go to work and when she cannot get someone to help, she stays home and she usually loses her job and, therefore, it is either to take care of the child or abandon the child. Therefore, what we are doing now is targeting these mothers, training them and giving them that grant, partnering with some of the other ministries, so that they can purchase a sewing machine and be trained to sew some clothes, so while they are at home tending to the child they can have some gainful employment. That is the kind of thing we want to do in some of these communities that are very hard-pressed.

With the regional micro project fund where you can, as an NGO or community-based organization come up with a project, whether it is aquaponics or whatever project you have in mind, a community fishing project, or an agricultural project, we have been able to get groups to come together and disburse \$455,464 for this. We have been out there and we have been exposing the services of the Ministry. Not only have we been exposing the services of the Ministry, but certainly we have been partnering with the private sector.

There have been occasions when we have received donations from corporate Trinidad and Tobago to assist us, because government cannot do it alone. The services of government are to facilitate growth and development of the society. It cannot be that the government can come and just fix everything. We need to strengthen the capacity in our non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and when we strengthen the capacity in our NGOs they can seek funds, not only locally but internationally, and that has been the case with Missions International, where we received wheelchairs, not only from the Ministry but from the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints and other organizations. Through the Red Cross, we have been able to get health hampers for flood victims. We partner with

international organizations. We partner with the Rotary Club, so we can do more with less.

The equity of which we speak, there has always been a concern that they were only assisting one group or the other. Cabinet has just approved the establishment of an NGO unit in the Ministry of the People and Social Development for the very first time in the history of Trinidad and Tobago; a unit that is dedicated to ensuring equity. Not only has Cabinet done that, but we have set up an Inter-Ministerial Committee to look at how grants are distributed across ministries.

So, while we do this in social development, you do not give, for example, the money we gave to La Brea and other areas, you just do not give the money. We have so many requests from so many parts of Trinidad and Tobago, but we do a rapid assessment on the organization. We have our people going there, but we did not have enough officers. Before, there were just two persons in the research department looking at this. Today, Cabinet has given the approval for there to be a coordinator of the NGO unit, a manager of administration and finance, six investigation and assessment officers, three administrative assistants, one executive assistant and a driver.

So that we can not only help these organizations to fill out their forms and apply. We have also partnered with the Small Business Company to ask them to give us resources to help these organizations to apply for funds, so that they can get the capacity, the lawyer and the accountant to assist them to fill out the forms. Then, the NGO unit can ensure that the funds are properly disbursed and properly accounted for, so that we would be able to divide these resources, limited as they are, and ensure that they get to go all the people of Trinidad and Tobago who need them.

As you know, this Government, the very first act that we did in the

Parliament of Trinidad and Tobago was to lift the lives of our senior citizens; and we came in not knowing the state of the Treasury, not knowing the commitments that were made by government, but determined to fulfil the promise that we made on the platform and we came to the Parliament of Trinidad and Tobago and ensured that we secured the livelihood of all citizens over the age of 65, who needed that assistance to get \$3,000 pension, so that they can have a good life.

Mr. Speaker, by January of this year, \$6 million had been distributed to 3,079 individuals, via the Public Assistance Grant. Presently, we have 21,209 recipients of this grant.

8.45 p.m.

Via the disability assistance grant, persons between the ages of 18 and 64 years who are certified permanently disabled from earning a living are granted assistance. By January 2011, we disbursed a total of \$10,000,956 to 1,500 persons in Trinidad and Tobago. Currently 22,278 persons are in receipt of the disability assistance grant. We have 16 clients in the special achievers committee where we have persons who have contributed in sport and art and who need that extra help.

What is most interesting, Mr. Speaker, is that not only are we giving more resources and more grants, but with the assistance of the Minister of Finance and the Finance and General Purposes Committee and the Cabinet of Trinidad and Tobago, I am proud to be the Minister of the People and Social Development under whose tenure we were able to double every single grant which existed before in the time of the PNM. [*Desk thumping*] So we are making it more available for the people, we are giving more and we are increasing, hence the reason the Ministry of the People and Social Development has been the recipient of an additional appropriation of \$455,537,000. We are trying to stay true to our mandate, “prosperity for all” and to reprioritize and refocus to the development of the people rather than to infrastructural development which is not done in a holistic manner,

with a holistic plan.

The housing assistance grant which provides support to purchase building materials has been increased, Mr. Speaker, from \$10,000 to \$15,000. The household items grant to purchase household necessities for those who simply cannot afford, or lose them in flood or fire has been increased from \$4,500 to \$6,000.

The medical equipment grant which allows for persons to qualify for wheelchairs, special beds, dentures, colostomy bags, et cetera, has been increased from \$6,000 to \$7,500.

The domestic help grant for part-time domestic help for up to three months, for clients who are unable to perform their chores has been increased from \$1,600 to \$1,800, and has also been extended for a further three months to six months, if necessary, in some cases.

The funeral grant to assist in the burial of persons has been increased from \$3,450 to \$7,000 which is now an acceptable figure to bury someone with dignity in the country.

The pharmaceutical grant which applies to those persons who do not receive the CDAP drugs and who suffer from cancer or related illnesses, this grant was available for \$900 for a three-month supply, today it is available at \$2,500 for a three-month supply.

If someone you know is threatened with being put out of their apartment and they have their children wailing and crying and they do not know what to do, they are in an unfortunate position and have no hope, there is a house rent grant where before you would have been given \$4,500, for a three-month period, now \$7,500 is available for a person in that predicament. Many persons come to the Ministry and get this assistance and have a second chance at life, so they do not end up on the streets and are victims of social displacement and what we call street dwelling.

This particular facility has been instrumental in ensuring that persons in this country live with dignity, and are afforded some assistance from the Government of Trinidad and Tobago which helps them to keep that dignity.

8.50 p.m.

Before, when persons were affected by fire and flood, \$500 was given to each child so that they could purchase their school books that were destroyed. This has been increased to \$750 to a primary school student and \$1,000 to a secondary school student.

All of these grants have been increased and the figures tell the tale. For the senior citizens' pension, the allocation was \$2.453 billion and the expenditure to date is \$1.901 billion, so we are, basically, spending in tune with the allocation that was given. The total number of people receiving the benefit of pension in this country is 76,473. We are also making it easier for people to apply for their pension by having regular customer training programmes in the Ministry and putting the impetus and drive to help the persons to facilitate their pension. We will also be coming to the Parliament to change the laws that are archaic and sometimes unfriendly to those pensioners who lose their cheques and, also, who are waiting on untimely approvals. Certainly, we are also looking at those persons who spend time in foreign countries. There is a restriction that debars them from the pension if they spend a certain amount of time. We are looking to remove some of those restrictions.

For fiscal 2011, we received an allocation of \$250 million. Our expenditure to date is \$204,731,000. The total number of persons receiving public assistance is 22,631. For the Disability Assistance Grant, there was an allocation of \$302 million. The expenditure to date is \$273,258,000; total number of persons receiving this is 22,601. These figures, when compared to the previous administration, are a 100 per cent increase in giving services to the people of

Trinidad and Tobago who need it the most.

Our National Family Services Division has been one of the divisions on which we have prided ourselves. We recognize that sometimes when someone's home is damaged by flood, the most important thing is not always to repair the "bashboard" and the roof and to bring people to start repairing the home. The destruction of property, especially of one who is poor and underprivileged, is a traumatic experience. It is an invasion of their privacy. It is as if they go to sleep and, within an hour, their home that they have spent their entire life building, is ravaged, broken up, turned and twisted and their cars thrown out of their garages and their entire lives disrupted. It is almost—

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. G. Ramadharsingh: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I was saying that their entire life is traumatized and they really want you as a Member of Parliament, or the councillor, to see the destruction. You go around the house and look and you say, "Okay, I have seen it". And they say, "No, there is a room to the back." You say, "Is it not the same as what has taken place in front here?" And they say, "No, but I want you to see it." Do you know what? They want you to share in their loss. They want you to spend time with them at that time of trauma. That is why the psychosocial support and the counselling. We have asked our National Family Services Division to be out there when there is fire and flood and the first thing that the Ministry of the People and Social Development must do is to hold the hand of the person and say, "We are with you in your time of need." There is no price to that psychosocial support.

We have been able to do 243 cases of child abuse; 198 cases of domestic

violence, of successful and ongoing psychological support; 172 instances of the crisis intervention which is either rape, murder, vehicular accidents and elderly abandonment; sessions on the radio and award of scholarships to the children's homes. One hundred and fifty-three applications were received from nine children's homes throughout the country and the Ministry is going to do a programme of scholarships where we will give it to persons who are overcoming adversity.

Mr. Speaker, I want you to understand that this is what the Ministry does. We build capacity. In other organizations such as Lifeline, I am proud to say that, with the cooperation of the Minister of Finance, who is also the Member of Parliament in that area, Lifeline's resources have been quadrupled under this Government, so that they can do 10 times the work we do because they receive support from other international agencies.

We have also quadrupled the resources of Childline, another NGO, and they have received more resources. We have turned Childline from an 8.00 to 4.00 operation to what is now a 24/7 operation and that number is 800-4321. We have rolled it out in partnership with the Minister of Education so that any school child who feels threatened; any child who feels confused—because many times abuse is not really known and felt—or bullied or pressured or stressed, can call 800-4321 and get relief. The Minister of Education has been rolling it out in the schools of Trinidad and Tobago so that any of our children who does not feel comfortable in any circumstance can call that number.

The work of the Community Mediation Services Department is strictly anonymous because it deals in high crime areas and the persons cannot be used for publicity. You will never see this part of my Ministry in any campaign. They have mentored 725 men, 1,107 women and they have taken cases, mediated and ensured that violence, crime and inter- and extra-family crises have been bridged.

We have bridged the gap with community mediation.

I have exhorted my colleagues to support the Community Mediation Services Department because you fight crime by policing and by bringing people to justice. The new system in the Ministry of Justice will unclog some of the impediments in the system with some of his initiatives, but at the genesis of crime, we have to go in the communities and mediate between warring factions and we are doing very well in that regard.

I come now to the Disability Affairs Unit and differently-abled persons. As you know, our Prime Minister has been very strong in the support and protection of those who are defenceless, innocent and need extra support. This Government, one of its first critical pieces of legislation, was to establish the Children's Life Fund, Act 12 of 2010, to provide lifesaving money for children so that they could be treated. So that, any whacker man who has a son or daughter, or any taxi driver who has a son or daughter, or any labourer who has a son or a daughter who needs lifesaving surgery can get up to \$1 million under this Government to ensure that the lives of their children are saved. No longer do you have to hold a barbecue or curry-cue, knowing that you have to reach \$360,000 and you make \$5,000 in the first one and you are already planning three and four; reaching up to \$30,000; not even reaching near the figure, but you do that for your own conscience because you know that you are fighting for your child. No longer do people have to watch their children die while they are carrying on these curry-cues and barbecues, fund-raising events that are really like pelting a stone in a lake; a sense of hopelessness; that has now been protected by legislation so that these children can have a life. That is a caring Government.

Mr. Speaker, beside all the activity in which we have participated, we have demonstrated our commitment to the differently-abled in the society. For those parents with differently-abled children, the only facility that has physiotherapy and

is open to the public is the Princess Elizabeth Home in Port of Spain, which has a rich heritage of caring. But it is urban centric and it is for the first time in Trinidad and Tobago that we will roll out a facility for the differently-abled and it will be an \$11.5 million facility in the Carlsen Field area in Central Trinidad. It will be a landmark activity because it will show that the Government is not only talking, but reaching out to the people in a geographical way and that is what the Ministry of the People and Social Development has done in social development. It has given it a mandate to go out to the people. It is in my own vision and that of my colleagues that we see this, not as an end in itself, but we see five centres for the differently-abled in different parts of the country; in the south west of the country; in the south east and east of the country, together with one in central so that people who have a child in Moruga will not have to go all the way to Port of Spain to spend an entire day for physiotherapy for a child who needs it. We will devolve the services of the differently-abled throughout the length and breadth of this country in time as we begin to do the work phase by phase.

When I come to the Division of Aging, it is no secret that we are also doing something novel for the elderly, in that we have talked about having a project where we can take our elderly around. This project before was named the ELMO or the Elderly Mobile Shuttle Transport Programme. Together with the Minister of Works and Transport, Cabinet has approved—and this was in the newspaper—a tender is out for supply and delivery of 24, 12- to 15-seater buses to service the disabled community in Trinidad and Tobago.

The model project will be done by the Ministry of the People and Social Development, the PTSC and the Ministry of Local Government. We envisage the incorporation of a bus in every single regional corporation for the elderly and the differently-abled that can be accessed by calling a toll-free number in every corporation. Right now, as it exists, it is only in the Port of Spain area that we

have a dial-a-ride, but the differently-abled require the service and this will be a reality under the People's Partnership Government.

There is so much to talk about, but I will just say that a lot of the work was only able to be achieved by the collaboration and assistance of my colleagues in the Government and some of the Members of Parliament on both sides of this House.

9.05 p.m.

It is the only way that we can truly build the Ministry of the People. Therefore, we intend to continue the work with the support given to us in this Appropriation Bill here today with the increased finance. As we go along, we are never about creating a welfare state. A welfare state will not do any justice for us. What we will do is first expose the people, who need it the most, for support and assistance to elevate their lives. As we continue to structure our programmes, we will be flexible in our approach and we will then create stricter guidelines for the accessing of these funds, so that they would be given to the people. As we make it easier for the people to access that, we will also ensure that the guidelines and the investigations and the assessments are also strengthened, so that they will go to the neediest in the society.

We will also do it in partnership and collaboration with international organizations who are talking to us through the Ministry of Finance and the Ministry of Social Development, and by recruiting the best skills available in the world to lend expertise to the programmes that were there available. So we will continue our outreach exercises except they will be more structured so that we will be able to hit more areas. Instead of collaborating with one Member of Parliament, we will do a regional direct impact that will incorporate more people in a more structured and organized way.

We will partner, not only to give the grant to those elderly people who

cannot help themselves, but we will also help them to do it by using the resources of local government, of self-help, the Defence Force of Trinidad and Tobago, the CEPEP and the URP, so that we can physically build for those are shut in—elderly—because there are some people who are elderly, who are shut in. They have no help at all. Therefore, we have sent out memorandums of understanding to all of these agencies because we want this to be an ordered activity not a one and done event where you come and help one person and it does not happen. So it can be cyclical in nature and a continuing process.

There is no doubt that there is need for better customer service. I cannot apologize everyday for the bad services that is met out at all the divisions. I can only appeal that we are about a new mandate, and that we should lift the lives of our citizens and take the opportunity to care for them at these offices in a very special way.

In that regard, we will partner with the UTT and UWI to get volunteers and we have a programme and a policy of volunteerism; so that we can get more friendly people partnering with these offices; so that they would get better customer service delivery.

Mr. Speaker, to truly serve all the people of Trinidad and Tobago we must demonstrate, not only, by boosting their morale and delivering good programmes and policies, but we must also demonstrate in a physical way that we care. At the Ministry of the People and Social Development over the next two to three years we will be looking at building three governance centres in Trinidad and Tobago, which will be highly technologically outfitted buildings that will be situated at the extremities of the country, at Icacos, Guayaguayare and Toco, that can communicate with the Head Office of the Ministry of the People and Social Development; so that persons can walk into those areas; that a fisherman from Icacos could walk into that governance centre and get every piece of information

that is available in Port of Spain.

9.10 p.m.

So, those governance centres will tell the people of Trinidad and Tobago in a very real way, that when we preaches about bringing back people in the Government on the campaign trail, the dialogue of the now Prime Minister was real, and will be demonstrated throughout the country through these governance centres.

We have already operationalized the People's Issue Resolution Unit, which is a body that meets every Monday, and there are persons from every Ministry at the level of director or higher. This committee has begun to build with the recruitment of staff so that we can be a guide Ministry to Ministries that may need to look into issues that the people require them to do.

Social displacement has not escaped our attention. In fact, we have deepened ties with the Ministry of Local Government and the Ministry of Health. The Minister of Local Government has signalled to every corporation that they now have a mandate to build a facility in every corporation to assist with the issue of social displacement, and I want to publicly commend him for that support, because social displacement is not a Port of Spain issue, and it must not be an issue to export street dwellers from Port of Spain to other areas of the country. In every area, we must have facilities to take care of those who are challenged; whether it is due to health reasons, drug abuse or family problems or other social ills, it must be an issue that is dealt with locally, not only with the problem, but with the prevention of social displacement. That is, at risk and vulnerable families must be identified through our local government representatives, and the appropriate interventions must be made to support these families so that we do not have social displacement in the country.

There is a plethora of protection programmes for the children. We are

hammering out the final stages of the Children Bill to bring it back into this Parliament, to make crimes against children a very serious punishment for those offenders and other issues. The Children's Authority Board has now been set up. We have filled the vacancies and we are operationalizing the Children's Authority of Trinidad and Tobago, and we expect this to be operational in about eight months' time. We have continued our exercises to educate and inform persons about the protection of children's rights throughout Trinidad and Tobago.

We continue to work with prisoner rehabilitation with Vision on Mission, incorporating them in community-based activities to assist the elderly and the disadvantaged. We are also exploring how best we can help those who come back out into the society and get into sustainable employment through our grants.

Mr. Speaker, the work continues. I thank the leaders of the People's Partnership Government for their vision and for their various philosophical thoughts that have all amalgamated into a platform on which we have begun to build this Ministry of the People and Social Development. I thank the Prime Minister for having the vision and for demonstrating in a real way her caring for the population, and especially, the disadvantaged, the poor and the oppressed in the society. I thank the Minister of Finance for the support, and the public servants in my Ministry who have worked beyond the call of duty to ensure some of these successes today. I thank you for the opportunity to speak. [*Desk thumping*]

Ms. Joanne Thomas (*St. Ann's East*): Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, it is very late, so I would not belabour the points made by both sides. Mr. Speaker, my Members on this side have efficiently highlighted some of our concerns as regards the adjustments and amendments to the financial numbers on this Bill. I would just like to give a little focus to some of the allocations for projects, some of which are listed under the Ministry of Local Government.

Firstly, I want to thank the hon. Minister of Local Government for pursuing

the PNM's initiative of the San Juan market. [*Desk thumping*] Works are ongoing and the burgesses who use the market are anxiously awaiting the completion.

Mr. Speaker, I want to firstly refer to some of the numbers, for example, \$1.5 million has been set aside for the renovations of the New City Mall and another million dollars set aside for the upgrading of the East Side Plaza. I ask the question, Mr. Speaker, what is to become of these projects? Can we expect approval for commencement of these projects?

Mr. Speaker, I also want to advise the Minister that the city and regional corporations are having great difficulties in acquiring approvals for the release of funds from the Ministry. We are coming close to the end of the financial year, and if at this point corporations are having problems with the release of funds, what is to become of the funding for all these projects and planned projects for the corporations? This barrier, of course, causes serious consequences for the infrastructural works that are badly needed in some areas, especially in the San Juan/Laventille Regional Corporation.

I know the Minister is aware of the attention that is required in my area, the Santa Cruz area, and I refer in particular to the area of the La Hoe Road in Laventille. I have brought up this issue several times in my contributions in this House. These residents are suffering gravely. The road has become impassable, and I have made requests via writings and discussions with the Minister. The residents have sought an audience with the Minister to explain their plight and, to date, nothing has been done. Of course, the residents are of the opinion that if they protest and bring in the media then something will happen. I have been trying my best to speak with the residents, and to put a stay on taking this kind of action. I use this opportunity again to appeal for some kind of attention to that area in La Hoe Road in Laventille Road and also La Canoa road in Santa Cruz.

Mr. Speaker, as regards allocations under the Ministry of Works and

Transport, I also wish to enquire about the funds estimated for the upgrade of the Priority Transit Mall at San Juan. This too, two allocations have been set aside and nothing has been done as regards the progress of this project.

I move to the issue of amenities for our local government councillors. Mr. Speaker, we are fast approaching the one year anniversary for our duly elected councillors, and they are still waiting on some of the promises made by this Government. Mr. Speaker, we must remember that the councillors are the ones closest to the ground and closest to the people, and we need to ensure that they are competently and efficiently able to conduct their duties for the burgesses of the region.

Mr. Speaker, permit me also to highlight to the hon. Minister the allocation set aside for the development of certain policies, to name a few, the local government policy for recreational facilities; the national policy and programme of action on public baths and conveniences; and the policy and programme of action on burial grounds, crematoria and cremation sites.

Mr. Speaker, some other questions that come to mind based on allocations are—we learnt that the contract with VMCOTT has been terminated, no reason for the termination was provided. Could the Minister tell us whether a cost-benefit analysis was done prior to making such a decision? Could the Minister also tell us whether PTSC has the capability to effectively maintain and repair the buses in a timely manner? Also, Mr. Speaker, \$47 million had been paid by the Ministry of the Attorney General for forensic legal services. We want to know which state bodies had forensic and legal audits conducted on them. When were these audits done? Who were the lawyers employed? How much did each lawyer receive? Mr. Speaker, I am asking important questions that the Government must answer.

I refer now to the Minister of Local Government. Can the Minister tell us when was the cost for the scavenging contracts increased? What are the reasons

provided for increase in this cost? What was the original cost? By how much has the cost increased? We just want the Minister to provide the names of the contractors who received these contracts.

Mr. Speaker, the hon. Minister of Finance boasted a lot last week about how the people spoke and gave the UNC-led coalition the mandate to govern the affairs of the country, but I wonder if the Minister is aware of what the people are saying now? I close like a wounded man who has left good house and gone in bad house, and the people are saying, "I am sorry, I did not know." Mr. Speaker, I want to let the people of this nation know that we in the PNM understand, but we console them with the words, "Wait my child, just wait, we will prevail." I thank you, Mr. Speaker. [*Desk thumping*]

The Minister of Finance (Hon. Winston Dookeran): Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am sorry that the Member for Diego Martin West or the Member for Diego Martin North/East is not present at this point in time, because I want to respond very quickly to some of the misrepresentations that they both made in this debate, so that we can correct the information.

What I have sensed in this debate is a lot of potshots that were made at myself and at the Government, but I think by now both the Opposition and the country would realize that I wear a bulletproof vest when it comes to potshots. [*Desk thumping*] I want to continue in that tradition by putting the facts as they are, so that the nation at large will be able to make intelligent choices about the issues that we are addressing.

Let me just correct a few of the statistical inconsistencies and misinterpretations that were made so forcefully by the member for Diego Martin North/East. He spent a fair amount of his time suggesting that as Minister of Finance, I had set myself a goal for expenditure for the rest of the last six months that was clearly impossible to achieve. If I recollect from his contribution, he said

that I was expecting to spend somewhere in the order of \$8 billion in the last six months, having only spent \$700 million in the first six months. Well, in the first place, he misread what I said earlier.

9.25 p.m.

What I said earlier is that our deficit for the first six months was \$700 million, and I just add now that the actual expenditure for this period was \$2.2 billion, and therefore, it was inaccurate for him to draw the conclusion that there is need to spend \$7 billion. Indeed, what we are talking about is spending a further \$5 billion over the next six months. This, Mr. Speaker, is not unusual in terms of what has happened in the pattern of expenditure over the last few years. And in previous years, we have seen a lower level of expenditure in the first six months than in the last six months.

The reasons for that are clearly bottlenecks in the institutional system that we operate and, to that extent, this possibility of spending a further \$5 billion is in fact a real one, and I want to dissuade those who seem to may have been persuaded by his argument that we need to spend somewhere between \$8 billion—that is just a statistical issue. I know this debate is not about statistics, but I think sometimes, in fact at all times, it is important to correct misinformation.

The second piece of statistics that I must comment on is his long argument that the inflation rate, as of January 2009, was somewhere in the order of 1.5 per cent, and in spite of the correction made by the Member for D'Abadie/O'Meara, he insisted that that was so.

I looked very carefully at the Central Bank Monetary Policy Report of April 2011, and there is a table as to the inflation rates from February 2009, coming all the way to March 2011. An inflation rate recorded in February 2009, was indeed, according to this report, 11.68 per cent in February 2009, and

eventually in March 2011, it was 9.37 per cent—so clearly not 1.5 per cent. So it is a clear case of misrepresentation of the facts before us quoting what he claims as another Central Bank report, but this one that I am quoting is based in April 2011, giving the time series which I can make available to you. [*Desk thumping*]

The third piece of statistics that I thought need to be corrected has to deal with the Member for Diego Martin West, who laid a charge of discrimination on the basis of the expenditure to the regional authorities. The details of these expenditures were provided in the Finance Committee Report at his request, and I would not go through them all because it is late and I do not want to detain Members, like the hon. Member said, but I will just refer him to the report itself. He was arguing that we were, in fact, not supporting the North West Regional Health Authority, and of the \$180 million that were allocated to the RHA for additional expenditure, only \$8.9 million was given to the North West Regional Health Authority, and \$94 million was indeed given to the South-West Regional Authority, \$35 million to the Eastern Regional Health Authority, and North Central Regional Health Authority, \$42 million.

Could I just point out that within that \$180 million, \$41million had to do with personnel expenditure, which, as you recognize in this allocation, was allocated throughout the heads in light of the new wage arrangements. So, immediately, the figure of comparison between \$8 million and \$41 million and \$180 million was a misrepresentation. This information is in the Finance Committee's Report, so I am quoting from the report which was circulated.

9.30 p.m.

Mr. Speaker, then it goes on to detail what the other expenditures were in very specific terms, with respect to the South-West Regional Health Authority, goods and services, \$2 billion for the Siparia district health facility; property, plant and equipment maintenance, \$20 million; security services, \$17 million; medical

supplies, \$18 million; laboratory supplies, \$12 million, and food supplies \$6 million. I just itemized these things to suggest that these are normal operating costs for the running of the facilities. They do not represent any extraordinary expenditure that ought to be dealt with. I can go on with the others, but the story is the same.

A clear analysis of these figures would suggest that his charge of discriminatory action is false, and it is about time that we in this Government and this Parliament stop this talk about discriminatory action, unless we have accurate proof. [*Desk thumping*] That is why I felt it was necessary to correct these statistics; not that this debate is about statistics, but it is important to correct that, for fear that misinformation may lead to wrong perceptions.

I sense that Members of the Opposition are trying to create a false situation, and on the basis of that false situation, trying to promote a sense of populist support for them. But that premise on which they are doing it is no longer relevant. That is why last week I said they were providing new promises on old premises, but those premises are no longer relevant. The Member for Diego Martin West asked the question, what is the problem that we are fixing? He, in fact, made an allegation that there was no problem to fix when we assumed office.

In some sense, he is right, because the country recognized there was a problem and fixed it themselves by putting us in office and putting you in Opposition. [*Desk thumping*] The country recognized that there was a problem to fix. No country would have made such a change, if they did not acknowledge there was a problem to fix. [*Interruption*]

Mrs. Gopee-Scoon: But he was referring to the economy.

Mr. Speaker: Member for Point Fortin, please.

Hon. W. Dookeran: The economy was part of that. That was a verdict of the people, that there was a problem to fix, and that problem manifested itself in many

areas of the economy, and manifested itself in the fiscal accounts. In presenting this Bill, I went at great length to establish what were those fiscal challenges that we were facing, and I quantified them. So I do not wish at this time to repeat what I said in presenting the Bill. But there was a problem to fix, and we have begun and we are fixing the problem with the fiscal accounts. [*Desk thumping*] I say here once more that this country is now in a safe place, when it comes to the fiscal situation in Trinidad and Tobago.

Mrs. Gopee-Scoon: What about crime?

Hon. W. Dookeran: They seemed to suggest that the Minister of Trade and Industry, the Member for Chaguanas East, had misrepresented the comments of the Central Bank Governor about the growth rate and about the 60 years they said of growth that had taken place prior to 2008. I was corrected by him; he did circulate his speech in which he talked about 16 years prior to 2009, and not 60 years.

Mr. Cadiz: “He cyar count.”

Hon. W. Dookeran: He was simply referring to the statements made in the Central Bank report of the expectation of a 2.5 per cent growth rate. Once again trying to manipulate statistics, for the purpose of misleading this country, but this country shall no longer be misled by that kind of mischief. [*Interruption*]

I think the Member for Point Fortin should go back to her own seat, [*Laughter*] so at least I would not have to listen to her comments. [*Laughter*]

The Member for Diego Martin West also said that when the former government was spending money, there was an argument that they were spending too much money. They expected this Government, when we got into office, to honour that commitment to spend less money. Rather than spending less money, they seem to be a bit jealous that we are able to spend more money and still balance the books.

Mr. Sharma: Intelligence at work.

Hon. W. Dookeran: They simply lost the argument that in the times when the economy was being overheated, in the times when there was excess revenue, that was the time not to spend money, because it was generating inflation. But when we got into office, the economy was no longer being overheated, and just the opposite policy was required, which was to spend more money so that you create more economic activity; an elementary piece of economic management. I am surprised that the Leader of the Opposition, who has now changed seat—sorry, the Member for Point Fortin, who is now sitting in the Leader of the Opposition’s seat, has not understood; but let us get that off.

Then the Member went on to talk about a number of other potshots here and there, which I do not intend to deal with, because we shall not detain ourselves in dealing with all these potshots. I have no doubt, but he threatened to raise these matters in questions. We look forward to those questions coming and having them corrected.

I am afraid that I have to correct these Members so often, and it is becoming a habit now that we must deal with the facts before us, rather than to represent misinformation in the name of trying to make emotional appeals to the electorate.

The most fundamental issue raised by the contributions of both the Member for Diego Martin North/East and the Member for Diego Martin West, was that, indeed, the prospect of this economy growing seemed dim and that the stimulus which was expected to come, via the fiscal incentives and the increased borrowings in the early part of the fiscal year, was not indeed working. Mr. Speaker, I want to just correct that interpretation as well.

What happens when an economy is beginning to revive is that it reflects itself in different economic measures. When we look at what happened in the years 2010 and 2011, we would see that the turnaround of economic measures is really an indicator that the stimulus is indeed working. The fact is that we are now

in a safe position and we are about to resume the growth process, as indicated by the Central Bank, reinforced by the projections of the International Monetary Fund and further reinforced by the statement of Standard and Poor's and all other economic commentators who look at the situation in Trinidad and Tobago. So we have not pulled out that figure from nowhere. I have never claimed it. I was repeating what others have said about the economy. But let me just put for the record, some of the indicators of the resurgence of economic activity.

Firstly, and I am quoting here from the media release done by the Central Bank on the monetary policy report. It says that:

“Among...categories of private sector credit, consumer credit continued to strengthen for the fifth consecutive month, rising by 3.9 per cent...in February...”

The first indicator that the stimulus is working. The second indicator:

“while real estate lending maintained a robust rate of increase of 7.7 per cent.”—which is a significant increase in 2011.

These are for 2011, the first four months of 2011. So you have an increase in consumer credit; you have an increase in real estate lending, which is the basis for the resuscitation of the construction sector.

Also, business sector loans grew by 1.9 per cent in February, the most significant monthly increase since September 2010. These are the indicators which the Member for Diego Martin West seemed to put a blind spot to, and the Member for Diego Martin North/East. Other indicators regarding the resurgence of a stable position have to do with the question of inflation.

The report argues that headline inflation measured by 12 months increase in the index of retail prices, declined to 9.4 per cent in March 2011, from 10.7 per cent in the previous month. This is the first time, since May 2010, that the headline rate has fallen to single digit figures; another indication of the change in

trend. What I am trying to point out to Members is that you do not move from one position to the next position, without changing the trend. What has happened here is that the trend is changing on all these indicators, which is why we could say we are now moving into that direction.

On page 7 of the monetary policy report, there was a suggestion that the unemployment rate by year end could be around 5 per cent to 5.6 per cent, the same substantial report in the monetary policy report of April 2011, which is the last report that was published by the Central Bank on this matter. This is a further indicator of a change in trend, because if we could have maintained that level of employment, it means that business activity is indeed taking place. In fact, the report goes on to say that it is clear that the period of heavy job loss is over.

This is the Central Bank report. Within six months and one year after this Government has been put into place, we have begun to change the trends in which economic action is taking place. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister brought to my attention an article in the *Guardian* editorial today. This has to do with the stock market. I did mention it earlier, but in looking at it, there were some significant figures which I would like to put on the record. The headline in this editorial, which I believed is today's, says:

“Stock market bright spot for the economy”

It goes on to say:

“Based on yesterday's numbers, the composite index of T&T stock market has advanced by close to 11 per cent in the first five months of 2011.” [*Desk thumping*]

It goes on to compare what is happening here to what is happening abroad. It goes on to say:

“While local stocks returned 11 per cent, the S&P index in the US has risen

seven per cent for the first five months of the year while the Dow Jones Industrial Average has recorded an 8.6 per cent gain for the year.”

So even compared in terms of the international situation, the recovery process in the stock exchange is superior to what is happening in the US. [*Desk thumping*]

9.45 p.m.

So, Mr. Speaker, [*Interruption*] I am giving you the facts, I know that you are not accustomed to listening to the facts, but I am giving you the facts; I suggest you go back to your seat. [*Laughter*]

Mr. Speaker, the prime lending rate which is another indicator of increased business activity, or the conditions for business activity, was 9.75 per cent one year ago. By virtue of the policies of reducing interest rate, both in the Agricultural Development Bank and in the commercial bank, that prime lending rate has now been reduced in April 2011 to 8 per cent, which by its very nature means it is easier and less costly to secure necessary financing.

And finally in terms of the issue of the change in trend, there was a suggestion by the Member for Diego Martin West, that we are bragging, we are bragging about some false success story. No one is claiming any success story yet. The success of the work of the People’s Partnership is yet to be achieved, [*Desk thumping*] but the groundwork and the foundation for that success has been well put together; that is what we are saying. And if you set up the structures right and the foundation right, you can sit back and you can see the growth of this economy over time.

So, Mr. Speaker, he said oil prices, and therefore, we are boasting on external factors, and the sustainability of our revenue position, he said, is suspect. The Member for Diego Martin West seems to have an obsession with this thing called revenue. I remember in the budget debate he argued that we would never achieve the revenue estimates that we had, and today when I said that our amnesty

had yielded \$1.8 billion, more than we had anticipated for—because we had projected somewhere in the order of \$1.2 billion—even in an ambitious programme he is now saying that we are using one-time revenue for sustainability of long-term revenue.

Well, I got the information with regard to the increase in revenue that has taken place during this year in terms of our projection. Oil companies had an increase of \$592 million, 5 per cent over what we had estimated. But the most significant figure came from other companies, not oil companies. Other companies increased by \$1,000,054,000 or 15 per cent, which is an indicator that the non-oil sector is beginning to show its head again, which is what the Member for Chaguanas East was talking about. [*Desk thumping*] Therefore the sustainability of this revenue stream is underlined by this statistics. And therefore the empty and vacuous claims of the Member for Diego Martin West can be turned on his head at this time in suggesting that this will not be sustainable. We can give even more details on that, but I need not really go into the details.

Mr. Speaker, the argument that there is no change in trends, is in fact, without any substance, and at this stage I have outlined some of the issues based on evidence that has been adduced in studied approaches, because the willy-nilly figures which he spoke about is something that he may be guilty of but we on this side are not guilty of doing that at all, we have made our inferences on the data that is before us.

9.50 p.m.

But this debate, really, is not about statistics, I agree, and to confine this debate to statistics is really to misunderstand the purpose of the debate. It is necessary to put the figures correct so that there will be no misinterpretation, and therefore, there will be no misunderstanding. The debate, really, is more about the

issue of what are we doing to ensure that there is a change in the paradigm for economic development. [*Interruption*]

You see, Mr. Speaker—

Hon. Member: Go back to point A. [*Crosstalk*]

Hon. W. Dookeran: Do not answer?

Hon. Member: No, do not bother. “Nah, just don’t answer.” [*Crosstalk*]
[*Laughter*]

Hon. W. Dookeran: Mr. Speaker, Trinidad and Tobago’s economic recovery, given the global downturn and our fiscal challenges locally has been predicated on measures to stabilize the national financial balance sheet, trigger a new momentum for growth and confront the fiscal challenges that would sustain the growth momentum while faithfully adhering to a strong social support programme. In essence, this is the economic strategy that has been put into place very carefully.

When the Minister of the People and Social Development spoke and enumerated with such articulation the changes in the programmes for social support, not only were we able to sustain it in terms of figures, but he was able to improve it qualitatively in what he has said here today. [*Desk thumping*] This debate really is about development and the prospects for economic development. Many countries have seen their credit rating downgraded, including economies that have been seen as sound such as Japan, Portugal, Greece, Ireland and, most recently, Spain. This represents the changing global environment of the world economy still searching for a sustainable response to the global financial crisis.

We in Trinidad and Tobago have reduced our exposure to that kind of contingent at this point in time, and this is what I meant when I said that we are now, in terms of our public finances and our exposure, in a safe place. This, of course, will perhaps have a risk of changing if things do change externally and internally, but at this point in time we have been able to establish an economic

framework that would achieve the multiple objectives of the solid fiscal balance, the objective of ensuring that the social support programme is enhanced and expanded and the objective of setting the momentum for growth in place.

So, when the Member for Diego Martin North/East, seem to suggest that we have not fixed the problems in the country, the fiscal problems in the country, I really wonder why he might even make such a claim. Because the evidence is clear, not only from what I have said, that there is, indeed, evidence that even our approach to dealing with the Clico fiasco has been one that has begun to reap rewards. Remember, for almost 18 months after the government acknowledged that there was a financial collapse of Clico they did nothing for 18 months and we in this Government within two months after began to put a solution in place. [*Desk thumping*]

They were flabbergasted. They did not diagnose the problem properly much less to prescribe. Thank goodness they did not prescribe on the wrong diagnosis. [*Laughter*] But what they did was do nothing and for 18 months the bleeding continued, the haemorrhage continued and we had to do a number of things, the first of which was to stop the haemorrhaging, and having stopped the haemorrhaging start to put things in order, so that today we can feel satisfied that the Colonial Life Insurance Company has got its statutory reserves back intact, [*Desk thumping*] which was a problem that they seemed not to be able to solve and for 18 months things just went down and down.

Mrs. Gopee-Scoon: You mean the last 24 months.

Hon. W. Dookeran: Eighteen months before May 2010. So, when you said no one is protected, you have the 225,000 policyholders of traditional life insurance and pension programmes, et cetera, now having a safe company once more, in terms of financial safety.

There are still problems—I do not want to give the impression that we are

totally out, but in less than one year we have been able to put a safety belt on Clico itself, and therefore 225,000 policyholders should feel a sense of comfort at this point in time. [*Desk thumping*] In addition to that, the Member for Diego Martin North/East made a strong emotional appeal and I need to respond, talking about those who are ill and those who are committing suicide and so forth, never to acknowledge that part of our programme and all of our programmes that we have put in this Government have been very careful to balance the economic growth with the social requirement.

In this respect we have put into place a compassionate window in which we said those who are of age, or senior citizens, or anyone, really, who has a need for the funds that they have put into Clico and that pending the resolution in the matter they can access \$250,000 per person, most of it is for medical purposes, but not only confined to that, it was based on individual needs and ability to pay. So, we were compassionate, very compassionate and set up that window, and I indicated in my presentation that 123 people have, in fact, accessed that window. Those are people who have more than \$75,000 in deposit, and that has been put into place.

With respect to those who have less than \$75,000; we have said that we have now paid off something like 70 per cent of them. They have come very quietly to the office. I have enquired. They leave very satisfied, they leave relieved, they leave from being fearful of what would happen to their savings, they leave now because the People's Partnership has honoured its commitment to pay back what is due. [*Desk thumping*] We are making attempts to get to the other 30 per cent, because some of them we found are not living in Trinidad and Tobago and they are being dealt with. [*Interruption*] That amounts to well over 8,000 people; 8,000 policyholders have been paid off.

Miss Mc Donald: Minister of Finance, through you, Mr. Speaker, I would like to find out about this compassionate window. I want to know whether—and I am

talking to the national community too, also asking that question, is it something that is operating now or is it something to come?

Hon. W. Dookeran: Well, that is exactly what I said, it is in operation and 123 persons have accessed it already. [*Interruption*] The figure I gave in my presentation, I believe, last week of \$33 million, has already been spent in that regard, so it is an operational window that is working. [*Interruption*] It is not something to come.

Mrs. Persad-Bissessar: The Member for Point Fortin bailed out their money. Sorry. [*Laughter*]

Hon. W. Dookeran: It is there already and the only issue to be resolved now when it comes to policyholders is the 15,000 persons who have deposits of more than \$75,000. We have a programme and we are trying to “relook” at that programme with a view to getting a better discount rate, and shortly we will be coming to Parliament to deal with that aspect.

Now, within one year we have been able to do all of these things and funded a programme in the Central Bank to deal with the investors in the credit union and in the labour union based on presentations made by the labour movement, by the credit union movement and by other institutional investors, because we were having discussions all the time. You see we do not conduct our discussions in the press, we conduct our discussions where it matters, in the offices and we convert those discussions into policies and then we implement them. [*Desk thumping*] But there are some in our society who cannot live without the press and I leave them to where they are. The noises outside are much less than the noises inside. [*Laughter*] [*Desk thumping*]

I think some of them are trying to find a platform for a new political career.

Hon. Member: “Oooh”. [*Crosstalk*]

Hon. W. Dookeran: And some of them are still enthralled by the glory of being

in politics. [*Laughter*] So, if that is not a serious attempt to fix the problem, Member for Diego Martin North/East, I do not know what he could mean by not fixing the problem. [*Interruption*]

It is not overnight and it is one of the most difficult tasks that we had to undertake, because we started with a debt situation which was \$20 billion, given the \$7 billion that the previous government had put in—\$5 billion and \$2 billion for CIB—they went on a different route and we are still to have exposure on CIB. It is a part of the problem that we have not yet addressed, because there are public/state enterprises exposed to CIB still. The problem was in the order of \$20 billion in a revenue base of just over \$40 billion, so it was an enormous problem, but we are not afraid to tackle the problems head-on and we have tackled the problems of Clico head on in this Government. And you in that government sat down for 18 months prior to the defeat doing nothing, doing nothing; making promises that you could not keep—

Mrs. Persad-Bissessar: Bailing out their money. [*Interruption*] Bailed out their own money. [*Crosstalk*]

Hon. W. Dookeran:—and bailing their own money in the process. But, Mr. Speaker, I just want to ensure that the Member for Diego Martin North/East does not get away with those false statements.

Miss Mc Donald: Mr. Speaker, I would just like to clarify a point, an issue that the Member for Tunapuna made. Yes, I was part of the former government, but I never got any bail-out of my money. [*Crosstalk*]

Please, please allow me to speak. Allow me to speak! [*Interruption*] I want to clarify with the Member for Tunapuna because I want the *Hansard* to report that I was part of that former government; yes, I would say quite categorically, that I have funds in that EFPA and I never bailed out any. I am now asking tonight whether I could bail out \$250,000. You understand, I am now asking that. But the

point about it, because you spoke about a compassionate window, but I want to tell you, the point I want to make is that I as an individual never bailed any money out of Clico. I want that straight. [*Crosstalk*]

Hon. W. Dookeran: Well, there was no inference of that on my part. [*Interruption*] There was no inference of that. I think the argument—[*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Minister. Please, Paula—“am”, Member for Point Fortin. [*Laughter*] [*Desk thumping*] Member for Point Fortin, please. I see that you have left your post and you have advanced. Please! Please allow the Minister of Finance to conclude in silence. Please!

Hon. W. Dookeran: Yes, well as I said, Mr. Speaker, there was no inference on my part to any Member here on the matter, but accessing the compassionate window is there for anyone who meets—but that is a different matter—the criteria, which have all been laid out.

So, I was addressing the Member for Diego Martin North/East, who did not stay to allow me to rebut his claim, his audacious claim, that we have not been fixing this issue. Then he raised some information about a new proposal. I indicated that we did get that new proposal and he did say that he was going to give me some additional information which he passed on to me and we would continue to look into that, because one of the things that we are doing, while we are solving these problems we remain flexible to any solutions that may come our way, but at that stage we know we are on the right track. We have a track record on this issue and we are beginning to fix that problem, a major problem. Had it not been fixed the entire financial situation, this country, would have been turned upside down.

10.05 p.m.

The Member for Point Fortin does not seem to agree. But I do not expect her to agree, because I do not think she would understand the enormity of the task

that we had to take on, on that Clico matter. But I wanted to correct that, Mr. Speaker. I said this debate is really not about statistics, it is really about regenerating a situation of development, putting it back on the right track; ensuring the fiscal discipline becomes the order of the day; ensuring that the Government's responsibility to take the right measures to deal with public issues is done at the right time and in the interest of the national community at all times. This is what this debate is all about. Had that not happened, then the electorate may not have chosen the way they have chosen. They have put onto us the responsibility to fix up the problems that they have created for this society. And that is why it is important to put this debate in that political context as well as in the development context.

But what I am most disturbed about is that I found the tone of the Opposition not its usual positive way. From time to time we have listened to some contributions, and although many times this may not be on target, the tone, has by and large, been on target. But this time I have noticed a new trend—[*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. A. Roberts*]

Question put and agreed to.

Hon. W. Dookeran: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and may I thank Members for that indulgence at this late time in the evening. [*Crosstalk*] Before I speak very briefly on the tone, I said that essentially this debate was about the development direction of the country and about the priorities which we have put into place. We have been accustomed to development paradigm shifts. We have become accustomed to, and somewhat tired with the arguments that there are strategic imperatives that must be followed. We have reset our priorities and we have reset our priorities on

more than one occasion. What we have been doing in the People's Partnership is embracing what I call "drilling down" for development.

Development is not about policy or paradigms; development is not about papers and documents—2020 documents. Development is about drilling down, getting the people engaged in the process of development and that is what we have begun to do in this first year of the People's Partnership Government, for the real change we are facing will be derived from our ability to drill down for development in our nation. In other words, it is a recognition that development cannot be imported—not a single investment; the philosophy behind that is that development must be imported. And the realization that we must unearth the natural entrepreneurship, talents and capabilities of our people. The new directions in building capacity and for delivering public goods must be at the top of our leadership agenda. The old institutions may have lost their relevance, part of the reason why the delivery is slower than we expected, calling now for new models of cooperation among the private, public and civil society. The role of the State must respond to the delivery that the society expects and indeed must also respond to the continuing pressing issues of equity confronting our societies.

10.10 p.m.

I put that on the record, because I believe the debate on equity that emerged, must be seen in the context of the new development paradigm. It must be seen in the context of serving the entire society, and therefore, to go to the old paradigm of trying to create a sense of loss at this stage, is really not to adopt the new requirements of development at this stage. But we will deal with that as we go along. I say that, because I felt the tone of the debate was a bit not inspiring.

[Interruption]

Dr. Moonilal: Disappointing.

Hon. W. Dookeran: As we try to reconstruct, those opposite are trying to

dismantle. Everything we do they dismantle. As we build confidence, they tend to erode that confidence. As we fix the society and the economy, they disconnect the Government and the policies from the people. As we shape the future, they simply get vex and destroy the hopes that we are creating for the nation. [*Desk thumping*] That, to me, was the most depressing part of the debate today.

I know that there is a role for the Opposition to have the highest level of scrutiny of Government action and Government proposals and, as we have said, we have been accustomed to dealing with that. Every single question that has been placed on the Order Paper in this Government, in this entire year, has been answered on time by the relevant Minister. [*Desk thumping*] That is a departure from the past, because we know that when the other side was in government questions were never answered. The list grew long and disappeared when the session ended. A new sense of priority, a new sense of commitment to answer to the people's demands and, therefore, we are accustomed to being subjected to scrutiny. And, I think it is fair to say, that we have attempted to do so in this Parliament with no fear or favour at anytime, because we are no longer in anyway faced with a situation that we are imprisoned by special interests.

We find and define what we think is in the national interest of the people of Trinidad and Tobago, and that is why I have never had any fear in the discharge of my duties as Minister of Finance. When I get the bullets all around, from all sources, from wherever they come, [*Laughter*] many people call and ask me: Are you well? Are you sleeping at nights?

I know, Mr. Speaker, that what we are doing to chart the economic course of this country is the right one. I know that we have to address the problems frontally. I know that if we do not do so, we will be forever fooling the people. It is better to tell the people the truth so that they can reap the rewards of that truth in due course and, therefore, I am really not unnerved at all by all these attacks that

have come my way.

As I said, Mr. Speaker, I have a bulletproof vest which I have kept with me in charting the fiscal management of this country, and the People's Partnership Government, under the leadership of Kamla Persad-Bissessar as our Prime Minister, is determined to overcome whatever obstacles there are in our way, as we ensure that we give to the people the mandate that they demanded upon us, and I thank you for this opportunity. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Speaker, I beg to move.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved:

That this House adopt the Second Report (2011) Session of the Finance Committee of the House of Representatives of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago on proposals for the Supplementation of the 2011 Appropriation.

FINANCE (SUPPLEMENTARY APPROPRIATION) BILL

Order for second reading read.

The Minister of Finance (Hon. Winston Dookeran): Mr. Speaker, I beg to move,

That a Bill to provide for the supplementary appropriation for the service of Trinidad and Tobago for the financial year ending 30th September, 2011 of the sum of the issue of which was authorized by the Appropriation Act, 2011, be now read a second time.

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

Question proposed.

Mr. Speaker: Is there anyone who may want to contribute? Hon. Member, if there is no contribution coming from the other side—

Question put and agreed to.

Bill accordingly read a second time.

Hon. W. Dookeran: Mr. Speaker, in accordance with Standing Order 70(1), I beg to move that the Bill not be committed to a committee of the whole House.

Question put and agreed to.

Question put and agreed to, That the Bill be read a third time.

Bill accordingly read the third time and passed.

ADJOURNMENT

The Minister of Housing and the Environment (Hon. Dr. Roodal Moonilal):

Thank you very much. Mr. Speaker, I beg to move that this House do now adjourn to Friday, June 03, 2011 at 1.30 p.m., and on that day it is the intention of the Government to debate through all its stages, Bill No. 1, a Bill to amend the Anti-Terrorism Act, Chap. 12:07. It is also the intention of the Government to deal with two matters relating to the amendments brought from the Senate to the Human Trafficking Bill and the Data Protection Bill. Additionally, the Government will also deal with Motion No. 1 on the legislative proposals for public procurement and disposal of public property.

Question put and agreed to.

House adjourned accordingly.

Adjourned at 10.20 p.m.