

**THE
PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES
OFFICIAL REPORT
IN THE SECOND SESSION OF THE TENTH PARLIAMENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF
TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO WHICH OPENED ON JUNE 18, 2010**

SESSION 2011—2012

VOLUME 7

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Monday, June 27, 2011

1.30 P.M.

The House of Representatives having assembled, and it being the first meeting of the Second Session of the Tenth Parliament of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago, the Clerk of the House read the following Proclamation:

REPUBLIC OF TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO

No. 2 of 2010.

[L.S.]

By His Excellency Professor GEORGE MAXWELL RICHARDS, T.C., C.M.T., Ph.D., President and Commander-in-Chief of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago.

/s/ George M. Richards

President.

A PROCLAMATION

Whereas it is provided by subsection (1) of section 67 of the Constitution of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago that each session of Parliament shall be held at such place within Trinidad and Tobago and shall commence at such time as the President may by Proclamation appoint:

Now, therefore, I, GEORGE MAXWELL RICHARDS, President as aforesaid, do hereby appoint the Red House, Port of Spain, Trinidad, as the place at which the Second Session of the Tenth Parliament of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago shall be held and 1.30 p.m. on Monday the 27th day of June, 2011, as the time at which the said Session shall commence.

Given under my Hand and the Seal of the President of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago, at the Office of the President, St. Ann's, this 14th day of June, 2011.

PRAYERS[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]**ELECTION OF DEPUTY SPEAKER**

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, the Office of Deputy Speaker has fallen vacant upon the appointment of Dr. Fuad Khan, Member for Barataria/San Juan as a Minister. In those circumstances and pursuant to Standing Order 4(2) of the House of Representatives, I invite proposals for the Office of Deputy Speaker of the House.

The Minister of Housing and the Environment (Hon. Dr. Roodal Moonilal): Mr. Speaker, I wish to propose that Mr. Jairam Seemungal be elected to the Office of Deputy Speaker of the House.

Seconded by Hon. Dr. F. Khan.

Mr. Speaker: Are there any other proposals? There being no other proposals, I now declare, Mr. Jairam Seemungal, Member for La Horquetta/Talparo, duly elected Deputy Speaker of the House. On behalf of all honourable Members, I congratulate the newly elected Deputy Speaker of the House. [*Applause*]

Honourable Members, His Excellency the President of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago desires to address all Members of Parliament. This sitting is now suspended.

1.36 p.m.: *Sitting suspended.*

1.45 p.m.: *Members of the Senate arrived and took their places in the Chamber.*

2.05 p.m.: *His Excellency the President, accompanied by the President of the Senate and the Speaker of the House of Representatives, arrived in the Chamber.*

[INVOCATIONS]

PRESIDENT'S ADDRESS

The Hon. Kamla Persad-Bissessar, Prime Minister, Sen. The Hon. Timothy Hamel-Smith, President of the Senate, The Hon. Wade Mark, Speaker of the House of Representatives, the Hon. Mr. Justice Ivor Archie, Chief Justice; Cabinet Ministers, Members of the Diplomatic Corps, Heads of Religious Organizations, the Hon. Dr. Keith Rowley, Leader of the Opposition, Members of the Judiciary, other Members of Parliament, representatives of the media, other distinguished ladies and gentlemen.

Today, June 27, 2011, we have gathered for the Ceremonial Opening of the Second Session of the Tenth Parliament. It is a ceremony that gives occasion to consider the awesome responsibility that rests upon the shoulders of every single Member of Parliament, whether elected by the people or appointed otherwise, according to our Constitution.

I think it is a good place to start by asking ourselves whether Trinidad and Tobago, as we know it today, is the place that we want it to be. In other words, are we happy with where we are? Are we encouraged by what we have accomplished? Are we convinced that we are on the right path? A more fundamental question may well be: where are we?

I have no doubt that each one of us has answers for those questions and they will not all be the same. What is necessary is that we put aside our biases and try to be objective in our assessment of where we find ourselves, at this time in our nation's development and, more importantly, ask ourselves what are we doing about it. It is not my intent to attempt to provide or suggest answers. I am quite sure that each one of us has his own convictions, separation from which will not be easily accomplished.

At the outset, let me say what most of us accept, at least in an academic way, that every one of us, inside and outside of Parliament, has a responsibility towards the betterment of life here. However, understanding and recognizing individual responsibility is not automatic, and so it comes back to the question of leadership and corporate responsibility insofar as our institutions are concerned, whether these institutions are the Government, the family or the private sector.

There is, of course, a symbiotic relationship but our business today is to focus principally on what is happening in this place and how it impacts the lives of the people of this country. Both Government and Opposition have responsibilities in that regard, responsibilities which need no explanation, on this occasion. And I believe that every Member of Parliament understands why he or she has a place here and needs no counselling and certainly no hectoring from anyone to understand it.

Nevertheless, taking stock is not a bad thing and it is indeed salutary to remind ourselves that we are not called to service by accident. The demands will always be greater than the accomplishments, but that does not give licence for the despair or complacency. It should, instead, encourage the necessary stretch that is required to reach our several goals, or most of the people's expectations, lest we forget.

How has the country done this past year? We have witnessed enthusiasm at almost fever pitch, if you will. Expectations have been high notwithstanding the global challenges which have persisted, from which we are by no means insulated, and perhaps we are finding our feet in a different kind of terrain.

While the passages have not been easy, we have seen positive movement in some areas, and there comes to mind immediately, the continuing recognition of tertiary education as an important means whereby a knowledge-based society can be developed.

The expansion of the GATE programme is but one major development in this regard. This is one of the programmes, having youth at the centre, which is critical for the development of the human resource base in the country. There are others, at different levels, such as YTEPP, providing skills training and other apprenticeship programmes which demonstrate a more inclusive attitude in the educational spectrum and which our country cannot afford to abandon or may do so at its peril. These programmes must be kept as they provide a necessary stepping stone from certain poverty to the possibility of a decent standard of living.

On the plus side, we are making strides in completing and initiating, where possible, our road networks in order to connect various points in our country. Bringing services to the people in a more efficient manner seems to be more evident or better known even as there is a stepping up of outreach from the centre to outlying districts.

Agriculture is being injected with new enthusiasm and this is particularly critical for us, given the persistent high food import bill with which the taxpayer is saddled; given also a tourism industry that continues to rely on food imports as a contributor to its survival.

We have what is necessary to turn around many of the negative situations in which we are living. While there will always be inequality in achievement among persons, there must be equality of opportunity and policy decisions must ensure that even-handedness and transparency are hallmarks in the effort to provide opportunities for a better standard of living particularly for the disadvantaged.

But over time, while we have heard encouraging statements, we have been embracing a policy of deferral in a matter that I should like to highlight and which I consider to be the extremely urgent need for us, as a country. That need, as I have said elsewhere, and on many occasions, is to focus increased attention on the non-energy sector, and, in particular, manufacturing and the application of

platform or generic technologies such as biotechnology, nanotechnology and new materials in order to achieve a level of balance in our economic development and provide needed diversification to our growth. I emphasize that we do not have much time to do so.

As we all know, Trinidad and Tobago is endowed with petroleum and gas reserves which, in absolute terms, are miniscule and represent less than one third of one percent of the world's proven reserves. Significantly, however, we have been highly successful in monetizing these resources. Indeed, our country represents the world's very first gas economy in the sense that no other economy, developed or developing, has previously been created and continues to function successfully which is dependent on natural gas as opposed to the many others which are liquid fuel dependent. We have become a model for other gas-producing countries. This sector clearly has a life of its own but it will be limited in its future growth by the availability of our hydrocarbon resources.

We have heard it said, time and time again, that we must always be cognizant of the fact that oil and gas are wasting assets which must be used to foster, for the longer term, more sustainable economic and industrial activity in a diversified economy. The world is in the midst of a revolution in which knowledge has replaced physical resources as the main driver of economic growth. We in this country must therefore look for our future economic and social well-being to science, technology and innovation rather than solely to reliance on the exploitation of our fiscal resources, important though this may be in the short and medium terms.

Excluding our country's gas reserves which are classified as "possible" or "projected", there are current proven reserves estimated at approximately 20 trillion cubic feet (tcf). However, given the current reserves to production ratio, and assuming no further success in our exploration efforts, admittedly, the worst case scenario, Trinidad and Tobago has only a 10 to 12-year window of opportunity for development of the non-energy sector.

Given this situation, we must have the courage to break with traditional approaches and consolidate the role of science, technology and innovation in our development strategies. We need to buttress our recent large investments in higher education, particularly in the areas of science and technology, taking consciously into account the aspect of innovation. We must focus on key sources of economic growth, such as an advanced and state-of-the-art manufacturing sector which is founded on the use of new as well as established scientific and technological knowledge.

In this regard, a modern manufacturing sector must also acknowledge the potential role of existing technologies, especially generic technologies mentioned before, such as biotechnology, nanotechnology, new materials and the information and communications technology, which all have broad applications and impacts on the economy. Economic change is largely a process by which knowledge is transformed into goods and services.

Creating links between knowledge generation and enterprise development will therefore be one of our greatest challenges. It should be obvious that we must first generate resources before they can be allocated to priority areas such as social services, health and education in order to improve the lives of our people.

This is no time for reduction in investment in infrastructure. Focus should therefore be placed on improving infrastructural services as a foundation for technology, including public utilities such as power, telecommunications, water supply, public works, transportation and environmental protection.

I say this with a question in mind: is there indeed a scarcity of capital combined with an abundance of labour in Trinidad and Tobago? If that is so, what do we do, with a sense of urgency, when there is no “big machine” as someone put it, no Alutrint, for example, to absorb idle manpower? It is a matter worth considering.

We are yet to accomplish the kind of income distribution that makes for a more even standard of living throughout the country. Poverty eradication is still, or ought to be, high on the agenda. But any sustained programme to eradicate poverty must have at its core community development and appropriate government policies must be in place with that in mind.

There are some who say that our shortcomings, in this respect, reflect the fact that, over the years, we have betrayed the dream of those who fought for our Independence. They say we have embraced, instead, a pervasive cancer that has been eating away at the self-respect of most of the masses which constrains them to a life of dependency on the next “masa”. Some, particularly among our youth, have chosen what they consider to be their escape route by living on the wild side and taking, by whatever means, what is perceived to be their piece of the pie.

It is my view that an accelerated social revolution can take place, based on a concept of education different from that which many of us have to come to accept. It is a concept that breaks down barriers erected between classes on the notion that education at the upper strata, that is the university level, cannot relate to education of the masses, which is described as skills training of a more practical nature.

The teaching of the motor mechanics, carpentry, bricklaying, plumbing, dressmaking and tailoring, pottery, planting rice, other food crops, herbs and cocoa or any other skills, should be used as a means of broader education, just as the intention in teaching of the arts and sciences at tertiary level should be to train individuals to think, not only to be certified.

When we all, policymakers, trainers and those being trained grasp that idea, success would be measured not only by the passing of examinations but by a better understanding of where our training fits into the wider and the more inclusive spectrum of national development. It is a concept that truly engages the intellect, whatever the choice of subject, consequent occupation and the social stratum of the individual, whereby all legitimate work is accepted as honourable. This can lead to the linking of towns and villages and the eradication of social insecurity, which, many would agree, leads to resentment.

This is not a task for the short term and engaging in it must mean that our vitality must not be sapped. It means also that the individual must not take precedence over the cause and policies so established that partisan preoccupations are not allowed to prevail. We keep hearing that Trinidad and Tobago belongs to all of us, yet, the evidence does not indicate that we have come away from the tendency to promote "our own". Our policies and practices must reflect a determination to ensure equal opportunity for all of our citizens, regardless of political affiliation or any other subjective consideration.

Opportunity for all, enhanced productive capacity and productivity must be at the centre of our efforts to move Trinidad and Tobago from where we are to where we ought to be, given the resources with which we are endowed. With this in mind, managers must be committed to proper management and time must be devoted by supervisors to training those under their charge so that there is more knowledge of what is required rather than learning from mistakes. Without this kind of leadership, the best policies will fail.

"Our task now", as John F. Kennedy once said "is not to fix the blame for the past, but to fix the course for the future" and, if I may add, in a paraphrase: with our eyes on the next generation, not the next election.

In closing, I wish all parliamentarians, Government, Opposition, Independent Senators and your support staff a most successful session.

May God bless our nation.

2.48 p.m.: *House suspended.*

2.51 p.m.: *His Excellency the President, accompanied by the President of the Senate and the Speaker of the House of Representatives, left the Chamber.*

3.00 p.m.: *Sitting resumed.*

PAPER LAID

Address by His Excellency the President on the occasion of the opening of the Second Session of the Tenth Parliament of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago. [*The Minister of Housing and the Environment (Hon. Dr. Roodal Moonilal)*]

To be printed as a House Paper.

STATEMENTS BY MINISTER

Red House Refurbishment

The Prime Minister (Hon. Kamla Persad-Bissessar): Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today is historic for the reason that this may be the last Ceremonial Opening that we will have here at the Red House before it is refurbished and brought back into its glory. We had given the commitment as a Government that the Red House will remain the seat of Parliament, and so with that commitment we understand and know that this place has become unsafe for all of us sitting here.

We had experiences recently where the electricity on more than one occasion gave us some cause for concern, and I do know that the Clerk of the House has raised many concerns for herself, for her staff more importantly, and so cognizant of those concerns we took the decision knowing full well that we may have to leave this place for a while, but also knowing full well that we shall return to this place—to this Red House.

We took the decision to make an investment in the refurbishment of this place that has been the seat of our democracy for so long. So today, as I say, it is historic in that regard because whilst we look forward to the refurbishment works, it may well be that we will not have another Ceremonial Opening here for maybe two years, and so we are very grateful that God has brought us to this place as we serve the people of Trinidad and Tobago.

Welcome and Thanks

Mr. Speaker, I want to welcome today all of us back to the second session. I want to thank all those who have served in this august Chamber over the past year, the first session, to thank you for your contributions as we look forward to more stimulated contributions in the Second Session of this Tenth Parliament. I want to thank in particular the Leader on the other side, the Opposition Leader,

Dr. Keith Rowley. I want to thank the Chief Whip who today conspired with me that we both are in grey, and so I want to thank all Members on my left and on my right.

I want to welcome the new Senators and MPs who would come in, in service to this Parliament—*[Interruption]* Well, there are no new MPs, you are right, the new Senators and Ministers. As I say thank you to those who served us before, I thank my partners in Government who have been very cooperative and of great assistance and guidance to me and to the Government. And so, hon. Speaker, I thank you for taking us through this first year, and I do believe all will agree with me that you have taken us to a higher level in the debate in this Parliament, in lifting the debate in this Parliament and enforcing the rules of the House. Let me welcome back my erstwhile colleague, the Member for San Fernando East, who is back in the Parliament. *[Applause]* *[Mr. Manning stands and bows to Hon. Kamla Persad-Bissessar]* *[Laughter]*

I want to say, hon. Members, through you, Mr. Speaker, I call for cooperation from all of us—Government, Opposition—in the national interest as we continue to confront our challenges. Those challenges are both on the social front, on the economic front, and indeed in many areas of our society. I ask that we work together as we have in the past, and maybe intensify those efforts in the national interest as we seek to transform our institutions, and indeed, to take our nation to a greater height.

Mr. Speaker, I give the commitment that my eyes will focus on the next generation, and that is why we have spent so much time, as His Excellency pointed out, on the whole area, the whole arena of education. His Excellency did mention as a plus, the areas of training and education and so I give that commitment to this Parliament, and my Government will remain committed to the next generation as we grow that generation to transform our economy. *[Applause]*

Proposed Legislative Agenda

Mr. Speaker, I know that many times we have talked about a legislative agenda, and in our First Session we focused on the urgency to fight crime, to deal with financial problems we inherited which pose a threat to the stability of our economy. The package of crime-fighting legislation we passed included—and I think some people may not remember so I take this opportunity to remind.

We passed the Anti-Gang Act, the Anti-Terrorism (Amdt.) Act, the Bail (Amdt.) Act, the Data Protection Act, the Financial Intelligence Unit of Trinidad

and Tobago (Amdt.) Act, and may I say that Trinidad and Tobago because of our efforts—and I thank all those who were involved—we have been taken out of the dark grey area by the relevant authorities with respect to the FIU and have been placed on a better footing because of the work that we did over the past several months. So we passed the Financial Intelligence Unit of Trinidad and Tobago (Amdt.) Act—one, and we passed also a No. 2 amendment to bring us into compliance so that we will not be in that dark grey area that would have placed Trinidad and Tobago at tremendous risk from international financial institutions and from international focus, as it were, on the camera in the international arena.

We also passed the Firearms (Amdt.) Act; we have passed the Interception of Communications Act; we have passed the Interception of Communications (Amdt.) Act, the Miscellaneous Provisions (Bail and Kidnapping) Act. Mr. Speaker, that takes us up to 10, but there is another one—we also passed the Miscellaneous Provisions (Remand) Act. So there was a lot of focus in the First Session of the Tenth Parliament on the anti-crime legislative agenda.

In this session, our Second Session of this Tenth Parliament, my Government intends to continue the legislative attack against crime, to equip the police with the legal tools so as to facilitate new and improved crime-fighting strategies and measures, so we will continue that anti-crime legislative agenda.

We also want to address in the Second Session, a number of very pressing social issues with laws designed to improve the standard of living of all our citizens. Some of these problems have plagued our society for many years; His Excellency pointed that out today in his speech, and may I say his comments are very interesting to us; we will take guidance from his comments in the areas of diversification of the economy. We have been trying in that regard, we will continue in that regard—the biodiversity, the biotechnology, nanotechnology that His Excellency spoke about, and so those are areas that we intend to address in the Second Session.

On the crime front, we have several landmark Bills to be introduced and, Madam, you have asked for the legislative agenda, the Attorney General will give more details, but I have just outlined in a general framework.

We will come with legislation to abolish preliminary inquiries; as many of us know this has been cause for delay at the level of the Magistrates' Courts because they have dragged on for many years. This has led to a loss of confidence by some in the criminal justice system, and so the possibility of direct trial without the need for a preliminary inquiry will not only free up much needed time In

the Magistrates' Court but, guess what, will expedite the prospect of conviction or acquittal. They say justice delayed is justice denied and so we look forward to that legislation coming in this new term. We also want to bring a new DNA Bill to allow police to utilize the latest technology in detection and investigation of crime.

We will bring also in this session a comprehensive overview of the legal aid system which has been conducted with a view to giving special protection to our children by granting special counsel to them. There will also be a dramatic increase in legal fees to encourage more attorneys to represent the interests of those in the courthouses. We are therefore concerned of the need to strike a right balance between the protection of our fundamental constitutional rights whilst at the same time trying to ensure swifter justice.

We will also bring in this session the Private Security Industry Bill. This will regulate private security firms and ensure that they complement the State's security forces to assist in the prevention of crime. It is my hope that this Bill will create a symbiotic relationship such as to lead to greater cooperation between the private sector and our State security agencies. These are some of the measures on the anti-crime legislative agenda.

On the social side, our agenda for legislation here in this Parliament will include the following important Bills: the Family Court Bill. This will provide the legal framework for the operation of a new family court which will be dedicated to family court proceedings. At the moment, we have had a pilot Family Court that has been on autopilot for many years. We need to take the pilot out now into the communities throughout the country.

The nucleus of the family is a very important part of our social fabric and I feel special emphasis and attention is required in this area so that family disputes can be amicably resolved in a very conciliatory atmosphere where the welfare of the child is paramount.

Also, in this parliamentary session, we will bring the Children Bill. This long-awaited law is one I grew hoarse agitating for as an Opposition MP. The lives of our lost children who have suffered and have been snuffed out in mysterious and obscene criminal circumstances have been a stain on this nation's conscience. This Bill is dedicated to the protection of children by creating special rights and offences that are specifically designed to protect our children.

Also, in this parliamentary session, the Second Session of the Tenth Parliament, we will bring here a Bill relating to squatting. The State must

vigorously ascertain its rights against those who are bent on illegally grabbing state lands, and so a Bill will be introduced which seeks to simplify the law and create a more effective procedure to deal with the problem of illegal land grabbing and squatting.

We will also bring in this Second Session, the Dangerous Dogs Bill. The recent attacks on our citizens have prompted much attention by all, and of course, much concern and pain. So the Law Reform Commission is presently reviewing the draft bill, which we plan to introduce, as I say, in this session to deal with that problem.

Another area of reform and legislation will be the land reform legislation: two major bills, which deal with the question of regularization of land title, will be reintroduced in this session. This is of special importance for the people of Tobago who have suffered for too long, because they have not been able to legally own the land, to have title, to have paper, to have a deed, even though they and their families have lived on that land for generations.

I am very pleased to announce, hon. Speaker and Members, that the hon. Attorney General will present a detailed legislative agenda in this session, and we will continue with that as I have placed under his new portfolio an item that was never there before, a legislative agenda, and so he will secure that for the Parliament.

Hon. Speaker, I want to thank you again; all of you, thank you very much. May God continue to bless you and to bless our nation. Thank you. [*Applause*]

MOTOR VEHICLES AND ROAD TRAFFIC

(MISCELLANEOUS PROVISIONS) (NO. 2) BILL, 2011

A Bill to amend the Motor Vehicles and Road Traffic Act, Chap. 48:50 and the Motor Vehicles and Road Traffic (Enforcement and Administration) Act, Chap. 48:52 [*The Minister of Transport*]; read the first time.

ADJOURNMENT

The Minister of Housing and the Environment (Hon. Dr. Roodal Moonilal):
Mr. Speaker, there being no other business, I beg to move that this House do now adjourn to a date to be fixed.

Question put and agreed to.

House adjourned accordingly.

Adjourned at 3.17 p.m.