

*Appropriation Bill, 2011*

*Tuesday, October 18, 2011*

**HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES**

*Tuesday, October 18, 2011*

The House met at 10.00 a.m.

**PRAYERS**

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

**APPROPRIATION (FINANCIAL YEAR 2012) BILL, 2011**

[Fourth Day]

*Order read for resuming adjourned debate on question* [October 10, 2011]:

That the Bill be now read a second time.

*Question again proposed.*

**Miss Marlene McDonald** (*Port of Spain South*): Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and indeed thanks to all the Members on this side. Thank you for giving me this opportunity to join this debate, and it is really heartening to have to be almost at the end of this debate, Mr. Speaker, because I listened to well over ten Government Ministers speak on this budget, and I really do not believe that the listening public, the national community, quite understand exactly what we are doing here, or quite understand the budget—the budget details. But before I get there, it behooves me this morning to clarify certain issues, which the hon. Prime Minister made yesterday afternoon.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to place on *Hansard* that I joined the Ministry of Community Development November of 2007. And may I state that upon my arrival there and on the assumption of my duties, with respect to the Financial Assistance Programme, which was loosely called a scholarship programme, that programme was closed temporarily until the third week in January, 2008. The reason why—[*Interruption*]

As Minister, I closed that programme. The reason I closed it is because I needed to get a better understanding of what the programme actually involves.

Mr. Speaker, it also gave me the opportunity to put in place a structure to deal with the particular programme. Indeed a committee was formed. The committee was headed by Mr. Wayne Wood as the Chairman. The other committee members were Mr. Victor Mc Eachrane, Dr. Valerie Hackshaw, Mr. Roger Kawalsingh and Ms. Amita Ganga. Those were the five members of the committee, Sir. And they assumed responsibility for the programme with their policy document, they had

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guidelines, also, Mr. Speaker, the application forms were all re-done and were all placed on the Ministry's website. This was done in January of 2008. And, indeed, every Wednesday it was not unusual to see the entire committee meeting and interviewing applicants. In other words, then, the Minister removed herself from the process, and this independent committee assessed all applications.

Mr. Speaker, let me state quite categorically that this process continued under the current Minister when I demitted office in May of 2010, and even further, two of the members of that committee continue to operate on the new Financial Assistance Committee, and they are Mr. Roger Kawalsingh and Ms. Amita Ganga. So a proper system was put in place. A proper system, Mr. Speaker, was put in place. And what I found very disingenuous was that the periods were not divided, Sir. I could account for what I did from January 2008 to May of 2010.

So, Mr. Speaker, having said that, and having placed that on record, because the current Minister could attest to what I have just said here; there is no doubt about it, I will continue my contribution to this debate.

Mr. Speaker, my objective this morning is quite simple. I am here to try to demystify this budget so that the ordinary person can understand what has happened in this budget. And I want to say from the top also that when I speak, I speak to you, Mr. Speaker, and I speak to the national community. I speak, more importantly, to the members of my constituency. So if these members of Government are not interested, that is not a problem. I speak to you, Mr. Speaker, and I speak to the national community.

Mr. Speaker, before I begin my analysis, I need to explain to the national community exactly what a budget is because we have been speaking here, and I do not think that anyone—and as you know I like defining my terms. That word, budget, is from that old French “*bougette*”, which means purse or little bag, presumably, because one's wealth was kept in some little bag. And we see a budget as a list of all planned expenses and expenditure. A budget is an important concept in macroeconomics. As a matter of fact, it is an organizational plan stated in monetary terms.

Mr. Speaker, from my understanding, a budget is supposed to outline to a country how a government is going to develop a country over a given period of time. The budget must set a clear direction, clear and identifiable direction as to where a country should go. It is my understanding also that in a budget certain items must be identified. You must identify your revenue streams. You must identify all your expenses. Let me go even further to state that a government, any

government, should state clearly exactly what is the composition of that total expenditure. And total expenditure comprises two elements: the element of capital expenditure, and the element of recurrent expenditure.

With respect to the capital expenditures, Mr. Speaker, these are basically expenditures creating future benefits, and this is where the development of the country takes place. And so you must identify, Mr. Speaker, clearly, your development plans for the country. And this is done through the Public Sector Investment Programme (PSIP) and the Social Sector Investment Programme (SSIP).

Mr. Speaker, the SSIP will be critical to countries or societies with a high level of social dislocation like Trinidad and Tobago. So when a government invests in the SSIP, it is an indication of the social conscience of that government. The PSIP takes care of the physical development of a country, for example, the building of highways, of roads of drainage of public buildings, and, Mr. Speaker, the recurrent expenditure does not—[*Interruption*]

Mr. Speaker, could I ask the Member for Fyzabad for some quietness, please.

**Mr. Speaker:** Member for Fyzabad, please allow the Member to speak in silence.

**Miss M. McDonald:** It does not result, Mr. Speaker, in the creation of any kind of assets. Instead, Mr. Speaker, the recurrent expenditure is really operational expenses used for running the day-to-day operations of a government. And they involve things like personal expenditure spent on wages and salaries, the purchases of goods and services, current transfers and subsidies and debt servicing, which is the repayment of your principal—on your principal on both loans: both the local loans and your foreign loans.

Mr. Speaker, I would have thought that when I read the review of the economy I would have expected to see a comparative report. When I picked up that booklet, I expected to see how the economy performed in 2011. There were projected figures, and then you need to tell us what were the actual figures, and then we look at the projected figures for 2012.

Mr. Speaker, I have to state this morning, it was one of the worst written budget statements I have ever seen. It gave me—and Mr. Speaker, I am accustomed—I am a former student of economics. The Member for Tunapuna taught me at university, taught me basic math at university. And I can tell you that when I read it, when I read that budget statement I was totally, totally taken back. But the comparative report that we were looking for was non-existent.

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Mr. Speaker, Trinidad and Tobago has been hit hard, so we need to look at the scenario. And Trinidad and Tobago has been hit hard by the global economic crisis. We have seen a slowdown in the US economy and the region. We have seen a steep fall in energy prices. We have even seen the collapse of CL Financial Group, and all of them working together would have slowed our growth rate in Trinidad and Tobago. That is my understanding. But I hasten to add at this point, that the fiscal savings in the earlier years under the former PNM administration together with the falling debt, the accumulation of assets, including international reserves, provided this country with the buffer, with the space, Mr. Speaker, to deal with their deterioration—to deal with their fiscal deterioration and the rapid increase in the debt ratio in this country.

I just want to remind this House that at May 31, 2010, when we demitted office, US \$300 billion in the Heritage and Stabilisation Fund; the debt to GDP ratio stood at 38.5 per cent, it is now at 50 per cent; the foreign reserves at \$11 billion. Mr. Speaker, permit me to examine some of the macroeconomic fundamentals. I want to go quickly and look at the economic growth projection that the Minister has made for Trinidad and Tobago for 2012.

The Minister projects the country's economic growth for 2012 at 1.7 per cent. Mr. Speaker, this is quite unrealistic. And I say that very boldly to the Minister this morning. Given the outlook for growth around the world for 2012 that government projected economic growth for 2011 at 2 per cent, however under your stewardship, Mr. Minister, you have recorded a negative growth of minus 1.4 per cent.

Let me give you a global perspective. In the United States, according to the White House, the US economy expanded at a meagre 1.6 per cent in the second quarter of 2011. The projected economic growth for 2012 for the United States is 3 per cent. The United Kingdom, according to the British Chamber of Commerce, economic growth slowed to 0.7 per cent in the second quarter from 1.6 per cent registered in the first quarter of 2011. And the projected economic growth for 2012 is 1 per cent for the United Kingdom.

In the Euro area, the first quarter of 2011, there was increased growth by some 3 per cent, but the data suggest that growth decelerated to about 1.5 per cent rate in the second quarter of 2011.

In Germany, Mr. Speaker, according to the Bundesbank, there is evidence of slowdown in the growth rate in Germany, which had been the driver of the

economic resurgence in the Euro area. The projected economic growth for Germany for 2012 is just 1.8 per cent. In Japan, according to the economic watch magazine the projected economic growth for 2012 is 2 per cent.

Let us look at growth in the emerging market economies, India and China—growth in these countries reached 7.8 per cent and 9.5 per cent during the first and second quarters of 2011. Brazil had a healthy growth of 4.2 per cent in the second quarters of 2011. But even for these emerging economies, the outlook is still gloomy.

Coming closer to home, Mr. Speaker, let us look at Jamaica. Jamaica reported real GDP growth of just 1.4 per cent for the first quarter in 2011, and that is following four consecutive quarters of decline.

In Barbados they experienced a 2.1 per cent growth in the first quarter of 2011 due to increased tourist arrivals. We have been talking about GDP and whatnot, and again it behooves me to state exactly what is GDP to the national community, and GDP is gross domestic product, and this refers to the market value of all final goods and services produced in a country in a given period of time.

The GDP is commonly used as an indicator of the economic health of a country. It is really, Mr. Speaker, a gauge to a country's standard of living; so through the eyes of the GDP, Mr. Speaker, where you are going to measure economic growth, let us now look at sectoral growth; what has happened to the various sectors in Trinidad and Tobago.

When we examine sectoral growth in Trinidad and Tobago, according to the Central Bank statistics, nearly all of the country's major growth poles registered negative growth for 2011. Agriculture registered negligible increase of just 2 per cent, Mr. Speaker—an increase—the manufacturing sector, a negligible increase of 1 per cent; the construction sector registered negative 7.9 per cent; the petroleum sector, negative 0.4 per cent; the services sector, negative 1.3 per cent; natural gas, negative 2.2 per cent; petrochemical, which would be like your ammonia, your methanol, your urea: ammonia registered negative 7.0 per cent; methanol, negative 2.2 per cent.

I could not find too much information, Member for Toco/Sangre Grande, on tourist arrivals. What I do know is that there was a 22 per cent decrease. But the only figures that I found—well, you can clear it up—the only figures I found was that airline arrivals, in your review of the economy, when I read it revealed that there was a decline by 9.7 per cent over the period 2009/2010. But to see what actually happened in 2011, I did not find anything, Sir.

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Mr. Speaker, this Government is in denial about the dwindling contribution of the energy sector to our overall GDP. That is why they continue to rely on increases in global energy prices in order to book their income while doing very little to diversify the economy away from oil and gas. Indeed, Mr. Speaker, I am proffering reasons to the Minister this morning why I am of the opinion that we cannot achieve a 1.7 per cent economic growth in 2012. Mr. Speaker, this is a failed strategy, for, according to the Ryder Scott Audit Report our proven gas reserves have fallen by 7 per cent from 2009/2010. Worse yet, our oil and gas exploration and production are down, and the prognosis for the future is bleak. Oil production, Mr. Speaker, is less than 100,000 barrels per day, the lowest since 1958, and the outlook for the rest of 2011 is dismal with production showing less than 96,000 barrels per day.

The statistics are clear, because we are still a gas-based economy. So let us consider the energy contribution as a percentage of our overall production of goods and services, that is, our GDP. In 2010, the energy sector contributed 42.9 per cent to the GDP. In 2011, it was 43.5 per cent. In 2012, it was 38.5 per cent. And to the Minister, if this Government were serious about diversifying the economy away from the energy, although I have seen here a 5 per cent reduction on the reliance of oil and gas, one would have expected to see a more significant decline in the energy contribution to the GDP.

On the question of unemployment, Mr. Speaker, before the current Government came into office, Trinidad and Tobago enjoyed—we were talking in terms of the state of full employment, and the last figure that we had in unemployment fell to 4.8 per cent in the second quarter of 2010. And certainly, even when I looked at the economic outlook from the Central Bank, they had no figures, current figures, available. But, Mr. Speaker, the IMF is reporting unemployment of 7.8 per cent for Trinidad and Tobago. That is what the IMF is reporting. On the question.—[*Interruption*]

**Dr. Rowley:** Where they got that from? Who told them that?

**Miss M. McDonald:** The IMF did their own independent—apparently there was an IMF team in this country. They did some country report—[*Interruption*]

Pardon me?

**Mr. Imbert:** They got it from the CSO.

**Miss M. McDonald:** Anyway. Mr. Speaker, even the Central Bank on the question of inflation, the Central Bank Governor has reported declines in

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inflation, but he also cautions this Government, and I want to quote him. The source is, September 2011; it was a media release on the repo rate announcement of the Central Bank. And this is what the Governor had to say, and I quote him:

“Whereas inflationary pressures appear to be well contained for the time being, downside risk to a stronger revival of the domestic recovery remain amidst rising concern that the global recovery”—global—“is faltering.”

And he went on to something that concerns me too.

“The reduction in business hours for some firms in the context of the State of Emergency could have a dampening effect on activity in the non-energy sector in the final months of 2011.”

So the Government is totally out of touch with reality by projecting a growth rate of 1.7 per cent. This Government has not yet convinced this nation why it had to declare a State of Emergency without examining the economic effects it would have.

Mr. Speaker, let me just give you my personal experience. I went somewhere one Saturday and going back home, I decided to get something to eat.

**Hon. Member:** Where you went?

**Miss M. McDonald:** That is not in issue here. And I went to TGI Friday’s around the Savannah to get something to eat. And, Mr. Speaker, I got there at ten past nine that Saturday night. *[Interruption]*

Yes, I was going for a salad, actually. *[Desk thumping]* When I got there, there was the guard and there was, I guess, the supervisor standing at the door, and they said to me, “Sorry, Ma’am, we are closed at nine o’clock”. Nine o’clock they are closed! So your businesses close down because they need to clear up and get their staff going to get out in time for the state of emergency.

Mr. Speaker, let me tell you that the business people in this country—and I am saying this vehemently this morning—the business people in this country are having two conversations in the country right now with this Government. One, they are saying loudly that they support the State of Emergency. They are living that publicly, but under the table they are telling us on this side, they are saying to us, “All yuh try and geh rid of dah state of emergency, argue it out in Parliament, get rid of that state of emergency”, because of the economic losses for them. And, you know, some of them even go further and try to quantify the amount of losses they have suffered to date. *[Interruption]*

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But they “fraid”, they “fraid”. If it was the PNM, they would not be afraid. They are talking and walking and whatnot and whatnot, because we are not vindictive people. [*Desk thumping*] And I stand here proudly and say that: we are not. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Speaker, on the issue of fiscal matters; in dealing with fiscal policy, one needs to focus on the following: we need to look at our revenue streams. We need to look at our expenditure, and we need to assess the split between capital expenditure and recurrent expenditure. We need to look at our deficit, and the debt situation in the country.

Mr. Speaker, with respect to the revenue, revenue reported for 2011 was \$45 billion, and this was against an estimated \$41.3 billion. But I want to state this morning that this increase was primarily due to the increase in oil prices, and it does not represent any effort on the part of the Government to diversify this economy. [*Desk thumping*] It does not. This level of revenue now being projected, the revenue of \$47 billion is unattainable given the weak performance of both our energy and our non-energy sectors and the declining trend of oil and gas prices worldwide, and might I say to the Minister this morning that oil prices are unpredictable. This projected revenue for 2012 is based on an oil price of 2.75, MMBtu netback—that is the gas price; sorry, the gas price.

Mr. Speaker, but I question this netback price they are using. Fiscal 2011 recorded weaker performances in the energy and non-energy sector. There was decline in crude oil production by 8 per cent. There was decline in natural gas by 2.2 per cent. The value added in the energy and the non-energy sectors declined overall. The energy sector declined by 2.7 per cent, and the non-energy sector by 0.8 per cent. And as I said before, the oil production is less than a hundred thousand barrels a day since 1958, when 226 barrels per day were being produced.

There is a decrease in energy production related to the temporary shutdowns at BHP Billiton and bpTT due to upgrade and maintenance work at those facilities. Falling natural gas production also affected our output in the petrochemical sector. It affected ammonia, it affected methanol, it affected urea. Mr. Speaker, it is generally accepted that Trinidad and Tobago is a gas-based economy. The Minister of Finance has relied heavily on gas revenues to support his budget. And as I said, he has predicated this on a revenue of US \$2.75 per MMBtu netback. But I have serious questions about this strategy; serious, Mr. Minister, since the trend for gas prices worldwide is down. The price of Henry hub has fallen below \$4.00



and is now trading at around, when I last checked, US \$3.50. And according to the Barclays Capital, the outlook for between short-to-medium-term gas prices are negative due to the worldwide economic downturn.

So, Mr. Minister, I have to look at this in the context of what you have budgeted. I have to assess it in the context of whether we are going to achieve our revenue. I have to look at it in the context of what should you do with your expenditure. I have to look at it in the context of the deficit that we are going to record, Mr. Minister.

Mr. Speaker, rather than boost revenues from the petroleum and petrochemical sectors, the Minister has resorted to a taxation strategy of all the actors in the industry, and has imposed licence fees in some cases of up to 1,000 per cent. And these measures, I see them as de facto tax, because these fees, these increased fees will be passed on to the consumers of the products. So it is an indirect tax, so to speak.

Mr. Speaker, natural gas prices could be reduced even further due to other countries producing natural gas, and which will contribute to an oversupply. And due to the laws, the basic laws in economics, the laws of supply and demand, once you have oversupply prices will fall according to the laws of supply and demand—basics in economics.

Mr. Speaker, the performance of the non-energy sector for fiscal 2011 was dismal. As I said, the manufacturing sector, minuscule increase. The construction sector remained subdued. There have been decreases in retail sales of hardware and construction materials. The local sales of cement are declining. The imports of construction materials have declined. So, Mr. Speaker—and the Minister has budgeted 28—because he split the revenue—\$28.9 billion in revenue from the non-energy sector. So I question the Minister, where is he getting this revenue from, when all these different sectors are showing negative growth, and those that are showing some form of growth are showing very negligible increases.

Let us look at revenue from taxation, and I want to look at lands and buildings taxation. My colleague from Diego Martin North/East has dealt extensively with this, but I need to touch on it. And I am saying that since, Mr. Minister, you are looking to stipulate economic growth and increase your revenue, you need to look closely at that lands and buildings taxes. Your “axe the tax” policy was wrong for this country. I do not believe that the right-thinking citizens of this country would refuse to pay any kind of lands and buildings taxes. I refuse to believe that. It is two years, and we are going to the third year, that we have not paid taxes. This is

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the third year. So in a situation where we have a big deficit on our hands, every single cent will count, Mr. Minister, and the gurus are saying to us, and saying publicly, that the loss to the Treasury was \$300 million for the two years of no lands and buildings taxes.

Mr. Speaker, on this question about the NIS payments, I know that the political leader has dealt a lot with it also, but I will just touch briefly. The Minister proposes to increase the insurable monthly ceiling from \$8,300 to \$10,000. It would seem that the intention is to add another class of contributions: people who are operating above \$10,000, because currently, it is up to \$8,300, that is my understanding, where the employee pays \$68.94 per week, and the employer contributes twice the amount, \$137.88. But the Minister has stated that this increase in the monthly ceiling will help fund the increase in the guaranteed minimum pension.

Mr. Minister through you, Mr. Speaker, the question I have this morning is, who is going to fund these increases? You have not come here with an increase in NIS payments. And the question in your wrapping up, you should tell us the actuarial report that is due. Do you have the actuarial report? Is the work going on? When will we see that actuarial report which will inform us as to the formation of this new category and then the addition of 115,000 self-employed persons? We want to know, because you see, one can stand here and talk loftily about plans. It is when you begin to roll out those plans, it is at the implementation stage you begin to see all the problems associated with the plans.

With the expansion I see another indirect tax coming, and I see it in the expansion of the deposit insurance coverage. Mr. Speaker, we have just witnessed the Clico debacle and as a consequence, we could appreciate the increase in the deposit insurance coverage from \$75,000 to \$125,000. But the question is, who will pay for this increase? Because banks, their insurance premiums, certainly, will be increased, and they need to pass those fees on. And those fees will be passed on to their customers. So everyone who holds an account in a financial institution as defined by the Financial Institution Act, 2008, those persons will be liable to pay those increased fees. Somewhere along the line they are going to have to do it. And I see that as a further indirect tax to the consumers, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, as part of the fiscal measures for 2011 the Minister, at page 32, introduced measures to improve the production of oil and gas. With specific reference to oil, the Minister stated that the present tax regime, that is that of 50 per cent of petroleum taxes, that is for exploration in the deep-water blocks, that

was reduced in 2011 from 50 per cent to 35 per cent, and the Minister claimed that the 50 per cent was too high, that we will now become more competitive if we reduce it and bring us in line with other countries.

Mr. Speaker, this fiscal measure taken by Government has failed miserably—has failed miserably in 2011. And not only that, Mr. Speaker, the deep-water production continues to lag and we are yet to see any increases in our proven reserves.

Mr. Speaker, on the expenditure side, in their 2011 budget, Government projected \$49 billion in expenditure. However, for the first eight months of the new financial year, 2011, the Government demonstrated its inability, its incompetence and lack of capacity to spend as projected. But when you are doing that—you see, what they fail to realize, you must have a plan. You must have a plan of how you are going to spend that kind of money. You must have a programme outlined as to how you are going to deal with it. So rather than register a deficit, Mr. Speaker, of 3 per cent of the GDP as projected, the Government found itself showing a fiscal surplus of 0.6 per cent of GDP, or at the early part of the year \$1.2 billion in surplus.

Mr. Speaker, their actual expenditure then was almost 10 per cent below the budgeted expenditure, and the capital expenditure with the first half of 2011, was almost \$300 million a month, and when they saw the months coming down towards the end of the financial year, which is September 30, they began to spend at the rate of a billion dollars per month. So I do not have—and these are your figures, Mr. Minister; I did not just pull them out of a hat. These are your figures that I am quoting and analyzing. So I have no confidence in their ability to spend \$54.6 billion.

Mr. Speaker, I want to take a look at the Government's expenditure, this is for this year—and what portion of it is the recurrent expenditure and the capital expenditure. Mr. Speaker, the recurrent expenditure projected for 2012 is \$53.7 billion. And if you break it down it is \$51.5 billion for recurrent expenditure, and the total capital expenditure is \$3.2 billion. So you get to a total of \$54.8 billion. But there is still a figure from the IDF of \$4.3 billion, because to get to your total capital expenditure it is what you have from the Consolidated Fund, the \$3.2 billion, plus the IDF figure of \$4.3 billion, which gives you—and it is in your books—\$7.6 billion. So you get to a figure of something like about \$58 billion, really, which includes everything inside of there.

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Now, if you are doing—and you are saying that your projected revenue is \$47 billion. So let us do the math—47 from 58, that is \$11 billion. So that is your deficit. How are you going to finance that? You are going to finance it—according to this book here, your draft estimates of \$6.6 billion. Okay? And, therefore, it leaves an unfinanced amount of \$4.4 billion.

Mr. Speaker, the question I have for the Minister this morning is, how are you going to finance that \$4.4 billion? I hope that at the end of this session you will be able to explain.

Mr. Speaker, I want to put on the table this morning, as I said at the top, capital expenditure stimulates growth, so the emphasis should be on your capital programme. And, Minister, what is the composition of the capital expenditure? Does it make sense? Is it assisting economic growth? How productive is your capital expenditure, and how is that expenditure linked to the future? Those are the questions I have, Mr. Speaker.

The question is, how do you propose, Mr. Minister, to move this economy forward on virtually the same level of spending in the PSIP, your \$7.4 billion in 2011 and now \$7.6 billion for 2012?

With respect to the deficit, Mr. Speaker, I want to state that this Government has continued this policy of trying to generate growth in the economy through deficit spending. President Barack Obama experimented with this approach, and he failed miserably. And today we are looking at the spectre in the United States of double-dip inflation. So I want to urge the Minister to look at this carefully.

I wonder if you all understand what it means to be running a country on a deficit. I will concede that deficit financing might be necessary for a short period of time to stimulate your economy, because as somebody said—I think was the Member for Chaguanas West or one of them—that you need to spend to get out of it. You need to inject money to get out of it. And whilst I agree with that, Mr. Minister, you need to develop a strategy. You need to tell us. So this is the second year of deficit financing. What is the strategy? Have I enunciated in my budgetary proposals to move this country out of deficit financing by a given period of time? Let us see the measures that you intend to employ in order to achieve such objective.

Mr. Speaker, all I can say is that rather than stimulate the economy, this amount of deficit spending will have catastrophic consequences for the economy and the people of Trinidad and Tobago. Our debt to GDP ratio will skyrocket based on the Government taking up all the approved borrowings. And let me

state, that the ratio, the debt to GDP ratio, now stands at 50 per cent. And if they should pick up the borrowings that they came here and got approved earlier this year, I think it was in August, it may very well go—that ratio could very well go up to 60 per cent or 70 per cent. In other words, Mr. Speaker, this Government is gambling the country away. And I want to tell the Minister this morning, I plead with you, Mr. Minister, this is not a game of chance, this is not Play Whe, this is not Pick 2, this is not Cash Pot, this is a country you are running and you need to demonstrate fiscal responsibility and sobriety in running this country, Mr. Speaker. [*Desk thumping*]

Where will the revenues come from? Where will they come from? Tell us, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, on the supply side, the monetary supply side, the general lack of business confidence in the economy has impacted the banking sector and this is demonstrated by the low levels of commercial lending in an environment of high liquidity. Commercial banks' excess reserves at the Central Bank jumped to 4.6. [*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. [*Mr. N. Hypolite*]

*Question put and agreed to.*

[*Desk thumping*]

**Miss M. McDonald:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Thank you Member for Laventille West, and thank you, colleagues.

Mr. Speaker, on the Central Bank side, we witnessed repeated reductions in the repo rate reaching an all-time low of 3 per cent by September 2011 and this, in turn, has resulted in the continuing reduction in the prime lending rate. In the commercial banks they are now down to 7.75 per cent. There seems to be revival, though, in consumer credit. It moved from 4.1 per cent in December 2010, to 6.7 per cent by April 2011. However, business demand for credit is still quite weak, Mr. Speaker, showing a steady decrease from negative 5.1 per cent in September 2010 to negative 5.9 per cent by April 2011, so it is an overall decrease of 0.8 per cent in business lending.

Mr. Speaker, who created these conditions? And the blame rests squarely at the feet of the present administration. By their actions and omissions, they have driven away business. They have cancelled contracts with suppliers. They have

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called the state of emergency without thinking about the economic effects of it. They have caused a flight of capital. They have created uncertainty in the minds of the population, and it is they who hem and haw, Mr. Speaker, but that is management, UNC style. [*Desk thumping*]

And, you recall when the Member for Tunapuna, Minister of Finance came into office, he said the Treasury was empty, and I just quoted to the Member US \$3 billion in the Heritage and Stabilisation Fund, US \$11 billion in foreign reserves and the debt to GDP ratio was at 38.5 per cent. That is—[*Interruption*]

Mr. Speaker, the exchange rates—let us look at the exchange rates stability. Mr. Speaker, in addition to our troubles with falling energy production and projected declining revenues, especially for gas, I am very concerned about the stability of our exchange rate. Since this Government came into office in May 2010 there has been a significant and worrisome depreciation of the Trinidad and Tobago dollar vis-à-vis other major world currencies. And let me tell you, these figures are taken from the Central Bank's website. Let me give you some figures, Mr. Speaker.

The currency: the US currency, May 2010, stood at—the exchange was 6.37; TT \$6.37 to US \$1.00. By August of 2011 that figure jumped to 6.42 and the period high was 6.42. The Canadian dollar, May 2010, was TT \$6.24 to \$1.00 Canadian, but by August 2011 it was \$6.65 and the period high was 6.94. The Euro dollar: by May 2010 it was 8.14, by August 2011 it jumped to 9.29 with a period high of 9.37. The pound sterling was at 9.54 in May of 2010, by August 2011 it skyrocketed to 10.65 and the period high was 10.66. Mr. Speaker, this is a disturbing trend, because since so much of our consumption and productive inputs are imported we are also importing inflation.

Mr. Speaker, I want to touch briefly on an area of expenditure, and that is the Ministry of the Attorney General. Mr. Speaker, in the details of the estimates of the recurrent expenditure for 2012 for the Ministry of the Attorney General, the Government projects increases in personal expenditure of \$3.9 million over the 2011 revised expenditure level and there is also an addition to contract labour of \$9.4 million over the same period. I make this observation, Mr. Speaker, because the Ministry of the Attorney General has the ability to hire consultants. They have the ability to hire attorneys—qualified attorneys—to assist the Attorney General in the execution of his duties. But I need to point out, Mr. Speaker, that for 2012 there is a projection of \$94.5 million in fees; fees alone for the Attorney General for 2012. Now, these fees—let me give you a breakdown of these fees: \$3 million

for expenses of overseas counsel and foreign witnesses; \$33 million for retainers for local and foreign attorneys; \$50 million for forensic investigation fees, and \$8.5 million for other—whatever that means. And, Mr. Speaker, as a former student of accounts, I know when you put “other” when you use “miscellaneous”, when you use “contingency”, I know you have a problem in there. Go and start looking. [*Interruption*]

Mr. Speaker—I will not put up with your disrespect this morning, at all— [*Desk thumping*] from the Member for Lopinot/Bon Air West, Mr. Speaker.

**Mr. Speaker:** You have my full protection, Ma’am. Do not disturb the hon. Member.

**Miss M. McDonald:** So, Mr. Speaker, that \$8.5 million represents “other”. What is the “other”? The Minister needs to define what is the other. The nation needs to understand what benefit will be derived from this \$50 million in forensic fees. What you are going to get from \$33 million being paid as retainer for foreign attorneys and local attorneys in the light of the fact that, Mr. Speaker, you have— [*Interruption*]

**Mr. Speaker:** Members for Lopinot/Bon Air West and Diego Martin North/East, please allow the Member to continue in silence.

**Miss M. McDonald:** I want to juxtapose this against what I am going to talk about now. Mr. Speaker, I want to take a look at the Integrity Commission.

Mr. Speaker, section 138(1) of the Constitution of Trinidad and Tobago establishes a body called the Integrity Commission. Section 138(2) outlines the duties of the Commission. Mr. Speaker, the Integrity Commission is an independent body and it is a creature of statute from our Constitution. The Integrity in Public Life Act, No. 83 of 2000, was passed. This is it here. And what does this Act provide for? The Act provides for the establishment of the Integrity Commission. Let me read the long title to this honourable House:

“An Act to provide for the establishment of the Integrity Commission; to make new provisions for the prevention of corruption of persons in public life by providing for public disclosure; to regulate the conduct of persons exercising public functions; to preserve and promote integrity of public officials and institutions, and for matters incidental thereto.”

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Mr. Speaker, section 5(1) says—this is under the objectives or the functions of the Commission. At section 5(1) (e) and (f) it says:

“The Commission shall—

- (e) receive and investigate complaints regarding any alleged breaches of this Act or the commission or any suspected offence under the Prevention of Corruption Act;
- (f) investigate the conduct of any person falling under the purview of the Commission which, in the opinion of the Commission, may be considered dishonest or conducive to corruption.”

Mr. Speaker, as far as I know, on reading this, also as an attorney-at-law, this is the true and appropriate investigating body to look at public officials or anybody in public office [*Desk thumping*] not the Attorney General; not the Attorney General. This Attorney General, he is uncontrollable and he is a—I will stop.

**Mr. Speaker:** Please, please, please.

**Miss M. McDonald:** Mr. Speaker, my understanding is that the Integrity Commission is charged with the responsibility of investigating persons in public life. They are the ones who will carry out forensic investigations in the course of their duties.

Mr. Speaker, let me share the budget of the Integrity Commission. The overall budget for the Integrity Commission, that independent body, is only \$25.7 million. You know what the fee is—payment of fees?—\$2.5 million; \$2.5 million. It went up the \$2.5 million because last year in 2011 it was \$720,000. And you know what? They asked for this increase because they need to carry out further investigations. This is the investigating body for public officials, and they are being squeezed. They are being squeezed of funds, Mr. Speaker, to carry out their duties and their functions. But yet we see the Attorney General—in 2011 the Attorney General spent \$108,950,000. [*Desk thumping*]

And, Mr. Speaker, this is not even quite final. So who is eating from this trough? I ask, because the Attorney General will say he has total control over this fund, Mr. Speaker. Who will be eating from this trough? Who is this A team of attorneys? I want to know. I want to know who is the A team eating from the trough of the Attorney General. Tell me, Mr. Speaker, tell me.



**11.00 a.m.**

Mr. Speaker, when the Minister of Finance is winding up, he will need to tell us what this is all about. He will need to justify—[*Interruption*—the \$200 million. When you add it, it is \$200 million in fees over two years, 2011 and 2012. What is this all about? Mr. Minister, you need to explain this. The country needs an explanation. Mr. Speaker, you cannot give any more money for Tobago. Member for Tobago West, you are in the Ministry of Finance and seeing that and sitting quiet! All right, we will talk; we will talk later.

Mr. Speaker, I want to draw your attention to a constituency issue. At page 28 of the 2012 budget, under the heading: “Strategy for growth trade and investment”, the Minister said growth is at the heart of our economic development, and the State has a pivotal role to play in building partnerships in the new initiatives; the new growth initiatives. He went on to state that his growth initiatives are expected to increase output, incomes and employment, and then he predicated his new investment platform and one was urban development. You would recall that.

Under “urban development”, he has a new project there, which he introduced, “Sustainable City Project East Port of Spain” and the project involves the restoration of Fort Picton, and also there will be some re-enactment of heritage, whatever—historical re-enactment.

Mr. Speaker, I will tell you something. I want the Minister to go back in time. Let me take you back in time. I am taking the House back in time. I am taking you back. Mr. Speaker, in 1996, “way back”, this UNC government, the same UNC government, made total fools of the same people in Picton Road in Laventille, headed by one Sadiq Baksh—do you remember that name, Mr. Speaker?—and accompanying him was one Ganga Singh, and both men headed to the two water tanks up in Picton. I do not know what they have with Laventille and the tanks. These two men espoused lofty and noble ideas about turning that area into a tourist attraction. They claimed that the view of the city from Picton Hill was immaculate and so, Mr. Speaker, they set about to create their tourist attraction, by painting red Scarlet Ibises on the two water tanks. Mr. Speaker, they did this at a cost of half a million dollars.

**Hon. Members:** What?

**Miss M. McDonald:** Mr. Speaker, I know the area, and I do not recall any visitors, any job creation and, today, all that is left of an ill-conceived plan and broken promise is those faded Scarlet Ibis on the water tanks up in Picton. That is

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economic growth UNC style! And here the Minister is coming back—the same UNC—with the same Picton Road, the same area to talk—let us do a tourist attraction at Fort Picton.

Mr. Speaker, I want to remind the Minister that you are the one who has stereotyped this area, your Government. You have deemed the area a “hot spot”. You have arrested young persons without a shred of evidence, and now you are talking about creating a tourist attraction. Who is fooling who? [*Desk thumping*] We do not trust you. You are not credible; your intention is not good. [*Desk thumping*]

In their same plan, at page 31, the Minister said he will also support community theatre groups for historical re-enactments. Mr. Speaker, I am sure you would have heard me come into this Parliament time and time again, and say to this Parliament that when I was at the Ministry I laid the foundation for the first dance theatre on Picton Road in Laventille, and that dance theatre, the objective was to harness—[*Interruption*—yes, Indian dance and tassa too—the cultural skills and talents of the young persons in that area. Mr. Speaker, go up to Picton, I will carry you. The foundation is lying there still. When this Government came in it was stopped. So, tell me, Mr. Minister of Finance, through the Speaker, where are you going to do these historical re-enactments? Is it on the road for them to get “bounced” down? [*Desk thumping*] In the road!

Mr. Speaker, I turn to make some recommendations. How am I going with time, Mr. Speaker?

**Mr. Speaker:** You have eleven more minutes.

**Miss M. McDonald:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker, that is enough to make my recommendations. Mr. Speaker, my recommendation, having read this budget and analyzed this budget, is that the Government needs to have a credible fiscal framework to increase our public savings, and also this would help as a buffer to the rest of the economy.

Mr. Speaker, there is no strategy, as I said, to take us out of this deficit that we find ourselves in. There is no strategy. The Minister has not enunciated it, and if he did, it was not clearly articulated, so he needs to tell us. In the absence of policy measures, the deficit would continue to increase and, as a consequence, the debt to GDP ratio would rise to well over 50 per cent, and the look at the region of between 60 per cent to 70 per cent.

Mr. Speaker, through you, we need to see in this budget measures to stabilize the debt to GDP ratio in the next coming years. That is—[*Interruption*] Pardon me? The Farrell brothers and many people; many, many good people on campus taught me. Dr. St. Cyr taught me. Many good people taught me, Sir. We need to seek to reduce the ratio, that is the debt to GDP ratio, and further implement measures in subsequent years to place this debt to GDP ratio on a downward trend. Measures should be put in place to strengthen the non-energy revenues to improve tax administration, because you need to diversify away from oil and gas, so you need to look at your non-energy sector.

Mr. Speaker, we also need to look at improving the business climate in the country. I see you have brought some measures, Sir, but, as I said, the implementation of it is what would be important as you begin to roll out. We need to see a strong regulatory system. We have just witnessed what has happened with Clico, and there are many other institutions which should be brought under the ambit of the Central Bank. We should really revise the Insurance Act, and the Member for Pointe-a-Pierre should make haste to bring legislation on the credit unions in order to bring them under the ambit of the Central Bank.

Mr. Speaker, we also need to see a restructuring in CSO. We need to become a data-driven society, because we cannot get information on tourism. There are other little items that I was researching and could not get information on them. Unemployment is another one.

Mr. Speaker, like my colleague from Diego Martin North/East, I think that this budget is deceptive in nature and, therefore, for reasons already mentioned, this Bench cannot support this budget. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Speaker, the Government's intervention to stimulate economic growth is—[*Interruption*] Hello, excuse me! [*Laughter*]—desirable in periods of economic contraction, but it should only be temporary. We should find a strategy to get out of it quickly, Mr. Minister.

Mr. Minister, this budget has not given any hope to this economy that we will see a turnaround in the near future. As I said, there is no fiscal framework in place, to effectively and efficiently manage this economy. I hope that the Minister would take these recommendations as what they are. They are merely recommendations but, I think, I was able to sit, assess and evaluate and come up with these. Mr. Speaker, with these few words, I thank you. [*Desk thumping*]

**The Minister of Housing and the Environment (Hon. Dr. Roodal Moonilal):** Mr. Speaker, thank you very much. If you see me scampering at the back and going to and fro my desk it is because during the last contribution, I

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remembered quite at the last moment that part of the EMA's objective for the next year is to strengthen the laws and policies dealing with noise pollution [*Desk thumping*] but I will address that later when I speak of the EMA's mandate.

Mr. Speaker, it is a pleasure to join the debate at this most interesting and opportune moment to speak in support of the second budget of the People's Partnership; to speak in support of the pillars of national development, in support of the Minister of Finance in his quest to return the finances of this country, and our economic destiny to satisfy our pledge to this country of prosperity for all.

When we are discussing, Mr. Speaker, our commitments to Trinidad and Tobago, that is a very serious discussion. It is a discussion we do not take lightly, and when we fashioned our theme "Prosperity for all" we were quite serious, that it is our ambition that this relatively small country of 1.3 million will evolve in the coming years, the coming decades as the richest, safest and most prosperous place in the world, in the globe, and all of us, regardless of our background, our creed, race and our religion, would truly believe that this is a paradise to live here, because we are safe, we are prosperous and we are happy.

The purpose of all political life and all political involvement is really to ensure citizens achieve the best quality of life they could, and if any government would serve and enhance the quality of life, then you would have done some good in your term of office and, indeed, in your life, if at the end of your term you would have enhanced the quality of life of all your citizens, those who support you and those who for any reason may not.

Mr. Speaker, a budget statement is precisely what it is, a budget statement. You see, Mr. Speaker, the budget is a policy document. I have heard colleagues asking for the youth policy, the gender policy and all types of policies. A budget is a document. It is a statement by the Minister of Finance outlining the Government's vision, the philosophy, the fundamental policy principles upon which the Government is premised. That is the purpose of the budget.

The budget also brings figures on issues of revenue and expenditure where the Minister of Finance invites the Parliament to inspect the figures and to debate them; to debate priority in terms of expenditure, and to debate credibility in terms of revenue, and that is the purpose.

**11.15 a.m.**

When the Minister of Finance gives us a basket, and in this case almost a grocery bag of documents, he gives us figures. He invites you to look at them. So when speakers opposite say, "Well in the budget document, we did not get this

figure and we did not see this figure,” it is not just the document, it is not just the speech. It is that grocery bag of documents you have, and you are expected to go and plow through that and look for the data, as the Member for Diego Martin North/East did. He raised some critical issues. The Minister of Finance, later in the proceedings, will respond appropriately. The documents itself, the budget, is not meant to have everything for everybody and all the data. This is not a PhD thesis; it is a statement to the Parliament. The Minister of Finance arrived at the Parliament and gave us his vision.

Several persons opposite were asking for policy. They spent one year asking for policy; well they got policy. You got policy on our development polls, our strategies and the new economic space. You get strategy in dealing with the social issues. In fighting crime, you got policy. So nobody could ask for more policy. Try and understand the policy now. The budget presented that.

It is consistent with our development strategy, based upon mobilization of all the resources of Trinidad and Tobago, based upon value for money, that is the budget. I take this opportunity to congratulate the Minister of Finance for this visionary statement to the national population. [*Desk thumping*]

The Minister of Finance outlined nine areas for development, various sectors for favourable treatment in terms of investment policy and institutional development. I would like to put on record that this budget is the first fundamental statement on the economic future of this country since Dr. Eric Williams elaborated a strategy for Point Lisas. [*Desk thumping*] Since the strategy for Point Lisas, this is this next significant policy statement on the future of Trinidad and Tobago, outside of the energy sector.

Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Finance is well respected in Trinidad and Tobago and elsewhere. In fact, there was a rumour recently that the World Bank was interested in the Minister of Finance, that he would be taken away by the World Bank, but we are proud. We are proud that in this Government the World Bank wants our Minister of Finance. In their Government the police want their Minister of Finance. [*Laughter*] The police are looking for their Minister of Finance. In this Government the IMF and the IADB are seeking him out, not the police. [*Laughter*] It speaks to the issue of credibility. There is another fundamental issue I just want to put on the landscape early.

When the Prime Minister spoke yesterday, our friends opposite responded that this was not in the budget statement. What the Prime Minister had to say was not in the budget; it was not presenting or defending a budget, but the budget

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statement is based on governance. A budget statement, a policy outline, is useless if you do not get the governance right. What is the sense of having the ideals, the best programmes, the best policies, if you fall at the point of governance? If you cannot get responsibility, transparency, accountability, if you cannot get to that position, then all your policy is a waste.

The banana republics of the world all have good policy, they all have good programmes, and some of the brightest people, but the countries are failed states, basket cases, because their governance is off. It is not in alignment with their ideal. So their national ambitions can never be satisfied because of the governance deficit. It was in addressing the governance deficit that the Prime Minister spoke yesterday. So we must understand that.

Mr. Speaker, I would not want to spend too much time on our friends opposite, but suffice it to say that this is my tenth budget debate, and I have had the great honour of representing the good people of Oropouche for 10 years, who have returned me, I think, on five consecutive occasions, each time with a greater majority, but that is the wisdom of the people. *[Laughter]* In all these years I have had the opportunity, and to me it was also a privilege, to serve in the Opposition. It has been a privilege. I believe that good training is possible in the Opposition.

I have listened to budget contributions in the Parliament from the early 1980s. I have heard the former Prime Minister and President, Mr. Robinson. I have heard the former Member for Couva North. I have heard the Member for San Fernando East on both sides of the aisle. The Leader of the Opposition and Opposition spokesmen invariably come with their alternative programme and policy. The Member for Diego Martin West is an alternative Prime Minister. You should not be laughing at that Member for Lopinot/Bon Air West. I mean it sounds funny, it is, but in the Westminster tradition a Leader of the Opposition is the alternative Prime Minister, and the team he leads is an alternative government.

**Hon. Member:** Oh God!

**Hon. Dr. R. Moonilal:** In the Westminster system at any time you do not know what happens and the Opposition can be asked to form a government, to assemble a team. Mr. Speaker, you know if this entire Government jumps on a plane and migrates to Moscow, who would lead this Government? Who would it be? The Member for Arouca/Maloney? *[Laughter]* A Member “say” Arouca/Maloney. Who would it be?—maybe the Member for La Brea. To do that you must come with an alternative programme, policy, and this was missing. From the beginning

it was missing to the end, and invariably speakers did not give us their policy. If they were facing similar economic problems, social problems, what would be the solution? We did not hear that. We heard about the Minister of Finance and criticisms and so on of his plans. But the Opposition owes the country a duty to outline an alternative agenda, which they have failed to do.

You see, Mr. Speaker, it is said elsewhere that some folks told the Leader of the Opposition he had to change his image, but he went and changed his tie. You look different, but you sound the same. The difference in appearance should give us a difference in philosophy, in policy, in ideas, but it did not come, and sadly, nobody else decided to change their clothes. [*Crosstalk*]

**Mr. Sharma:** Marlene looks nice.

**Hon. Dr. R. Moonilal:** I was left to wonder, at the very beginning, had Dr. Williams been alive in this, the centenary of his birth, to see the leader of the party he founded, who has thrown the balisier in the dustbin, after 25 years of leadership by the Member for San Fernando East building that disciplined army. But that is a matter—Dr. Williams is no more, so he will not know of this development. But I wondered what he would have said, in fact, what Munroe would have said. You all know Munroe, who died a couple of years ago? A stalwart of the PNM, the gatekeeper at Balisier House, he served Williams, Chambers and all others, strong servant Munroe. When we went to park there he would be very kind, allowing us to park and block the gate. What would these stalwarts think when their leader abandon their sacred and spiritual symbol. But that is a matter they will work out in due course. My matter is to the speak on this issue of our budget, our policy and our prescription.

Many years ago, in school and so on, there were times when you went for dinner and you had a big group. Persons who you think are your friends, colleagues, you would go for dinner with, and you notice that when the dinner is finished, a few may not stay for dessert. They may not stay, and you notice that everybody ordering big. “Dey ordering” the most expensive meal, the most expensive drink, but as it comes closer to the end of this dinner, the people become fewer and fewer and fewer, and then suddenly you are left to pay the bill, because everybody has an emergency. This Government found itself there. They left us at the table with the bill, because everybody had an emergency. This Government found itself there. They left us at the table with the bill.

We had to pay the contractors. The Attorney General had to pay outstanding legal fees. Today they made a big song and cry about the funds for the Ministry of

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the Attorney General when they left him with bills. They left him at a table. They ran and left him to pay the bills, legal fees inherited from the former administration. [*Crosstalk*] That is a smart man.

The contractors came to us. Within days of coming into office, the Prime Minister met the contractors at the Diplomatic Centre, and the Prime Minister made a commitment with the Minister of Works and Transport. The Minister of Finance was there. The Prime Minister said, “We will pay you. We will verify and pay.” We have paid \$1.5 billion to contractors for work that we had never agreed to. It was their doing; we paid. We did not agree to it; I will come to it in a while. I have some UDeCott matters to raise here. In fact, nobody may have agreed to it. We paid that; we did that.

The PNM were in office two years, 2008—2010, they did not meet the trade unions to even begin to negotiate. Do you know there were protests in this country every Friday by trade unions? Do you know what they were protesting for? “We protesting, we want to meet.” Not, “We want money”, “We want to meet.” The government of the day for two years did not meet with the trade unions to even begin negotiations. So they left us with the bill there too. [*Interruption*] Mr. Speaker, 2008—2010 we are negotiating for. They filed their proposal in 2008. When we came in at the end of 2010, we had to have the first meeting with the CPO, so you left us with the bill. You left us with the contractors.

In other areas you left us with cost overruns. The Scarborough Hospital began at \$130 million and then reached \$700 million. The Brian Lara Stadium began at \$250 million, \$1.1 billion. [*Crosstalk*] Tamana began at—“it still going”.

**Hon. Member:** “It still going, because we doh know.”

**Hon. Dr. R. Moonilal:** “Dey doh know when it will end.”

The former Minister of Sport came to the Parliament in the Red House and said, in response to a question, “I do not know when the Brian Lara Stadium—I do not know how much it is going to cost.” He told us that. Whatever he was, he was honest in that. He said, “I just do not know.” He did not know, and he did not want, unlike other persons, to say something that was wrong. He said, “Look, I do not know. I am only the Minister of Sport. I do not know when the stadium will finish. I do not know how much it would cost.” That is what we inherited.

In one remarkable year, we have come to terms with the UDeCott mega projects. We have paid our contractors. We have entered into negotiations with the trade unions and sorted out the majority. In one remarkable year: contractors,



taken care of; unions' bargaining table—some settled; mega projects, on the move. We have made our assessment, we are clear.

Mr. Speaker, the Chancery Lane project in San Fernando—the Member for Diego Martin West, for that short time when he found himself on the Back Bench, spoke about that project and the cost escalation and the possible corruption. He knows about it. A few weeks ago, we went for a tour there. We are converting that into the San Fernando complex, a hospital extension project—[*Desk thumping*]*—*to put 300 beds in Chancery Lane to satisfy the need in the hospital where people have to sit on a “peera” for three days waiting on a bed. Do you know what happened when we reached there?

We reached to the seventh or eighth floor. They said that the car park was the first five floors. They discovered that when the cars were coming up the car park, at every point in the car park, two points, each car had to make a three-point turn. So this car park was designed for Mr. Bean in a little mini, to drive up there. [*Laughter*] That is what the car park was designed for, to come up with a mini. At every point you had the Minister and relevant Ministers having to make a three-point turn.

**11.30 a.m.**

We have now to engage engineers and so on, to see what can be done. I could not understand how you could design a car park but a car in Trinidad and Tobago cannot use it. Today, the engineers are now looking at solutions, whatever solutions they may find, and we do not know yet, you know; it may cost something. That is what we inherited, and they may not want to hear it.

My friend from Port of Spain South this morning raised an issue and indicated that she found a programme there; had some concerns, presumably stopped it, but it started back. We have some data that that programme continued as early as January 23, 2008; a list here of applicants requesting financial assistance for studies—January 23, 2008, from the then chairman of that committee; I think it was Mr. Wayne Wood. They continued the programme; they did not stop. So to say that the programme stopped; it did not stop, it continued. But, you see, when they were in office they thought they could handle everything quietly and nobody would know.

The issue of governance—and, regrettably for the country, and maybe for the PNM as well—any time you thought of corruption, governance, and you think of waste of money—[*Interruption*]

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**Hon. Member:** PNM.

**Hon. Dr. R. Moonilal:** Well, you think of PNM too, but the state agency that came to your mind was UDeCott. UDeCott today carries the burden of this image, that when you think of corruption, you think of poor UDeCott, because that was the playground for Calder Hart. That was it. It is regrettable that this UDeCott carries that blemish that anytime you think of anything bad, you think of UDeCott, because that is where they did it.

Today we were proud to say that we told the country we would deliver the budget in a new Parliament at Tower D. We did it, and UDeCott did it, [*Desk thumping*] within the budget, under the budget, within time. Do you know there were Members who believed that when we said we were delivering the budget here, they said, “Listen, all that sounds good, but just keep the Red House open; keep the chairs and desks in the Red House.” They did not believe it. They did not think we could be here, under the budget, within time; three local contractors selected by open public tendering. [*Desk thumping*] They did not think we could do it, but UDeCott can do it.

When we came in we found a mess at the UDeCott and at the HDC. At the HDC, it “gone” wild. Anybody who was anybody was a housing contractor. In fact, they could be sitting down in the hall now and I do not know. Anybody could be a housing contractor. Persons who never built a dog kennel in their lives, suddenly building 300 houses. Anybody! They come in; house contractor; money gone!

My friend and I, the Member for Diego Martin West, he came down to Debe to turn the sod in February 2005 at Wellington Road; delivered a speech. The only time the Ministry of Housing ever invited me to anything was when the Member came down to Debe, and we spoke. I think he was lost and he needed to find that venue. He called us. We were there and we made a good speech. But he was very kind and gracious and we turned the sod. Do you know—2005—that project cannot be completed in 2011? The houses moved six inches. When you look at the PVC for the waste water system, it has moved six inches, because infrastructure work was not done. So the houses crawl! The cost overrun is 250 per cent, from 171—is it? I will get it. There is a cost overrun in that project. It began at \$71 million; today it is around \$182 million—\$50 million in remedial work; repair work.

I went to Arima to visit housing stock. They have some houses there where “it have” five walls in a bedroom! A five-wall bedroom, and then to discover that a bed cannot fit in the bedroom! [*Laughter*] So now we break down to move four

feet in one direction so a bed can fit in this five-wall bedroom. That is what happened, and this is what we have to deal with. Many citizens—you know, you pass on the highway, you see houses like Legoland, colourful, and “thing”, and you look to the Minister of Housing and the Environment and you say, “Minister, why do you not give out those houses? Look, empty.” Well, Mr. Speaker, they have no waste water treatment plant in that estate. The houses are already cracking up; some moving; no electricity, and they are there. This is the problem with which we are faced.

I have had the experience—the Member may have had it—where someone received keys for a house, so you see them two weeks later. When you think they probably bake a little sponge cake and bringing it to say, “Thank you”—they are happy, they bake a cake—when they come they bring a list for \$100,000 in repairs. That is what you have, \$100,000 in repairs. This is the reality. So people beg; they are desperate; they want a house; they want a housing unit. You give them and two weeks later, \$100,000 in repairs. This is the reality we face.

And in all fairness to contractors, we have some good work. There are housing estates that are fine, we have no problem, but, invariably, they were persons who had been in the construction sector for many years. They were known builders; they were in the construction sector for decades and they delivered high quality. But when you bring in the OJT contractors, you bring in persons because they are a friend of this one or that one, they come, they get the contract and then they go look for a builder. That is what is happening. Again, I want to say, some of these things have their chain straight back to the Member for San Fernando East. You can identify some of these contractors with him. But that was what we inherited.

I will speak to the housing plan in a few minutes, but I wanted to indicate that at the UDeCott we spoke about the lack of oversight and governance. This Member for Diego Martin West, the only thing he talked about was UDeCott, and a bit of HDC, when he was in quasi opposition, to use that term. That is the only thing he spoke about. He had the dubious distinction of speaking, at that time wearing a balisier tie, and not one Member of the PNM would stand to extend his time to speak in Parliament. [*Crosstalk*] Not one! He had the dubious distinction, and at another time I will tell you who extended his time.

At the UDeCott, which he knew about, they invested a lot of money to try to jail him. All hell broke loose in the year 2009 to 2010. I have in my hand some

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documents here; at UDeCott, no corporate governance. A former senior executive, Nelanda Rampaul—not Ravi Rampaul, “eh”—racked up a total of \$3,185,250 in expenses over a period of eight months, September 2009 to April 2010 at the Hyatt, in cookies—[*Interruption*]

**Hon. Member:** What?

**Hon. Dr. R. Moonilal:** “Like biscuit, nuh. Yuh ain’t accustom to dem sophisticated thing?” [*Laughter*] Sleepovers,—you know what is a sleepover?—lavish banquets which they classified as office expenses. I have the bills here from the UDeCott.

Now, Mr. Speaker, I want to tell you something. I have no difficulty with people who have lavish tastes and they like their executive meals and drinks. I have no difficulty with that, [Crosstalk] but when it comes to the pay, take the money from your pocket or your purse and pay. Do not put it on an expense.

Mr. Speaker, look at this here. If you look at the dates: December ’09, two dozen cookies. I do not know what is this fascination with cookies. All room charges paid to UDeCott. They buy up to Duracell batteries and put them on UDeCott’s bill! It goes on: burger, chicken, avocado—“dah is zaboca.” They run up bills in one case, for \$2,000, all with eating caviar, pork chops; another bill here—and this is January 10. It happened a lot in that last few months. There is a pool bar bill here for piña colada. What is piña colada? That is a drink?

**Hon. Member:** Alcoholic drink.

**Hon. Dr. R. Moonilal:** I thought it was a fruit—for piña colada, liquor. Look at the food: one mixed sushi—salmon?

**Hon. Member:** Salmon. “Dah is fancy ting.”

**Hon. Dr. R. Moonilal:** “I doh know about these things: Spicy Nigiri.” Mr. Speaker, the food bill again: a virgin banana, whatever that is. [*Laughter*] Mr. Speaker, I better put down this now. You see, when it comes to that, I think I “finish” with that. [*Laughter and Desk thumping*]

Mr. Speaker, \$3 million from September ’09: fish-of-the-day. Look, well they reach curry now. But you “coulda” get curry by Patraj or that place opposite the avenue, somewhere there. That is curry now. What is this? This is cookies again! This must be some sophisticated meal I do not know about, “eh”, because I do not

think it may be biscuit, because I do not know about macaroons, oatmeal cookies and almond cookies. This is paid for by the taxpayers: cookies, piña colada, virgin banana, lamb chops, pork chops, any chops!

**Miss Hospedales:** Mr. Speaker, 36(1).

**Hon. Member:** What is wrong with you? [*Crosstalk*]

**Hon. Dr. R. Moonilal:** Mr. Speaker, I just want to get back to the total figure: \$3,185,000 during the period September 2009 to April 2010, during the Uff enquiry. But if you incur expenses like these, personal expenses, liquor, alcohol at the pool bar, this is your personal business; this is not for the taxpayers of Trinidad and Tobago to foot the bill.

The expenses, the wanton waste—but, you know, they do not want us to allocate money for a forensic audit, because then if we audit properly, we might find out about these piña coladas and all these pork chops and lamb chops and virgin banana.

At the UDeCott, Calder Hart had a parallel structure. Do you know what this “fella” did? He had a board of directors, but they would mean nothing and do nothing. They were persons appointed through the proper systems, advertisement and so on. So you would have a chief legal officer; you would have an information and technology manager, chief financial officer, all duly appointed. What he did was set up a shadow Cabinet at UDeCott, with Richard Freeman, who was the legal and regulatory services manager, \$50,000 a month; Samantha Young, \$42,000 a month, plus \$7,000 travelling; Ricardo O’Brien. You have on your record a chief financial officer on your establishment, but you then hire a finance and business operations manager. This “fella” got about \$53,000 a month. But hear this one now. The Uff Commission found that there was no audit at UDeCott—none!

**11.45 a.m.**

You know it had somebody called D-E-I-R-D-R-E, I do not know, I really cannot pronounce that.

**Mr. Warner:** Deirdre.

**Hon. Dr. R. Moonilal:** Deirdre Etienne, Executive Manager Risk and Audit, \$70,000 per month.

**Hon Member:** “Oooh”.

**Hon. Dr. R. Moonilal:** But it had no audit “eh”. “It had no audit, but a manager with \$70,000 a month for the audit but it had none.”

Now I want to tell you something, again I want to say in principle, Mr. Speaker, we have no difficulty; there are persons in the world in specialized professions and if you want the job done you have professionals in specialized areas and they do not come cheap. They do not come cheap, you have to pay, but when you pay they must deliver. They must deliver. If you are going to pay executives at that they must deliver, you must have accountability, you must have delivery and you must have your projects coming in on time. You must get some value for money although you are paying a lot of money. Did we have that at UDeCott? Calder Hart set up a parallel Cabinet to run UDeCott, ignoring those persons who were properly and duly hired on the establishment and the COO, Elandra Rampaul, was the one writing persons and demanding. When officers wrote letters saying we cannot pay we do not have the paperwork, things were not properly done; she would override them and want to ensure payments.

Mr. Speaker, in some of the UDeCott projects you would have a contract sum of \$211 million, you would pay out \$176 million, but the value of work completed is \$28 million. [*Interruption*] So the payment outstanding is \$100 million, we cannot see the value for that, we cannot see the work.

**Mr. Warner:** What did they say?

**Hon. Dr. R. Moonilal:** No, no, they had nothing to say about that.

Mr. Speaker, the Red House: let me get to the Red House quickly. For eight years, the Red House—for eight years they throw a tarpaulin on the Red House, they say they are restoring. The only thing that covering the country is the Red House with a tarpaulin. But do you know in those eight years—well, actually in 2005, from 2005 to 2010, five years, if I tell you, you must believe it, and I want to tell you if you “don’t believe meh, don’t doubt meh.”

**Mr. Warner:** What did you say?

**Hon. Dr. R. Moonilal:** In 2005—2010 to throw a tarpaulin on the Red House it cost \$88 million.

**Hon Member:** “Oooh good!”

**Hon. Dr. R. Moonilal:** That is the money spent on restoration of the Red House so far. Mr. Speaker, before we move a filing cabinet \$88 million gone “eh”. It gone! Not thousand, million. [*Crosstalk*]

They engaged in all sort of activities. They had design work, they engaged for design work. [*Crosstalk*]

**Mr. Speaker:** Please! Please, allow the Member for Oropouche.

**Hon. Dr. R. Moonilal:** Mr. Speaker, a project at the Red House— [*Interruption*] one project at the Red House—

**Mr. Speaker:** Hon. Member, I know that you have not sought my protection but I need to hear as well as the Hansard reporter, so I will ask Members on both sides, allow the Member for Oropouche East and Leader of the House to speak in silence, please.

**Hon. Dr. R. Moonilal:** Yes, Mr. Speaker. One project at the Red House for restoration of the roof, comprising the roof of the north wing/south wing, et cetera; that was delayed by 650 days; 55 per cent of that particular contract was completed, but there were 37 items of variations and an escalation of \$8.7 million. This is the governance issue we are talking about, the Prime Minister spoke on this.

They had a scaffolding there, I think with thousands of dollars per day. Structural engineering and consultancy services paid off \$2.2 million on a contract of \$3 million “eh”, so that gone. Consider that gone; 65 per cent completed; \$83 million gone, plus it had some money for grass cutting and security.

**Mr. Warner:** That is where?

**Hon. Dr. R. Moonilal:** I do not know where. Does it not have grass down there?

**Mr. Warner:** No.

**Hon. Dr. R. Moonilal:** Okay. [*Interruption*] These are the issues that we had to confront and quickly, quietly—I do not want to say we handled it quietly, “eh”. [*Laughter*] But quietly we moved, looked at the Uff Commission report, we looked at the recommendations; we decided what are recommendations for UDeCott, what are recommendations for HDC, and without fanfare, without calling a press conference, without any big noise we moved ahead to implement recommendations in the Uff Commission of Enquiry.

So, today you have a shift in the way UDeCott does its business. A new culture is emerging where for the first time in life people are seeing the logo of UDeCott in the newspaper advertising. Of the 91 recommendations of the Uff Commission

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45 fall outside the scope of UDeCott, the other 46 recommendations have already been implemented or are being implemented. [*Desk thumping*] We are overhauling the procedures and processes at UDeCott to ensure that there is no room for corrupt practices. I want to tell you something in all fairness and honesty, you see, the day they have a project in UDeCott or any state agency and you move from \$171 million to \$750 million, that is the day we need to—that is the day I and those of us on this side, we need to pack up [*Desk thumping*] and go back to trace where we come from you cannot do that I do not think it is right to Cuchawan Trace, go back to Debe, Felicity and where we come from. [*Interruption*] We cannot do that. I do not think it is right to do that and this is why we are concentrating our procedures and we have a heavy emphasis on the delivery of projects on time.

Mr. Speaker, we now have a CEO in place at UDeCott, that is from advertising in the newspapers, a process; we can defend the process. UDeCott has hired for the first time ever a procurement manager to deal with tendering—a construction programme director. We are on the way to putting the processes and institutions in place to prevent the tragedy of 2005—2010 under Calder Hart and that gang at UDeCott. [*Interruption*] Well, that crew, that crew. You like that word, the crew?

**Miss Cox:** Apologize.

**Hon. Dr. R. Moonilal:** I think we will use the word “crew”. [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Speaker, UDeCott as you know is now responsible for the delivery of the Chancery Lane Extension Project in San Fernando. We would be responsible for delivery of the children’s hospital. [*Interruption*] You know—and I hear people in the national community, my friends opposite, I say, what change? What is the change? What changed on May 24, 2010?

**Hon Member:** Value.

**Hon. Dr. R. Moonilal:** Sometimes I am not always amusing, but sometimes I am tempted to say the turtles living because of the Government, but it is not just the turtles. This Government—for 20 years they were trying to put a ban on the hunting of turtles, we did it in about six months. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Speaker, when a cement truck overturns on the highway and goes into that rail, that is the change, because before May 2010 that cement truck would have gone on the other side and killed six people; that is the change. You see, Mr. Speaker, when we talk about a 70 per cent reduction in crime and our families,



our friends, even Members of our party, the national community can sleep in the night relatively safe; the murder rate went down, that is the change we talk about. [Desk thumping]

When we talk about the increases in the pension—NIS—that is the change. You know we heard this debate and you would think that outside of this Chamber nothing is happening, the morning after the budget the *Guardian*, “More dollars for retirees”. This is the *Guardian* newspaper. Not to be left behind, the *Express*, “\$3,000 pension, \$1,000 allowance”—the workers are happy—“\$1,000 for state security officers”; they come and ask, “Why you doh give the SRP?” They who gave nobody—\$100 million for some geriatric policeman from London, somewhere, come down here with a stick—[Laughter] Yes, \$100 million gone to them, they gave nobody, when we give, “But why yuh didn’t give the rest?” You know, it reminds me of the state of emergency, “They catch no fish; big, small or medium” and when we start they say, “Where de big fish? They ain’t ketch no fish eh.” Mr. Speaker, mortgage rates, 5 to 7 per cent—

**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. J. Warner]

*Question put and agreed to.*

**Hon. Dr. R. Moonilal:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I was saying the *Express* newspaper, 4,500 houses next year; 5,000 scholarships for the disabled. You know on the evening of the budget I told the Minister of Finance, “After hearing you the disabled is abled”. [Laughter] Transportation, scholarships; what else they have? A suite.

**Hon Member:** Food cards.

**Hon. Dr. R. Moonilal:** “Oh yes”, food cards! [Interruption] We are giving house grants at the Ministry of Housing, specifically for disabled persons. [Interruption] They could buy cookies. [Laughter]

Mr. Speaker, rapid bus transportation systems—now they make jokes about the rapid bus transport system. They spent \$565 million to do a study, which the Member for Chaguanas West “does” kick every morning with his boots under his office—

**Mr. Warner:** In a box.

**Hon. Dr. R. Moonilal:**—in a box under his desk, \$565 million to do a study. We put the buses in place; every 15 minutes a bus will appear for you to go; the East-West Corridor. Buses are going in the rural areas now. They have never seen what a bus looks like. [*Interruption*]

Mr. Speaker, in rural areas there is a bus system now and it is extended in Tobago; the Scarborough hospital and so on. It would be unfair for me if I do not—at the same time we quoted from the *Guardian*, the *Express*, and we really do not want to leave the *Newsday* out. So the *Newsday* had \$55 billion budget; \$3,000 pension; more disability grants; tax holidays; public shares; waiver of this, waiver of that, whatever; and this is how the national community saw the budget—at a time when we do not have plenty we are giving. Could you imagine if we had plenty? If we had as the time when the former government had, \$148 for a barrel of oil, 2008; \$148—we would have given more, but we would have invested in WASA, in water. We finished the Navet trunk line; 300,000 persons getting a regular supply of water under this administration. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Speaker, on the UDeCott projects we have in mind the police stations at Arima, St. Joseph, Tobago and other areas; the list is long to go through. We promised a fire station; is it in Mayaro?

**Mr. Warner:** Yes.

**Hon. Dr. R. Moonilal:** I do not think we want to incur the wrath of the Member for Mayaro—[*Interruption*]

**Mr. Peters:** No, Sir.

**Hon. Dr. R. Moonilal:**—by delaying that project any further—Mayaro, Siparia, you look on; the library in Chaguanas, the police station in Arima started—[*Interruption*—and in home construction, housing units, we are on the move. We are on the move with housing.

Mr. Speaker, the former Minister of Housing, Member for Diego Martin West, spoke about housing. He indicated that he was happy, notwithstanding that the former administration, 1996—2001, was moving along the line of construction of estates and so on. Mr. Speaker, I just want to indicate to you that—[*Interruption*—the HDC has implemented 16 recommendations of the Uff Commission of Enquiry. So that is governance. [*Desk thumping*] At the HDC we do not distribute money without agreement and contract in place. This is not a Minister who will call a contractor and say “Put 50 more apartments”. That is not going to happen here.

**12.00 p.m.**

Mr. Speaker, we do the paperwork. We go through in detail, in meticulous detail. This Minister has nothing to do with HDC directly, we deal with policy; they deal with contact administration and so on. And today, Mr. Speaker, we monitor our tender rules by an internal audit department led by a manager compliance monitoring oversight. We have committees and sub-committees of the board established to oversee the operations of the corporation. We liaise with WASA, T&TEC, Town and Country Planning, Commissioner of Lands and so on, to deliver. Our aggressive delivery programme 2011/2012—we have made a commitment to distribute 1,000 housing units for Christmas, 2012. [*Desk thumping*]

In our first year in office we distributed on average three homes per day. We want that up to five homes per day to distribute to persons. We introduced a programme called “It has been a long time coming”. I met some folks at the Crowne Plaza—not community leaders—and a lady came to receive the keys; she was waiting for over 25 years. Mr. Speaker, I met someone else who came and when we were giving the keys I told them, “Do you know the year I wrote common entrance, you applied for a house?” I came back with four university degrees later to give her the keys. [*Interruption*]

**Hon. Member:** And Minister!

**Hon. Dr. R. Moonilal:** And Minister! Mr. Speaker, when I wrote common entrance this person applied. Someone by the name of Hazel Manning was a clerk in the Ministry somewhere. We had her signature. People waiting 25 years, they gave up. A gentleman collected the keys, he said, “Look I gave up, I did not believe this could ever happen to me; I could be so fortunate.”

We have our home construction in phases and we are on the move. We started at Union Hall in San Fernando, 700 units. We turned the sod in January of this year. At Fairfield Princes Town, we have started, contractor on site; and we have negotiated a very nice peaceful settlement with the farmers, I am very proud to say that. At Egypt Village, after a little rough start, we are on the ground in Egypt. We are on to Pineapple in a couple of weeks at D’Abadie/O’meara. Mr. Speaker, trestrail Farms is coming, 2,500 units.

So, Mr. Speaker, for 2012, we can go as high, as construction starts on the ground, to 6,952. Contractors, of course, prequalify and they go through a very rigorous process. We have oversight in place. So we are constructing while we are

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doing repairs to distribute. That is the important point. Our settlement policy is not just building houses and giving out. That is not our approach. You see, our approach is different. Through the Land Settlement Agency, an agency that was almost destroyed by the former administration, we have brought life to the LSA, Land Settlement Agency. And so working with the IDB through a loan facility we have embarked, Mr. Speaker, on a programme to develop squatter settlements where we are in a position to regularize.

Mr. Speaker, in our first year we have given out 600 certificates of comfort to citizens of this country. Tell me that was going on. [*Desk thumping*] How much you gave out?

**Dr. Rowley:** [*Inaudible*]

**Hon. Dr. R. Moonilal:** Well, you gave out none. Emily Forde Dick—Gaynor Dick-Forde.

Mr. Speaker, correct me if I am wrong. She gave out none; no certificate of comfort. Mr. Speaker, we now have an additional 1,469 certificates of comfort to distribute. She planned—all the time she was in the Ministry, she was trying to jail the Member for Diego Martin West. [*Laughter*] She had no time for that; had no time to develop a land policy. They spent \$5 million trying to jail him, from taxpayers' money. If they had stayed one more year, you could have been with your bailor, if we had left them one more year. [*Crosstalk*] They did not need any evidence. But they needed no evidence, they were on the verge of putting him in bracelets.

An IDB loan programme—we are developing 25 sites, distributing 2,000 certificates of comfort, a programme that I am now extremely proud of. I am proud that the hon. Kamla Persad-Bissessar mandated us to develop a programme for distributing land. [*Desk thumping*] You see, Mr. Speaker, a lot of our citizens, they may not need a house, but what they would like is a piece of land, and in their own modest way they will build. They would start off with, what may look as a modest poor shack [*Interruption*]

**Mr. Warner:** “Chirrip-chirrip”.

**Hon. Dr. R. Moonilal:** “Chirrip, chirrup”. Well the “dulaha” on my right here said that they will build “chirrup-chirrip”. [*Laughter*] So, Mr. Speaker, they will build like that. And after a while, you know, when you go back to this settlement you will see bungalows and mansions, after a while. You must give them the land, allow them to build.

Mr. Speaker, we have an exciting programme called “Land for the landless” in which we will distribute in a pilot stage 500 lots of land to citizens who may wish to build. [*Desk thumping*]

Let us assume that you are in another category now, you do not want a house, but we do not want to put you on a piece of land like that, because we are concerned that you will go and build something that may not look good. You may go and put outdoor facilities and make greater problems for health hygiene. We have another programme, “A Foundation for the Future”, in which we distribute now a parcel of land, a small plot of land, but we put a concrete foundation that is demarcated for kitchen, living room, washroom facilities. So we pigeonhole you in space, on what you can build. And if you were squatting somewhere you would just pull out the galvanize and ply board and come and put it up around that. So we keep you on a particular space and we ensure that you do not go and make anything into a ghetto and into some poverty stricken area and so on. It is a foundation for the future; another innovation that we have at housing.

Mr. Speaker, those persons who cannot afford, you can then come to us for two things, either a grant \$15,000, we help you—[*Desk thumping*] But let us assume you are working. We want to encourage people to save and build their homes. Mr. Speaker, there is a good feeling when you buy a pan of paint and you paint a wall—[*Interruption*]

**Mr. Sharma:** In your own house.

**Hon. Dr. R. Moonilal:** In your own house as opposed to going and begging somebody for paint and wood and nail. So you are working. You could save a little money. If you come with \$20,000 we will give you another \$20,000. So bring 20, you get another 20. [*Crosstalk*] I do not know if you can get money for “leepaying” the floor. That is how we build, so that our applicants have this sense of contributing, that they are worthy, that they work, they save, they buy some materials and the Government through the relevant agency, after your application process, we help you, we help you along.

Mr. Speaker, we have identified a land for the “Landless” and “Foundation for the Future” as two critical programmes.

We will also in the coming year reform the law. We have been talking about that for ages. Again people will say, “What change? What change?” Change came in May 2010. What change? You know what change? There is a commitment here that when we tell you that we are going to do something we are doing it. [*Desk thumping*] Mr. Speaker—[*Interruption*]

**Mr. Imbert:** What about the oncology centre?

**Hon. Dr. R. Moonilal:** The oncology centre; that was promised by the PNM before the word oncology was fashioned; [*Laughter*] before the word was fashioned they had promised that. They promised the Scarborough Hospital 50 years ago. They promised the highway to Point Fortin when Williams was the Premier. Williams was called the Chief Minister. Not Butler you know, Williams. Williams promise—[*Interruption*]

**Dr. Rowley:** Dr. Williams.

**Hon. Dr. R. Moonilal:** Oh no, no, no, I am sorry, Mr. Speaker, I am sorry. The leader who threw away the balisier tie is now telling me have respect for Dr. Williams. [*Laughter*] Sorry, my friend. Dr. Eric—what was his middle name?

**Hon. Members:** Eustace.

**Hon. Dr. R. Moonilal:** Eustace? You know that well, but somehow you do not know the sanctity and the spiritual nature of the balisier tie in your party. You do not know that, but you know about Dr. Williams' legacy. My friend, what Cuchawan Trace is to us, the balisier tie is to the PNM. It is spiritual territory that you threw in the dustbin. So there will be reform of the law. And we promised it. The Green Fund; we promised that we would open the Green Fund so that NGOs, community organizations will access. Mr. Speaker, we opened the Green Fund. A workshop on local government; the progress.

Mr. Speaker, the Green Fund legislation was changed in our first year to make it accessible for community and NGO groups. But you know what the Minister of Finance said, he said, you can get Green Fund money now for environmental education. So if you are doing programmes that are for public awareness, education on the environment, you can access the Green Fund. We will bring that legislation in due course. We did it last year, we will do it again, we expand.

We have constructed 13 surveillance bays on the highway to enhance our security capability. Mr. Speaker, I am proud to announce that by the end of November, first week in December, they will fully be solar powered, [*Desk thumping*] using resources from the Green Fund. So the cameras, the lights even the blink lights on the ground, they are all solar powered and we will set up 13 and then we are moving to the HDC estates, where we will begin with solar power. The contractors are there.

You know the EMA had earlier this year, the first time ever, a green Business symposium at the Hilton, bringing green business together. So we met the business community in that area. We now engage them. We used the Green Fund

to pay for that. The housing estates; we will go to schools eventually; community centres. Mr. Speaker, that is how we begin. We begin there so that after a decade or so you will hardly be investing in energy that is derived from fossil fuel. And that is how we will get our low carbon development strategy. This is the division for the environment. You know when they were there they thought the environment was just picking up garbage. So every time they would go on the beach somewhere and they would pick up some rubbish and say, “Oh, we environment.”

Mr. Speaker, in our first year Cabinet approved a climate change policy. [*Desk thumping*] We are now with the IDB for a loan of \$40 million to implement a climate change unit with strategies for adaption and mitigation. The IMA will deal with coastal erosion, another important issue for us. Cabinet approved the protected areas and forest policy. We are moving for our forest authority. This is the issue, it is law, it is policy, it is programme, it is institution. It is not “mauvaise langue” and “kuchoor” and bacchanal and so on.

We are on to programmes—Mr. Speaker, I was so proud, to tell you. I was so proud hearing my colleagues in the Cabinet speak: Minister of Health, Minister of Works, Minister of Labour and Small and Micro Enterprise Development, Minister of Education, Minister of Justice, Minister of Foreign Affairs and Communications, all; Minister of Community Development, Minister of Trade and Industry, they brought their programmes, policies; we are doing this. [*Interruption*] Tourism—you know what is amazing now? I mean, I must say; this country is the recipient of an award by an organization for tourism—[*Desk thumping*] unpatriotic ones about. Unpatriotic one said, we should not take that award, it is an NGO. But you know if the Rotary Club called them tomorrow for a medal they will run. [*Laughter*] And they are unpatriotic! They should be happy and proud that their country is recognized. But you know, Mr. Speaker, I am not surprised, because two or three years ago—two years ago, they had some company called Venky’s Chicken sponsoring the national cricket team in India. This time when we looked at the cricket team on ESPN, we were proud to see the National Gas Corporation of Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*] They had Venky’s Chicken. Mr. Speaker, if the Minister of Health was around that time “he ban” them too from the Paediatric ward—[*Laughter*] They were lucky he was not in office then. We are proud. We talk about tourism. When the Trinidad and Tobago Cricket Team go on ESPN they are seen morning and evening.

Do you know for a one-minute-ad on ESPN it is US \$50,000 for one minute of an ad, or more. We had three hours in the morning—Trinidad and Tobago, three

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hours in the night—Trinidad and Tobago, that is how we showcase. No wonder we won this tourism prize; an award which we are proud to receive.

**12.15 p.m.**

**Hon. Roberts:** How many viewers?

**Hon. Dr. R. Moonilal:** Billion, billions. On ESPN, that is not a station from some village somewhere, that is ESPN—premier. And that is how we take tourism. So do not be unpatriotic, and say those not-so-nice things about the award. We will receive it and they were invited for lunch, but I want to tell you at that lunch there is no virgin banana, and piña colada, and cookies and so on. But you all are invited to be with the Prime Minister and the Government, receive the award, be proud, your country is recognized, your country is recognized on the right path. The Minister of Tourism, you know he gets some blows sometimes but he is resilient and will take us further. I want to say something—I know I have about 35 minutes.

**Mr. Speaker:** Nine minutes.

**Hon. Dr. R. Moonilal:** Nine minutes, not even that will do. Mr. Speaker, CEPEP. We heard about CEPEP, and they like talking about CEPEP, because they still have a—what is the word—“tabanca”. They have a tabanca with the CEPEP. I want to indicate to you, that with the CEPEP programme we came in and we met some people there, some contractors and so on. We met 118 contractors, today we have 158 contracting companies at CEPEP. When we came in there were around 5,000 employees, we have today 9,000 workers employed in CEPEP. CEPEP is throughout the country. I was a Member of Parliament in Opposition for 10 years. I did not know what CEPEP looked like, I never knew what this thing was; I never saw it in Penal, Debe, Barrackpore. I had one person that I knew in CEPEP, he used to walk with the Member for San Fernando East like a bodyguard—all of them know him. He was in CEPEP, you could call him to move an old car or something. We did not know what CEPEP look like.

Today, when you go to Barrackpore—they do not know where Barrackpore is—they do not know where Rookmania Trace is. When you go there the people tell you, you could eat lunch on the ground after CEPEP is finished. Throughout Trinidad and soon in Tobago, we will have our CEPEP presence.

If Members opposite have requests for assistance with CEPEP, talk to us. We have good hearing. We will help, whether you need teams to help you. I have asked, and I want to say publicly, I have given a direction to CEPEP, that every



single Member of Parliament elected—everyone; when that Member calls a regional manager and asks for assistance in their constituency with cleaning and related activities, they are to respect a wish of an elected Member of Parliament. [Interruption] And if we do not know well then good, well we do not know. So we will get our regional coordinators to be in touch with your office. When you have a need you call, but what we do not want, we do not want Members of Parliament calling up contractors because they have to bathe the dog home. They have to take somebody to go somewhere and do something and they want to go with a few people, no! You have some function in your house and you want somebody to come clean the backyard, not at all. But you see for churches, mosques, temples, schools, community centres, you could bring anything you want, we are there. We are there for that purpose, to help your communities.

In the coming year, we will introduce for the first time—you know, I am very proud of URP as well. I am saying “URP Social”, distributing food. We will introduce “CEPEP Marine” where we will clean and clear the beaches, the river mouths [Desk thumping] and when we pass our Beverage Container Bill, which is finalized, and we put our CEPEP Marine, dirty beaches and clogged rivers mouths will be a thing of the past.

**Hon. Roberts:** They will clean up the diesel too.

**Hon. Dr. R. Moonilal:** Well, the diesel bunkering is a another matter. So CEPEP is available; they are working; they are everywhere. Throughout this country people who have never seen what CEPEP looks like they see it now.

You know I just want to remind friends, after one year in office this Government published a book of achievements—one year. We are working now on volume two, for the second year. You want a copy? We will give copies. In fact, we will distribute copies to Members in the Opposition—a book of achievements. This book is not a pamphlet, it is 27 pages long, and it deals with all our Ministries and what we are doing. You know we are bold enough to put out our record for inspection. This is our record, inspect it—look, criticize if you want, we do not mind. But if you criticize, maybe, I do not know if you will find something that you want to criticize, at least there are things here you cannot criticize, they are the facts. This is an achievement and we are now updating this because when this was written and produced we did not have certain issues resolved. After this was produced decisions were taken to provide free bus rides for children in school uniform, and citizens 60 years and over, these things happened after volume one—so we have to do it. The laptops are here and my friend from Port of Spain North, an educator at large, dialling up the principals

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and so on, the Minister of Education whispered to me that a few principals were complaining of harassment and the Ministry is investigating that. [*Laughter*]

I want to tell our national community as I tell the people of Oropouche East, we are working. In Oropouche East, Wellington Road paved, water work now at Cuchawan Trace. The Barrackpore school hill; a wall falling down about 10 years now; we fixed the wall, paved that road. Drainage programmes on the move. In one year we have delivered; infrastructure in all areas, we have delivered, but we have tried our best to remain faithful to our commitment on governance. In one year we have no corruption scandal.

**Dr. Rowley:** What?

**Hon. Dr. R. Moonilal:** No money has gone. Which dollar was misappropriated? [*Desk thumping*] Which dollar was misappropriated? I take my dollar now and I give you. Name it, tell me a dollar that was misappropriated.

**Dr. Rowley:** You have to be joking!

**Hon. Dr. R. Moonilal:** When they raise issues of corruption we quickly go to stop, to investigate, to review.

**Dr. Rowley:** Rachel Price show is Sunday.

**Hon. Dr. R. Moonilal:** When they raise matters—sometimes they raise scandalous matters. When they raise matters of corruption we stop, we revoke, we recall, because we do not want to commit moneys and have that money as the subject of corruption. [*Desk thumping*] Name one. Which one? Which one?

In one year and we are proud that we have been working so far and we defend everything we do, with our paperwork, with our ads. [*Crosstalk*] Mr. Speaker, this from a party that threw a tarpaulin on the roof of the Red House.

I want to indicate in the coming year in terms of the legislative agenda the Attorney General will speak to that in a few weeks. We are going to intensify our fight against the criminal elements insofar as law making is concerned. We are going to deal with land reform, we have the Beverage Container Bill, we dealt with human trafficking last year—I think that is complete. We have a package from the Ministry of Justice dealing with electronic monitoring, dealing with a new DNA Bill and dealing with the removal of the preliminary enquiry process, the dangerous dogs legislation. I want to put all Members on notice that we will be meeting twice per week, minimum, at this venue to ensure that our legislative agenda is met. Members are on standby, you are on notice for that. So we expect a lot in the coming year in every area. In closing we promise and we commit

ourselves to our country and to our nation, that we will deliver more. We have taken off, we are no longer on the runway; we are in flight and delivery is here. Mr. Speaker, I thank you.

**Minister of Tobago Development (Hon. Vernella Alleyne-Toppin):** Mr. Speaker, it is with pleasure that I rise to make my contribution to this debate, which gives citizens an insight to the plans and priorities of this Government for the new fiscal year. I thank you, sincerely, for this privilege. Let me from the outset congratulate the Minister of Finance, the hon. Winston Dookeran, for the comprehensive and very professional way in which he presented the budget proposals, inclusive of the underlying policies and financial provisions. He has competently provided a robust platform for lively debate, both inside and outside of the Parliament, involving a wide cross section of Members of the diverse national population. I would like to recommend our Minister of Finance as the advisor to Greece, to the United States, to the United Kingdom and to the world economy.

**Mr. Imbert:** Now they dead!

**Hon. V. Alleyne-Toppin:** Therein is my confidence in him. I also commend my Prime Minister, hon. Kamla Persad-Bissessar, for the leadership of this People's Partnership Government. I wish also to recommit myself and to reaffirm that I will serve the people of Trinidad and Tobago unstintingly and especially, continue to serve the people of Tobago whom I represent specifically. [*Desk thumping*]

Let me also congratulate the persons responsible for the relocation of this honourable House for bringing us to these intimate quarters, and for doing it in such quick time and within budget. I want to say here that the Westminster system of Parliament—in our system, both sides of the House sit facing each other, but there is a stipulation, and maybe many of us do not know the stipulation. The Opposition must be at least two sword-lengths away from the proposition, so that people do not get into attitudes of pugnacity. So where we have some people who are good “pelters”, some people who have honed their skills playing cricket and “pelting” every mango tree in Mason Hall, when we have those people who are good “pelters” you know that is supposed to help you to keep the hounds at bay and keep the “rot” out.

**Mr. Sharma:** That sounds like Rottweiler.

**Hon. V. Alleyne-Toppin:** So, Mr. Speaker, I know you have a challenging job. I wish to address briefly some of the comments the Member for Diego Martin West; it is

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just two days ago that he spoke, or three, four. But I want to talk about some of what he has said and I want to quote him, especially, where he was speaking about Tobago.

“...I thought that Tobago would have received at least six per cent of the national budget... But just as the eyes of the Trinidad people have opened to the disrespect, the deception, and subterfuge and betrayal of the People’s Partnership Government... Tobagonians too have seen through the fiscal sleight of hand and the attempt to” confuse if not—“deceive.”

Mr. Speaker, why did the Member for Diego Martin West not push for a greater allocation for Tobago in all of its 20-odd years of stewardship in this honourable House? How is it that now that the Dispute Resolution Commission has asked that we have 4.03 per cent to 6.9 per cent, the Member for Diego Martin West is now seeing that Tobago needs more than Tobago has been getting from his government.

The Member for Diego Martin West continues with that kind of argument. We cannot find one instance in the *Hansard* records where he has pushed for more allocations for Tobago. In his ramblings he also stated:

“The plan is clearly to starve the Assembly of needed development resources, and divert resources for the exclusive use of the Minister of Tobago Development.”

Mr. Speaker, The Ministry of Tobago Development received \$4.88 million in its PSIP and, the total allocation is \$31 million.

### **12.30 p.m.**

Who then in their right mind can say that the People’s Partnership Government is giving to the Ministry of Tobago Development money to develop Tobago? I find that all of the time his arguments are very convenient. Can any rational person viewing the allocation of the THA contend that the People’s Partnership Government purports to starve the Assembly of funds?

Now, this is exactly what was happening before when the Government in Trinidad was not People’s Partnership and the Government in Tobago was NAR. There was a time, a long time, in all of those 43 years of PNM stewardship where Tobago was starved and starved and oppressed, and we know it. Dr. Jeff Davidson had written a book and the book is called *Tobago vs. the PNM*, and I will advise that people read this book. [*Member holds up book*] It gives you all of the accounts of the debates over Tobago since the days of Butler—way back. It gives you all of the debates.

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I am one of the persons representing Tobago now sitting in the same seat as the hon. ANR Robinson; sitting in the same seat as the hon. Wilbert Winchester, whom I am proud to say was raised by a cousin or raised by my grandmother just like I was, so it is the second of us in the family whom my grandmother raised to this position, and I am saying here that our PNM people in Trinidad have been afraid to talk for Tobago. They have been afraid.

When my hon. colleague, the Member for Diego Martin West, said that his navel string is buried in Mason Hall, my navel string is also buried in Mason Hall and I think we are buried close by under some mango trees. But all of sudden, he is a born-again Tobagonian, and he has come to the point where he is here quarrelling with us about what we need in Tobago. Mr. Speaker, we know and all of us know—I do not want to say anything too wild here. [*Interruption*] No, I do not know if he is my cousin. He was my classmate.

Mr. Speaker, the People's Partnership Government underscores the need for reviving economic activity in Tobago. We are committed to the holistic development of the entire nation and no community will be left behind as we institute fiscal measures that will redound to the benefit of all citizens.

When I heard my colleague, the Member for Oropouche East, outline the plans for Trinidad, when we heard all of my colleagues on this side outline the plans for Trinidad; I am very pleased. The only obstacle for Tobago to be as developed as Trinidad, the only thing that is standing in our way is the PNM Government. The only thing that is standing in our way in Tobago is the PNM Government. If Tobago must grow, the PNM must go. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Speaker, in respect of constitution reform, we have searched the *Hansard* records high and low and we cannot find anywhere where the Member for Diego Martin West was agitating for constitution reform for Tobago. We have searched everywhere and we cannot. In 20-odd years in the Parliament, we cannot find any place where the Member for Diego Martin West was agitating for constitution reform in Tobago. He could not ask his hon. Prime Minister anything about constitutional reform for Tobago, but he is coming now to jump on my hon. leader, the fair lady, the Prime Minister, to rush constitution reform into Tobago. All of sudden, he has found his voice.

It is passing strange that after all of these years of struggle by a great majority of very prominent and eminent Tobagonians including ANR Robinson; James Biggart; Winston Murray; Ashworth Jack—I have a whole long list of them. After

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all these years from 1889 when Tobago became a ward of the country of Trinidad and Tobago, since that time Tobago has been talking and fighting about autonomy and constitution reform, and everyone of us has talked and tried to see what we can have, but it is very significant that every struggle was a struggle against the PNM, and every other Government that came into effect gave Tobago a little more, a little more. Now, the Member for Diego Martin West and his—[*Interruption*]—yes, the Member for Diego Martin North/East would never do that. The Member for Diego Martin North/East would give us all the autonomy we want.

**Mr. Imbert:** How do you know that?

**Hon. V. Alleyne-Toppin:** I know “I used to come to you for thing on the boat, I doh even know if you—you doh remember.”

So, I am saying, when the former Prime Minister did his constitution reform paper for public consideration, there was one page in it—one single page, well, it was actually half of one page and then you turn and half of the next page—about Tobago. There was no provision in that entire document for Tobago and for any kind of constitution reform for Tobago, and if you read it, it says:

“Whatever will happen in the Tobago House of Assembly as will be prescribed.”

Now, all of a sudden, he is jumping all over my Government for constitution reform. Well, I am saying here that the People’s Partnership Government is committed to constitution reform, and committed to giving Tobago its full autonomy and this is going to happen. And whoever is looking out and whoever is thinking that Trinidad is going to give trouble, there is no trouble in Trinidad. The People’s Partnership Government is committed to the development of Tobago.

After all of these years, after all of that struggle, we are seeing some people breaking their leashes, bursting out of their kennel and running down the road behind the bandwagon barking at the wheels trying to get on the bandwagon of constitution reform.

Mr. Speaker, I wonder where the Member’s navel string is really buried. He asked, also, where did the name “Magdalena” come from. All of the time when we were suffering there, we need a hotel; we need all kinds of quality rooms and everybody is working to see what we could get. Now that the Minister of Finance, Minister of Tourism, Minister of Trade have come together and found a way to

give Tobago some Government guarantees to revive the tourism industry that was killed somewhere around 2005 and went steadily down into a steep decline, now, they are talking about who gave the Magdalena its name. He said:

“Where did the name of the Magdalena come from to be attached to our premier hotel investment in Tobago? I gather it was a brainchild of the Minister of Tobago Development.”

I want to emphasize to this honourable House that I had absolutely no part in renaming the hotel. I do, however, acknowledge the rationale of the operators who gave the hotel the name. Now, naming is an important aspect of our heritage, and it is associated with a spiritual and cosmic value in addition to educational and historic significance. A name aids in the preservation of history, and even as it portends inexorably to the future, it connects us to a past that we must not forget and keeps us forever vigilant.

Thus, we have in Tobago: Bloody Bay, Parlatuvier—Bloody Bay where the pirates fought and the sea turned to blood; PiratesBay where the pirates came in, Henry Morgan and everybody from all over; Englishman’s Bay, Indian Walk where we had our first peoples living—Indian Walk meaning Indians not from India but Indians from the first peoples, the Amerindians; Congo Hill where we have our African people.

I want to tell you something about the name of this hotel. The name of the hotel comes from a legend and the legend is that in 1502, Alonso de Ogeda, accompanied by Columbus’ trusted pilot Juan de la Cosa, sailed from Spain on the second Caribbean voyage. One of the four ships he sailed which was called “La Magdelana”. On reaching Trinidad, a third ship, the “Santa Anna” went missing. While searching for it on the north-east coast of Trinidad, Tobago was sighted. Columbus never landed on Tobago and as was customary, named after one of the vessels, hence Tobago became the “La Magdalena”. That was the name of Tobago, as it appeared on a map dated 1508 printed in Naples, Italy. Eventually, the island was renamed “Tobago”.

Now, the island was renamed Tobago—first it was Tovaco which is the long-stemmed pipe that the Caribs used, then it was Concepcion—it depends on who occupied the place. So we had Tovaco; we had Concepcion; we had La Magdalena and we had several other names—the Courlanders gave it another name—and eventually, using the Amerindians, the first peoples’ name, Tovaco, Tobago became Tobago. [*Desk thumping*] The hotel is named for the original

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name “La Magdalena” bestowed upon Tobago by Columbus. Whether you like Columbus or not, that is where we got that name, Columbus’ trusted pilot, Juan de la Cosa, on a voyage of discovery.

La Magdalena Grand captures the magic of old world heritage combined with the exotic charms of the New World which lie waiting to be explored. Like the ship for which she was named, the Magdalena Grand takes you on a voyage of discovery. I am encouraging everybody to come. If we all become marketers of Tobago’s tourism, if we all become marketers of tourism internationally, we are going to do well. If everyone of the 1.3 million of us could invite one person from somewhere else in the world, we could become a vibrant tourism destination.

Here you will experience a new world of leisure and luxury, all your senses will be awakened and delighted; every comfort is. [*Desk thumping*] [*Crosstalk*] [*Inaudible*] fine dining, peace and quiet; enjoy original Tobago hospitality served as only La Magdalena Grand can. Discover your best self there. I would like to say, Mr. Speaker, a man could serve the Lord there.

Mr. Speaker, let us talk about the disrespect and betrayal for our people as we revisit the PNM stewardship in Tobago just by following a chronology of unforgettable PNM pronunciations in Tobago. “Tobago is only for raising sheep”. Some PNM sycophant said that. That is why all of the lands in Tobago were designated agricultural lands. If you look at the maps, even now, all of the lands in Tobago were designated agricultural lands. This is why the Member for Diego Martin West, when he wanted to do a sheep farm in Mason Hall, he had to fight Town and Country—first of all, he wanted to build a house. When he wanted to build the house, he asked for it to be changed to residential land, and somehow or the other, it happened—maybe because of who was where—and then he wanted to raise some sheep. So he went again for the residential land to become, again, agricultural land. He did not succeed and he had to sell all his sheep. [*Interruption*]

**Hon. Member:** Why?

**Hon. V. Alleyne-Toppin:** Why? [*Interruption*] “Must be the PNM stop him?”

**Hon. Member:** “Dem stop him.”

**Hon. V. Alleyne-Toppin:** “Is dem stop him?” “Mr. Speaker, his own boss stop him”.

Let us go to 1976 when the Tobago people voted for the PNM out. What did the Prime Minister then say? “Crapaud smoke dey pipe! Let Tobago people eat



grass.” Let us go a little further along. I mean, I could bring a whole lot but I have plenty to say.

When the Member for Diego Martin West was commenting on the deep-water harbour that the hon. ANR Robinson and that Government put in place in Tobago, after all of these years of Columbus, after 1502, if Columbus should come back to Tobago, he would ask, “Wha’ happen to allyuh? All yuh doh even have a harbour yet? We still have to park outside.”

The Member for Diego Martin West said that what the Government is building is a duck pond. So when he is talking about the stinking ship—the *Magdalena*—and that was not the name of the ship he was talking about, the name of the ship he was talking about is “Mal-da-dena”; it is a different story. Maybe just a slight difference but it is different. He said that that harbour is a duck pond. And the greatest and the latest of them all in the chronology of what people are saying about Tobago from the PNM side is—[*Interruption*] of course I know that—our hon. Chief Secretary is saying now that Tobago is more developed than Trinidad. [*Interruption*] Tobago is more developed than Trinidad.

**Hon. Member:** Quote your source.

**Hon. V. Alleyne-Toppin:** I quoted my source—hon. Chief Secretary. [*Laughter*]

**12.45 p.m.**

Mr. Speaker, I lived in the constituency of Diego Martin West for some time and our family owned a lovely bungalow on top of the hill in La Puerta. All the time we lived there, the Member for Diego Martin West was our representative, and for 16 years, not a single drop of water came through the taps—[*Interruption*] La Puerta, Diego Martin.

**Mr. De Coteau:** Who was your representative?

**Hon. V. Alleyne-Toppin:** The representative was the Member for Diego Martin West. There are springs on that mountain, yet not a single drop of water came through the taps. We had to buy water and we had to beg the fire service for water. Now, that we have the People's Partnership Government serving this country, the people of Diego Martin West now understand what representation means. The people of Diego Martin West will have water. They will also have roads. Minister Jack Warner, Member for Chaguanas West, will build the Diego

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Martin Highway, will fix the Diego Martin traffic problem, just as he is doing with Maraval, just as he is doing with San Fernando, from Golconda to Point Fortin. I think, for myself, I have to give my Minister some applause. [*Desk thumping*]

There will be certain negative and positive responses, views and sentiments on budget proposals, as well as partisan, neutral and objective positions, which will all be taken by some citizens. This is the essence of democracy, which characterizes governance under the People's Partnership Government. Since all views and comments cannot be accommodated, democracy requires that the legitimate government make the necessary assessment and take the appropriate decisions in the national interest. This is what we are doing. As a parliamentary representative for Tobago East and as a Member of Cabinet, I am therefore required, along with my colleague, the Member of Parliament for Tobago West, to articulate the perspective of the people of Tobago. My contribution will be informed by our Government's overall philosophy and policies, our performance over the last fiscal year and our projections for the new fiscal year.

I would also respond to comments or criticisms of Members of the Opposition where necessary. I do not need to remind this House that the People's Partnership Government emerged out of the citizens' desire to be governed by a political party which reflects the diversity of our nation and which is willing and ready to pilot the journey to a new horizon of growth and development. This is the basis of the national consensus which endorses our philosophy of a people-centred development and our vision: building a secure, prosperous and sustainable nation.

Mr. Speaker, the content of the national budget has shown that we are well advanced in laying the foundation and erecting the pillars for achieving our vision, despite having to confront and overcome internal and external hurdles.

I quote from the theme of the 2012 budget presentation when I note that we are moving from steady foundation to economic transformation. We have baffled our detractors by our resilience and our commitment to achieve our goals and objectives. We have also gained much admiration, made new friends for continuing steadfastly along the road of progress, while more powerful nations flounder and jerk under the weight of the global economic and financial crisis. We continue to progress and maintain a relatively high level of stability, because we are building our nation on seven sturdy pillars of development.

This is a whole country approach, which identifies the major sectors of development and subjects each sector to special attention. Anyone who wishes to

examine national development will therefore find it very simple to focus on our achievements on people-centred development; poverty eradication and social justice; national and personal security or diverse knowledge-intensive economy; good governance; and our foreign policy.

No one can dispute that Tobago has a unique place in the context of location, development and public administration. The island is separated from Trinidad by the surrounding oceans. We have a structure of governance, which is different and more autonomous than any other local government authority and Tobago receives a percentage of the national budget as its annual allocation. Notwithstanding these differences, Tobago is part of a unitary state and subject to the laws of Trinidad and Tobago. The policy prescriptions in the national budget are, therefore, relevant to Tobago, with the understanding that the Tobago House of Assembly is accountable for the funds allocated to it, for executing its responsibilities as enunciated in Act No. 40 of 1996.

As I focus on the theme of this budget statement, for emphasis, its pillars must be restated: safety, jobs, investment. Economic transformation would be expedited in a stable society. The Government has taken the initiative to impose a state of emergency, to facilitate the stability required for economic growth. I lobbied successfully for the exclusion of Tobago from the areas identified as hot spots, and, therefore, subject to the imposition of a curfew. This was on the basis of Tobago being now a relatively safe island.

I want to congratulate ACP Allan Crooks; ACP Lovell; ACP Edwards; and now ACP Trim. Although we have had four ACPs in one year, they have all worked very hard and very well, together with their teams in Tobago and I want to congratulate them for keeping Tobago very safe. When our citizens feel unsafe in their homes and in public places and are afraid to engage in their normal civil activities as lawful citizens, then we will witness the accelerated deterioration and destruction of the social fabric of the society. Without reliable national security, Trinidad and Tobago becomes a failed state.

Mr. Speaker, through you, I urge my Tobagonian people to listen carefully and make a critical analysis of what I am saying. Even as we call for internal self-government, we must assume a responsible stance and become productive citizens, creating wealth, using our natural heritage in respect of flora, fauna, physical space, ideas, values and attributes.

Let us have conversations on internal self-government. Let us ask ourselves: when I get this freedom, what am I going to do with it? When I get internal self-

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government, what am I going to do with it? Will I be ready? Am I prepared to plough the land and produce hundreds of acres of foodstuff for export? Will I invest in downstream agricultural produce for export by establishing my own factory? Can I stay out at sea for six weeks and bring in thousands of pounds of fish for processing, filleting, salting and canning for export? Will I use my five years of secondary education to prepare for the new jobs that will become available in oil and gas and the manufacturing and services sectors? Will we come to the Parliament each year quarrelling about the allocations? Solomon in his wisdom noted that money answers all things in Ecclesiastes, Chap. 10:19.

Internal self-government is an evolutionary process and should be approached with consummate planning and attention to all particulars. Even as we approach this new platform, we should be planning revenue-generating initiatives and priming the population for mature thought, ideology and responsible action. A self-governing Tobago cannot be tugging at the dress tail of Trinidad. As we say in Tobago: "Ah wha happ'n tah wee? Wha happ'n tah wee? L'a ah we pull together. L'a we go. L'a we pull together and build Tobago." When we want to speak and we do not want anybody to understand we say—[*Interruption*]

**Dr. Baker:** You are giving Hansard trouble.

**Hon. V. Alleyne-Toppin:** *Hansard*, giving you trouble? A self-governing Tobago will not be tugging at the dress tail of Trinidad or coming cap-in-hand. The People's Partnership Government and the TOP will change that, under the able leadership of the heir apparent to the throne in Tobago, apparent to the throne of Chief Secretary, and through the able leadership and diligence of that honourable gentleman and our Prime Minister and the People's Partnership Government, Tobago will rise. [*Desk thumping*] There is no doubt that the People's Partnership Government, under the leadership of hon. Prime Minister, Kamla Persad-Bissessar, is wholly committed to the development of Tobago and the complete development of the country called Trinidad and Tobago.

Our People's Partnership Government is the first Government that has put into its manifesto the commitment to give Tobago autonomy in the very near future. I want to put you on notice; the bandwagon is rolling in fast. We have approximately 15 more months to go before the next time we choose in Tobago and we have a decision to make.

I remember when the Member for San Fernando East was the Minister for Tobago Affairs, they used to call him a nice name.

**Mr. Manning:** What, what, what?

**Hon. V. Alleyne-Toppin:** Robinson used to call you a nice name. It is not unparliamentary. They used to call him "Mannish Manning." He was responsible for Tobago affairs. When he came he told us that he was going to do all this good stuff for us. He came right back to Trinidad. [*Interruption*]

**Mr. Manning:** What is autonomy?

**Hon. V. Alleyne-Toppin:** That is what you are talking about, autonomy. He came right back to Trinidad and he called an election; sporting election. It was not time for an election; sporting declarations and lost the election. We have had two sporting declarations from the Member for San Fernando East. We love it when the Member for San Fernando East is in charge. [*Interruption*]

**Dr. Khan:** He has an addiction for elections.

**Hon. V. Alleyne-Toppin:** I know what he likes. I am sure that he likes me very much. I know that, because he likes people to be very diplomatic and suave. He does not like people to be "wajang" and forthright. We in Tobago know what you like. When some people jump up on "ah we boy, we feel ah kinda how, but we understand. Yeah?"

Without peace, without safety, without respect for law and order, the socio-economic benefits of jobs and the net effect of cumulative economic activity are lost. Everyone knows the consequences: the expansion of the drug trade and arms; increased threats to public safety; rape and robbery in homes and elsewhere; capital flight, meaning money running out; gang warfare and other serious acts of violence and lawlessness.

I understand very well why the Member for San Fernando East is concerned about what is autonomy, because he was sure that devolution of power must not happen under his tenure, maybe some decentralization. I saw it in the document. Autonomy is very wide and broad and has as many—I need to say this—definitions as democracy has, and in every democracy, if there are 180 democracies in the world there are 180 types, so autonomy could give you just anything that you can prescribe. For me, Trinidad and Tobago must have, in the construction of its government, something that we may have to invent, that has not yet been invented, that is pleasing and palatable for Trinidad, and Tobago, and Trinidad and Tobago and in the best interest within the sphere of global circumstances. [*Interruption*]

**Mr. Manning:** Would the hon. Member give way?

**Hon. V. Alleyne-Toppin:** Not at all. Not at all! I like him too. “In ah lil bit.” Without economic transformation, how do we guarantee economic growth? Without innovation, how do we capture the imagination of the young and harness natural—[*Interruption*]

**Mr. Speaker:** Hon. Member, I think this is a good time where we can probably break for lunch. We shall resume at 2.00 p.m. This sitting is now suspended until 2.00 p.m.

**1.00 p.m.:** *Sitting suspended.*

**2.00 p.m.:** *Sitting resumed.*

**Hon. V. Alleyne-Toppin:** Mr. Speaker, the Ministry of Tobago Development and the Tobago House of Assembly are two government institutions whose mandates are specific to the needs of the people of Tobago. I have been at the forefront of efforts inside and outside of the Cabinet as an advocate on behalf of THA, especially for its allocations. For this fiscal year the THA will be in receipt of \$2.2 billion; \$1.9 million under recurrent expenditure; and \$319 million under development programmes.

Mr. Speaker, as Minister of Tobago Development I cannot hide the fact that I am impatient with the pace of development in Tobago. Major capital projects continue to take too long to come to completion. I refer here to the Scarborough Regional Library, the Financial Complex, the Cove Industrial Complex and the Shaw Park Cultural Complex, among others, the housing projects at Blenheim, Plymouth—which we call Adventure—Castara and Roxborough.

The Minister of Finance has stated in his budget presentation, I quote: “We will make every effort to ensure that monies allocated are spent expeditiously and for the purposes so identified.”

Mr. Speaker, with your permission I will show this honourable House just some pictures which will explain what we are talking about. [*Interruption*] I have his permission already; I have the Speaker’s permission already. [*A large picture of a building is shown*] This is a picture of the Cove Industrial Estate and Eco-park, languishing for seven years; nothing has happened—

**Mr. Sharma:** “Oh God, PNM is ah curse!”

**Hon. V. Alleyne-Toppin:**—it is in the ground, nothing has happened and the people who are—remember Tobago continues to be under a PNM administration,

this has nothing to do with the central government. [*Crosstalk*] [*Interruption*] But this is what I am talking about, hon. Member. I am talking about urging that we do something in Tobago. I am asking all of those who are wont to invest in the Cove Industrial Estate, come to Tobago and establish your factory shells, we are building the factory shells and we are handing them out to persons who would bring clean, green industry to Tobago.

But this project has been hanging for too long, and this is one of the reasons we have this serious slowdown in the economy of Tobago. So as the Minister of Tobago Development, I will collaborate with the THA urging, urging the people of this country and foreign investors to make use of these opportunities, so that we could move forward, so that Tobago can walk side by side with Trinidad.

I also want to show the picture of the Shaw Park Cultural Complex. [*A large picture of a building is shown*] The Cultural Complex was—the previous one was demolished in 2004/2005 and since that, this one is being built, this has been going on for six years. The Shaw Park Cultural Complex will hold when it is finished, 5,000 persons; it is one of the—our NAPA, our SAPA—

**Mr. Peters:** “Dat is all yuh never!”

**Hon. V. Alleyne-Toppin:**—[*Laughing*] I am urging our people, when the Minister of Finance—this will be completed in our term of the People’s Partnership Government. [*Desk thumping*] [*Crosstalk*] The absence of a cultural and sporting complex has brought sport and culture in Tobago to a standstill.

**Dr. Browne:** You enjoying NAPA weekend.

**Mr. Peters:** And very happy, and my money build it.

**Hon. V. Alleyne-Toppin:** Mr. Speaker, I want also to talk about the Scarborough hospital. The Scarborough Hospital started at the price of \$135 million in 2003, to date it is not completed, to date we are expecting—we have come to the point where we have already spent \$719 million on that facility. The former Scarborough hospital was 100 beds, the present, the new one is 103 beds.

**Mr. Peters:** “What ah shame!”

**Hon. V. Alleyne-Toppin:** The former hospital had a capacity for maternity beds of 18; and this one has a capacity for 17; the former hospital had no Intensive Care Unit—Doc, Minister of Health.

**Hon. Member:** No vision!

**Hon. V. Alleyne-Toppin:** And the new one has no Intensive Care Unit. We need very simple and basic things in Tobago, very simple and basic and things like ECG machines and all of this. We are working through the People's Partnership Government and through the Minister of Health. Now, this Minister of Health does not hold responsibility for health care in Tobago, and this is something which we have to look at. [*Crosstalk*] The Ministry of Health does not hold responsibility for health care in Tobago, the Tobago House of Assembly does. But we, on this side will partner in every respect with the Tobago House of Assembly, collaborate in every respect, and bring proper health care to Tobago.

I cannot stand by; since the TRHA is under my remit I cannot stand by and just watch persons die needlessly. Eight persons have died on the dialysis machines in the last three months, I cannot stand by and see this happen. Persons are calling me and saying to me, my husband is on dialysis, my daughter, my son, my wife and I am afraid for them to go to dialysis because persons are collapsing on the machines, persons are dying; but persons want me to keep quiet.

Mr. Speaker, I am paid to talk, and I am paid to talk on behalf of the people of Tobago and that I will. [*Desk thumping*] I have come into this part of my life to the service of the people of Tobago and I was not a "born and bred" politician, I became a politician all of a sudden, last year. [*Laughter*] When I was walking with my husband who was a candidate in the 2009 Tobago House of Assembly elections, I discovered that Tobago was in dire need and I became a politician then.

**Mr. Manning:** "Jenny come lately", you say?

**Hon. V. Alleyne-Toppin:** Very, very, very, very lately, last year; I became a politician last year. I was always a student of politics; some of us have to come early and some of us have to come late. But you know there is something about coming early and something about coming late, Doctor. [*Laughter*] There are persons who come early and they get nothing done for 25, 30, 40 years [*Desk thumping*] there are some people who come early "Jenny come early", or "Johnny come early", and sit there doing nothing, twiddling thumbs and then "Jenny come lately". When I came in last year, I tell you I became a politician last year. When the hon. Member here did—I love the hon. Member, my Prime Minister—he did another sporting declaration, I suddenly became a Prime Minister, a politician. I went to my—

**Dr. Browne:** You became a Prime Minister?

**Hon. Member:** She acted as a Prime Minister.



**Hon. V. Alleyne-Toppin:** All of that happened. I went to my leader and I said, send me; before that I went to my God and I said, send me, I want to go and stand in the gap for the people of Tobago.

So this “Jenny come lately” caught up this Scarborough General Hospital, abandoned and started to push and push in the Cabinet and push and push. And this Cabinet supported me and my Prime Minister supported me [*Desk thumping*] they gave me a little window as acting Minister of Health and during that time I got the first \$27 million and then we rolled on from there. [*Desk thumping*]

So we are going to open this thing next December, we are going to open it in December; it was abandoned. If you talk to the people of NIPDEC, they will tell you it is a good thing. [*Crosstalk*] [*Interruption*]

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** No, work had stopped.

**Hon. V. Alleyne-Toppin:** You see they do not want me to explain what happened, you know. Every single piece of copper, every pipe which went through the walls of that hospital every single piece had to be ripped out and replaced, because all were rotted. Every single piece of plumbing and that hospital, Mr. Speaker, that hospital—

**Mr. Speaker:** Hon. Minister of Tobago Development, if you would address the Chair you would not be disturbed or distracted. Focus on the Speaker, and you would not go wrong.

**Hon. V. Alleyne-Toppin:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. That hospital you will very well know—if you read the UFF Report you will see—has some branches in other places you know, hon. Speaker.

**Hon. Member:** “Ahhh!”

**Hon. V. Alleyne-Toppin:** It has some branches in other places, this is why it is like that. Yes. [*Interruption*] [*Laughing*] I do not know some wards at other places. When my constituents come to me and complain about their inability to access services which are their lawful entitlements, perhaps Minister of Health you should look for those places where those things have been built, and put in some wards in those places. We need a burns unit, we need several things, those places where all of that material went. The range of these inabilities which they experience is too wide and too numerous for quiet comfort. All our citizens are entitled to fair and equal treatment.

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

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

*Question put and agreed to.*

**Hon. V. Alleyne-Toppin:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. And I say thank you to my colleague for being so gracious, "ah tell yuh he like meh". [*Laughing*]

**Mr. Manning:** We are family.

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** "Yuh haf Tobago family now I see".

**Hon. Member:** I thought "was" from St. Vincent. [*Crosstalk*] [*Interruption*]

**Hon. V. Alleyne-Toppin:** Mr. Speaker, we have the facility of an air ambulance, we have to call it an air ambulance. Now, we have—our hospitals are in Trinidad and we live in Tobago, so whenever something happens that you need special treatment for, we have to come to Trinidad. This People's Partnership Government will stop that. The hospital will start in December and it will be a teaching hospital so that the international standards can be upheld. And I am very proud to say that I was one of the persons begging for an international standard.

**Mr. Sharma:** You have done very well.

**Hon. V. Alleyne-Toppin:** [*Laughing*] Mr. Speaker, [*Interruption*] there are some persons in Tobago, on the other side saying things like Tobago must not have a university, Tobago is too small for a university. Where in the world do you know a university where only the persons from that village go? People travel far and wide all over this world to attend universities. I, myself travelled 27 hours on a plane to get to my university.

**Hon. Member:** In New Zealand?

**Hon. V. Alleyne-Toppin:** In New Zealand.

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** She had a scholarship, you know.

**Hon. V. Alleyne-Toppin:** Mr. Speaker, people travel all over the world—

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** She received a scholarship.

**Mr. Sharma:** "That scholarship was not from the Ministry of Community Development".

**Hon. V. Alleyne-Toppin:**—[*Crosstalk*] [*Interruption*] Tobago having the integrated campus put in now by the People's Partnership Government which

other governments before had played with and had never put in. After I lectured at UTT, where UTT had 17 campuses in Trinidad, none in Tobago, and every time I made representation—[*Interruption*] please! I was told, we do not have money for that. All the money has gone in eTeck and what the Minister of Trade and Industry was talking about, disappeared.

**Mr. Manning:** “You know dat eh true man, doh say dat!”

**Hon. Member:** That was not priority.

**Hon. V. Alleyne-Toppin:** Well, I do not know that the university—I worked at the University of Trinidad and Tobago, Mr. Speaker, and the University of Trinidad and Tobago had 17 campuses in Trinidad not one in Tobago. [*Interruption*] No, and I fought—[*Laughing*] From 1889, the teacher training began in Trinidad; all Tobago teachers came to Trinidad to be trained, from 1889.

**Hon. Member:** That is right.

**Hon. V. Alleyne-Toppin:** When the Mico Trust was training persons in Antigua—and some persons were going to Antigua—and from that time to this the people of Tobago have been agitating for a teachers’ training facility in Tobago. Now with People’s Partnership Government, for the first time in September of this year, the UTT Bachelor of Education programme was brought to Tobago [*Desk thumping*] and it is going on, oversubscribed. You see, because of the social upheaval, you have to—if you have to leave Tobago every time you need some kind of post-secondary or tertiary education it tears the fabric of the society apart. This is why there are 300,000 Tobagonians living in Trinidad and only 55,000 living in Tobago.

**Mr. Warner:** I will build a bridge.

**Hon. V. Alleyne-Toppin:** I think you better build the bridge or the tunnel. It tears the families apart and maybe as I talk about this education bit, I could talk about the library. The Scarborough library is being built for the last 10 years—more than 10.

**2.15 p.m.**

The generation of Tobagonians who have come up through high school without a library—no place to go and study, no place to do research, and then when we started talking about it and we started asking the man in charge there: how come we do not have a library, you know what he said? We do not need a library because everything now is electronic, so you go to the internet. But if you

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have to pull yourself up by your own bootstraps and you have no boots, how are you going to do it? So get a computer and you are looking for the internet and you are living somewhere between Mt. St. George and Delaford, there is no reception for the Internet, and the People's Partnership is bringing that also to Tobago. [*Desk thumping*]

When all of the fishermen in Trinidad through our partnership got smartphones and GPS tracking systems for their boats and for their engines, Tobago is now going to have all of that, but what we are waiting on is that system that could bring in the signals. So when you are talking about library and "we are bound for that and Internet", if you do not have electricity how can you plug in your computer? Mr. Speaker, I do not have to talk about where Tobago is but this People's Partnership will bring Tobago side by side with Trinidad, and we will share a very beautiful nation.

You know, according to one of my former luminaries from Tobago, bad habits gather by unseeing degrees that streams make rivers and rivers run into seas. Let us contain ourselves and give the best of what we have to a developed nation. I hope the people who are listening are listening to the plethora of good things that are happening in Trinidad. When you listen to all of these Ministers' you listen to all the good things that are happening in Trinidad and you know there is a stumbling block in the way of Tobago. And when I was a child we did Baptism in church we said: nobody should put a stumbling block in the way of one of these, and there is something stumbling Tobago. So if Tobago must grow the PNM must go. [*Desk thumping*] So, Mr. Speaker, "London Bridge is falling down". That is a song that we sing in Tobago. [*Desk thumping*] "London Bridge is falling down" and very soon that bridge will be removed entirely.

Imagine blaming the decline in the tourism sector on the state of emergency. Mr. Speaker, the tourism sector went into decline in 2005, and has gone steadily downhill and all of a sudden you are blaming the state of emergency which was instituted in August 2011. It is no secret that nationals living abroad were alarmed at the negative impact of the numerous murders and robberies and vicious attacks on tourists on Tobago's image. What impression would potential tourists have? Tell me. Listen to these: "Swiss couple hacked to death at their flat in Canaan", "British couple who were hacked mercilessly and viciously at their home in Bacolet are fighting for their lives". "Husband and wife burnt to death at their Moriah home. Foul play suspected". If nationals were filled with anxiety and trepidation over the extent of lawlessness in Tobago, this Government is trying to remove this alien mood of lawlessness that is creeping into the island. Persons who visit Tobago now are much safer.

It is not the state of emergency that caused the fall of visitor arrivals in Tobago, but a rise in criminal activity, the negative international press coupled with a most feeble and lacklustre marketing by the THA; a poor attitude to customer service, a paucity of quality hotel rooms and an unwelcoming airport. Improvements and attractions in the tourism product are lacking, yet people say the mainstay of Tobago's economy is tourism.

Perhaps the mainstay of Tobago's economy is subventions from Trinidad. Mr. Speaker, this People's Partnership Government has put in moves to erase all of that and to build tourism again, and to build an economy again in Tobago. The state of emergency has actually given us a boost because what we are hearing now is that our foreign visitors are saying: "At last you all are doing something about crime. "At last you are handling the thing and we are feeling better so we will come."

Mr. Speaker, in Tobago we have had a 60 per cent decline in tourism, yet in Anguilla there is a 7 per cent growth, Bahamas 3.1, Barbados 2.6, Jamaica 4.9, St. Lucia 9.9, and I want to tell you that the People's Partnership Government has begun the upward move. We have the guarantees and I do not have to go into that, my Minister of Trade explained all of that, but what is also happening is that we just got that international award for the best destination for 2012. So this is to show you what is happening, Trinidad and Tobago; this was to show you what is happening with our new thrust in respect of tourism.

Mr. Speaker, there are ways of measuring and we have had in Tobago a rainforest that has been preserved since 1776 as a nature reserve, and when you have heritage tourism, when you are builders, the best site, the best destination, it is because of the way you preserve your environment. Mr. Speaker, so I am urging, as I go along, all of the people in Tobago to rise to the occasion, join with the People's Partnership, partner with the Tobago House of Assembly, let us move forward. I am sure that I am a part of the solution although some people feel if I say something I am part of the problem.

So if you come to Tobago and you get sick and you go to the hospital and you have problems and I am telling you: I have to be fighting somebody, call a helicopter, they say I am part of the problem. I cannot understand how that could make me a part of the problem. I will do everything I can to forward the plight of the people of Tobago. With all the respect for all of my colleagues, and I really, really, do bless you all for all that we have been doing.

Mr. Speaker, I have to go quickly. The housing situation in Tobago: they said they would build 4,500 houses, they actually did build 137 in the past 10 years.

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They have given out 15 houses every year for the past seven years, but the only thing—that is when you look at the statistics, but when you look at what they have given out, in the last year they have given out 137 houses. The rest of the time no sewage, no electricity, all kinds of things—flooding, all kinds of problems.

In Trinidad we have land for the landless, we have homes for middle income, high income, low income; we have all kinds of initiatives from the Ministry of Housing and the Environment. In Tobago we have the single-prong approach and all the computers in the housing department are really special because when they throw up the names of the people who must get houses, they are either an aunty, a cousin, a “nenen”, a brother, a sister and nobody else, and they all have to be wearing red.

Mr. Speaker, in Tobago red or yellow, Black or white, they are precious in my sight and in the sight of [*Inaudible*] [*Desk thumping*]. What these people are doing is giving people fish after fish after fish. They will not teach them how to fish. Do you know why? This is just to keep people in a state of dependency; keep people in a dependency state; keep you in a place where: okay “I will give you a 10-days”, “I will give you a 5days”, “I will give you whatever”, “I will give you a short term”. You cannot go to the bank with it, you cannot go to a business house with it, you cannot face—you cannot own a mortgage. You just do not qualify. You do not qualify for anything.

So, besides that, I will give you a little contract job, maybe one year, maybe two years, maybe three years. If I give you a three-year contract, maybe you could buy a secondhand car. And this is what is happening, and people are doing what they have to do—find a way, get a job. I am urging my people: get ready to be an entrepreneur. Find something in your space and turn it into money. The People’s Partnership is doing this with the growth pole, with the Green Fund and we are helping people to create wealth in their own space.

As we say in Tobago: “All ah we is one family”, and, you know, it really does hurt me, it does really hurt me that people could sit and see their neighbours starve. I had messages come to my family, “You have to starve because you are not wearing red”. You see? “You have to starve because you are not wearing red. So what we did, we moved to Trinidad—you could be as qualified as you want, you will not get a job.

**Hon. Member:** That is not true, man.

**Hon. V. Alleyne-Toppin:** It is not true? The same things that you complain about, we have to complain about. I always worked but, Mr. Speaker, I worked in Trinidad and when I did not work in Trinidad I worked in the United States, because I could not—in Trinidad you fall into the pool. In Tobago everybody knows you. People who have come and had a conversation with me, just a casual conversation, have lost their jobs, but let us talk about the mandate of the Ministry—enough complaining, because now that the People’s Partnership Government is here there is no more need to complain, freedom is coming tomorrow. [*Desk thumping*]

The Ministry of Tobago Development has under its portfolio Central Administrative Services Tobago, Met Services, Registrar General’s Office, Co-ordination of matters relating to Tobago, and under statutory boards and authorities we have Tobago Regional Health Authority. The Ministry plays a key role in facilitating effective delivery of government services to the people of Tobago by collaborating with other central government ministries and departments and various agencies. These include, of course, all of my colleagues here.

Mr. Speaker, consistent with our mandate, the Ministry was very active in the last fiscal year ensuring that the necessary structures and processes are put in place, and programmes and projects that are implemented in Trinidad and disbursed in Trinidad are also available in Tobago. We have a Registrar General’s Office and this is where, for the first time, we have that electronic birth certificate that you can get not in two weeks but in 15 minutes.

Last August, Cabinet agreed to the award of a contract to the National Insurance Property Development Company Limited for the design, construction and outfitting of a new building for the Met Services Division, and the mobilization money has gone to them. This will facilitate the much needed expansion of the ANR Robinson Airport, facilitate the provision of a state of the art facility for Tobago inclusive of dormitories for the workers and function as a substitute facility in the event that the office in Trinidad is unable to function during a natural disaster or other emergency.

The Ministry provides also for the Met Office the Smart Met System, an improved forecasting model system. This system is utilized by the Met Office in Piarco to enhance the accuracy and reliability of forecasts thereby increasing public confidence. And we have outfitted that office and I do not want to go through all of that because I want to finish quickly so that all of my colleagues

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can give you all of what is happening, but suffice it to say that through the Ministry of Tobago Development, every service that is offered in Trinidad to the people of Trinidad and Tobago can be accessed in Tobago. This is the mandate of the Prime Minister, so that Tobagonians do not have to be travelling to Trinidad for everything—remember we used to come for birth certificates and all that.

We have, through the Ministry again and through my agitation, brought Tobago to a place where national scholarships are easy to come by. Mr. Speaker, for my ownself I had my scholarship to New Zealand four times before somebody told me that I had a scholarship—four years.

**Hon. Member:** You handled it quietly.

**Hon. V. Alleyne-Toppin:** Well I did not know until they finally said: “Okay, well go”, and then when New Zealand said: “send the last four winners”, the last four winners was me. So they sent all the second places with me. Mr. Speaker, we know what we are talking about. What the hon. Prime Minister was talking about yesterday about discrimination in those things, that has happened to Tobago from time memorial under the PNM. “What you kept calling them for?” What are you calling them for? Let us give this to somebody else. All of that has stopped; we have a transparent arrangement and I am one of the Ministers in the inter-ministerial committee, and just since this year, since March, since we started this thing, Tobago has received over 15 scholarships. [*Desk thumping*]

**2.30 p.m.**

Just when you go through the books you see but these people qualified last year, but these people qualified the year before, but these qualified the year before that, but nobody called them.

So, Mr. Speaker, just to go down quickly, land regularization. The Member for St. Augustine, the Minister for Legal Affairs, is moving very swiftly along with me to make sure that land regularization happens in Tobago. This year—in the run-up to the next Tobago House of Assembly election which must happen in or before January 2013, we understand that they have decided to give out 1,000 lots of land to friends and family—1,000 lots of land. All of the time they are sitting there on 40 per cent of Tobago’s land, and they are not giving it to anybody except partners, that is in order to build the vote bank. Now, they are going to give out 1,000 lots—

**Mr. Warner:** Let them give it out.

**Hon. V. Alleyne-Toppin:** What we will do, Mr. Speaker, I will report in the Parliament every name that is on that list, and we will see what happens, every



name, because I continue to call on the Tobago House of Assembly and I do call—some of them do not answer me at all—all the time. Those at the very top do not answer me at all, but some of them answer.

I say what is happening here, this person needs something, this person needs something, that person needs something, I will continue to call and find out where is the money going.

You know, Mr. Speaker, let me just talk about something that is happening in Tobago. You see when we get our allocations, say whatever money for whatever or this for that, this to buy eggs, this to buy cheese, this is to buy ham, the Tobago House of Assembly gets its allocation en bloc, every quarter, and the Tobago House of Assembly decides what to do with that money.

So, here I have quoted from somebody from another place. My rough calculation puts the unexpended balance over the last 10 years to maybe \$1.5 billion. The secretary must make a comprehensive statement about the unspent balance reserves currently held by the THA. Last year I spoke about it and I am speaking about it this year again.

**Mr. Sharma:** Excellent.

**Hon. V. Alleyne-Toppin:** Further, that unspent balance was placed in the Assembly's contingency account. When the Auditor General wrote to the Attorney General for legal advice, his advice was that existence of a contingency account was illegal. Not my advice, the Auditor General's advice.

But still we continue to have unspent balances hoarded and put in certain accounts to gain interest, and the interest disappears. So, the Minister of Finance has no idea what is happening in Tobago, who is spending what, what they spend it on, whether they are buying eggs or whatever, no idea.

So, this is why since 2003 no Auditor General's statement is available to the Government for scrutiny.

I am calling on my people in Tobago to go back to where we used to be, we used to be honest, we used to be honest, we use to be hard-working, we were not on this dependency syndrome thing. We used to say, "nobody could rice me" nobody could whatever. We used to be independent and proud. And I am calling on my people to get back to that place. [*Desk thumping* ]

So, that I as a politician do not have to hold you to ransom so that you have to vote for me, I do not want that in my term.

**Mr. Sharma:** Very good.

**Hon. V. Alleyne-Toppin:** I want you to vote for me if I am serving you the way you want me to serve you, and if I am derelict in my duty, vote for somebody else.

**Mr. Sharma:** Agreed! Excellent!

**Hon. V. Alleyne-Toppin:** Mr. Speaker, as I close—

**Mr. Sharma:** “PNM ain’t go win no seat next time.”

**Hon. V. Alleyne-Toppin:** I lean again on the wisdom of Nkrumah. I must emphasize that our Government is in the process of building a society in which men and women will have no anxiety about work, food, shelter; where poverty and illiteracy no longer exist. Where health care—

**Miss Hospedales:** A promised land.

**Hon. V. Alleyne-Toppin:**—is of international standards for all. You see that people who cannot plan for such an eventuality must say that is a promised land or must say that is a utopia—that is the way that people should live.

**Mr. Sharma:** Well said.

**Hon. V. Alleyne-Toppin:**—standards for all—international health care standards, and where our educational facilities provide our children with the best possible opportunities for learning.

The fiscal 2012 budget which is a theme of security, jobs and economic transformation clearly supports this process. In particular, Mr. Speaker, our Government envisions a Tobago where every person uses his or her talent to his or her fullest capacity, and contributes to the general well-being of the island and by extension the nation.

Mr. Speaker, I am believing God for peace and an unparalleled progress in this nation, but as Jimi Hendrix said, when the power of love overcomes the love of power, then the world will finally have peace and progress. Mr. Speaker, I thank you. [*Desk thumping*]

**The Minister of Legal Affairs (Hon. Prakash Ramadhar):** Mr. Speaker, once again I am honoured to be part of the debate of the budget for Trinidad and Tobago in year 2011/2012.

**Mr. Sharma:** You are looking very distinguished.

**Hon. P. Ramadhar:** Thank you very much, Sir. Mr. Speaker, let me just put on record that this budget has been criticized by many on the other side and it is

obvious that by the experience on the other side that they do not understand what is happening in this country.

**Mr. Sharma:** Exactly.

**Hon. P. Ramadhar:** Mr. Dookeran, our Minister of Finance is a man of great integrity. He is a patriot who has given his life, his dedicated service to the people of Trinidad and Tobago, and today, and for years gone by, and we hope for the future, many years into the future, we would have God's gift in allowing him to continue to serve our people.

The budget clearly has been misunderstood by the other side. A budget is not just about dollars and cents, it is about charting a course and a vision for our people, and a budget is that life source that sustains that vision and makes things happen. And I want to congratulate first of all the Prime Minister in having chosen Mr. Dookeran as our Minister of Finance. [*Desk thumping*] I congratulate his efforts, his continued efforts, to change Trinidad and Tobago, first of all, by changing the politics because politics is where power resides and power is what determines the future of a nation.

When we inherited the governance on May 24, 2010, as my dear friend and colleague from Oropouche East put it—"we were left at the table". They had deserted us with debts that needed to be dealt with, for the right thing to be done, to fix the wrongs of the past.

This last year has been a great challenge for our people, but we have been able in the face of an economic meltdown throughout the globe to be able to stabilize things. Yes, a decrease in GDP is not good, but how worse would it have been if this People's Partnership had not taken control of the situation.

And as we move forward let it be understood that this mission of the People's Partnership on behalf of the people, it is really about giving back, as my friend for Tobago East has spoken to, giving back to the people of Trinidad and Tobago, the destiny that they truly deserve; to bring back truth, honesty, independence, commitment and patriotism to a nation that has seen a deficit in the governance and the politics of the past.

Mr. Speaker, this budget is about stabilizing and then transforming. A lot has been done to stabilize, and the transformation must now come. As we go into our 50th year of our anniversary of our independence, you just reflect and ask yourself, are we a truly independent nation? What is independence? Why is it necessary? Why do we say that we are independent, when we truly are not?

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When a nation cannot feed itself it becomes really the victim of international forces, and this Government is intent on the first priority of any government, that is, to feed its people from within its shores. I congratulate wholeheartedly the efforts of the People's Partnership and the Minister of Food Production for the efforts he has taken in the last year to finally bring back to Trinidad and Tobago a source of wealth that has been demonized by past PNM administrations, that is agriculture.

God gave us everything we need to sustain our beings, our bodies, our minds and our souls, but I grew up in central Trinidad and I know the disrespect that had been shown to agriculture and those involved in agriculture for all of life. It was as if those who were involved in agriculture were children of a lesser God. When you heard the insults recently, when floods would take away and ravage the work of families and then they would be presented with cheques of \$47, you ask yourself what priority could a government have had to treat the people like that?

But this last year we have seen a new energy in agriculture where farmers are starting to believe and feel as if they are truly part of society, not of a dying breed, as young people are now made to understand that there is great wealth to be had. You can have professions in agriculture by the use of very modern techniques. We are making agriculture sexy for our people to return to it. That is transformational effort.

When governments of the past have used the largesse of the state, oil and gas, not to develop other industries, not to develop other things, but to become totally dependent on the very oil and gas, you ask yourself, did we not ever realize that it is not a source that is being replenished? There will come a day when oil and gas will be no more in this nation. Have we done sufficient to prepare and transform the economy to meet that challenge?

These efforts are not things that could happen within a year or five or maybe even a decade, maybe 20 years might have been required, and clearly it is now upon the People's Partnership to do the things necessary to transform the economy, so that when that day comes, when oil and gas are no more we will not be met with that awful shock that will cause economic meltdown, and devastation in the streets.

This is not easy and that is why we need the effort of all to become part of the transformation, but yet the other side does not get it, they just do not get it. I spoke to Mr. Dookeran, the Minister of Finance, because I am against deficit spending, but when I truly understood what was happening, the deficit in the

budget is not to go into recurrent expenditure to pay for salaries, it is in a large part to pay for new industries, for new development, to create an environment for new investment. Every businessman knows that you sometimes have to borrow to invest, to create new wealth, and that is what we are doing.

I hear my friends muttering on the other side “not true, not true”, not true, when hundreds of billions of dollars have been spent over the many years. What is there to sustain the economy if we do not now change it?

We hear of the use of this waterfront project now housing the Parliament, well I tell you what if we did not need to move from the Red House what would have been here? We had to use government offices to make use of space, and reduce the rental burden that had been placed on our citizens on behalf of the government for all the years. These are the things that we have had to do.

Mr. Speaker, I want to congratulate members in my Ministry. The Ministry of Legal Affairs is doing its part in the transformation process. Under our responsibility is the Office for Intellectual Property. This is a new understanding in society that intellectual property is not just about trademarks for the sale of trademarking or for protection of rights, but we are embarked now on a programme to educate our citizens that an idea can change the world.

Bill Gates, Steve Jobs, they are persons who earn billions of dollars from ideas. Trinidad and Tobago is a nation of great thinkers, great inventors, people with very creative minds, and we now as a Government have to set that environment where the young people in particular can appreciate that if they think through things and find solutions and come up with new inventions, that they too can earn a livelihood, not just a livelihood, probably come into even very great wealth and that is a new transformational effort on behalf of this Government.

Mr. Speaker, I am also proud to say that we in the Ministry of Legal Affairs have done a great deal of very simple things to enhance the quality of life of our citizens.

#### **2.45 p.m.**

I remember, sometime last year, the Member for Chaguanas West, called me to tell me that there was a line-up outside my Ministry before 6.00 a.m. We made enquiries and realized that the offices were not open to the public until later in the day. There was a simple instruction that at whatever hour any citizen arrives at our door, whether three, four or five o'clock in the morning, they would be allowed inside. [*Desk thumping*]

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We have facilities where our brothers and sisters coming from far, Toco, Chaguanas or Diego Martin, wherever they are from, as they come in, they have access to the washroom facilities, water and coffee, simple things like that.

I understand my friend, the Minister of Health, is taking initiatives to allow the health clinics to open so that whatever hour people come they will be able to access them. These are simple things.

In my Ministry, when I came into public life, I always had the impression that public servants as a whole were not really interested in work. I realized, having been there for a year and a few months, that they are fabulous people [*Desk thumping*] waiting for the opportunity to be guided, to be liberated, to be given the authority to do their jobs.

My Permanent Secretary, Mr. Bernard Sylvester and the Registrar General, Karen Bridgewater-Taylor, are just two examples. I will tell you what happened. We have said this repeatedly, but it is shocking to know that a birth certificate could have been had in Port of Spain in a matter of two weeks, but if you were unfortunate to have been born at the San Fernando Hospital, it would take you a year to get a birth certificate.

How is this possible, I asked? They said, you know we have certain rules and regulations and we need this, that and the other. I said, listen, I am going to be project manager for this. I want it done in one week. Guess what, Mr. Speaker? With the work of the Registrar General, the Permanent Secretary and their team, within one week we were able to put the computers in San Fernando and deliver birth certificates in two days.

We have expanded that effort now to 15 centres. I thank the Member for Point Fortin for the very warm welcome the Ministry received when we opened one of those centres, so that the people of Point Fortin could go there and receive their birth and, unfortunately, death certificates.

More than that, as we opened the 15 centres throughout this nation, I have already spoken to the Minister of Public Administration. We are already computerizing those areas and, as we move forward to the single electronic window, and with the valuable parliamentary time to pass the legislation so that we can pay by credit card for any government facility, these centres will be available to every citizen for any service this Government offers.

You can go into these centres, pay with your credit card and we will post out to you, wedding certificate, death certificate, birth certificate, land registry

documents; you name it, from the Ministry of Trade and Industry. Anything that this Government offers, those documents can be sent to you, you can go to the centres.

But, let us not forget the vision of this Government. When laptops were given out to children, there was a hue and cry. The understanding beyond just immediate was that when you give a laptop to a child, you give it to the family and sometimes to entire communities. As we work toward enhancing Internet access, we would be able—every family, every community—to go online and order these documents. [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Speaker, please. I always treat my friends with due respect. You can go online and order whatever document and it will be posted to you so that you no longer have the burden of going to any government office to line up for hours and get the runaround. This is a service to the people and it is so simple you ask yourself why was this not done many years ago. They just did not care enough.

I just came back from New York where I visited the consulate. I was informed by the Consul General there that many of our citizens who live abroad sometimes their passport expires. Some may not have the privilege of returning to Trinidad and Tobago because if they do, they may not be able to return from whence they came. If they do not have a valid passport, they cannot cash their cheques; so they are caught in a really awful position.

Very often, the reason they cannot get their passport renewed is that there is some error on their birth certificate. There and then we made a decision, the Consul General and I—I want to thank the Minister of Foreign Affairs and Communications because I went to him with the idea that within three months we would set up, in all our consulates and embassies, wherever in the world, videoconferencing facilities to network with the Ministry of Legal Affairs, the Registrar General's Department and whatever interviews, whatever is necessary to be done, you do not have to come back to Trinidad and Tobago. We will fix it from afar and send the documents to you. These are simple but important things that we continue to do.

I am also proud to announce that the Ministry was able, in-house, to produce a CD of the Laws of Trinidad and Tobago. It would be remiss of me not to mention the names: Mr. Deo Bhagowtie, Senior Counsel, Miss Lorraine Lutchmedial, Miss Yolande Robinson and Mr. Richard Roberts. Their work is seminal. Do you know what they were able to do? In the past, of course, CDs were prepared, by

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external industries and imported back to Trinidad at great cost. These persons resided within the Ministry of Legal Affairs and I asked: could we not do this in-house? What do you need?

They said what they needed and we gave them the resources. Within a very short period of time, we had one of the most modern CDs available with all of the Laws of Trinidad and Tobago; with a search engine that is envied by most. We were able to do that at next to no cost.

To the extent that we were able to do these things, with the cooperation of the Minister of Education, every single computer that has been distributed to children this year is loaded with the Laws of Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*]

We, of course, will be sending copies to the Leader of the Opposition, the Chief Whip and whomever on the other side is interested in our laws. It is our view that the laws of a nation must be spread and given to the people of Trinidad and Tobago and that is why we have taken these initiatives.

Speaking as the leader of the Congress of the People, I am extremely proud to be part of this coalition [*Desk thumping*] and I hear the other side referring to the UNC Government. The UNC is an important component, but it is not the only one. We have, in this party, this partnership, the TOP, the NJAC, the MSJ, the COP and the UNC. [*Desk thumping*] The interest of all may not always be what we want, but we will always express it and, in that balancing, come up with a formula that works for the people of Trinidad and Tobago.

How proud I am as leader of the COP to be handed the opportunity to lead a great party, the foundations of which were set by our leader, Mr. Dookeran! To hear the Minister of Housing and the Environment, under whose Ministry comes the environmental protection—let me put it in the widest possible terms: the very things that the COP have fought for in our Green Manifesto, written by Dr. Muradali and others, the People's Partnership is delivering.

When you compare that to a government of the past that cared nothing about the environment, you know that the one thing you must protect, because everybody knows that, you have to look after your home. God gave us everything, but they were willing to poison it and destroy life and greenery for the sake of industrial development at the expense of the very lifeblood of a nation. Today, we have a different vision that if you do not protect your environment, you are destroying your future and I am very proud to be part of that.

As leader of the COP, many criticized the Prime Minister for the removal of a most able Minister of Energy and Energy Affairs, Carolyn Seepersad-Bachan, and



put her in the Ministry of Public Administration. I knew then that the Ministry of Public Administration would possibly be the most important Ministry in the future governance of Trinidad and Tobago [*Desk thumping*] because therein lie resource and the potential for the saving of this country and wherever Carolyn Seepersad-Bachan is put—[*Crosstalk*] Could we have some respect in this House, please.

**Mr. Speaker:** I appeal to Members to allow the hon. Minister to make his contribution in silence. I appeal for your cooperation. Hon. Minister, you may continue.

**Hon. P. Ramadhar:** Mr. Speaker, I thank you very much. I was making the point that the Prime Minister knows the quality of the Ministers she has and Carolyn Seepersad-Bachan, anywhere she is put, will excel.

Having had discussions already with our Minister, I am very pleased with the vision she has for that Ministry and how she is going to transform how Government interacts with the people of Trinidad and Tobago [*Desk thumping*]

How proud I am, in the face of some criticism of the MP for Arima, when he stood on the foundation upon which the COP was created, of community rights.

[Mr. Deputy Speaker *in the Chair*]

The Government made a decision to put a detention centre in Santa Rosa in extenuating circumstances. We appreciated the need for speed in that and a decision was taken. But when citizens said they were not pleased with this, the MP, as a representative of the people, a COP member—let me tell you, Member for Arima, I am very proud of the fact that you stood for the people and you were able to work together with the authorities to come to a better understanding of how things happen and to make things better.

These are the things that a coalition government must face. It may appear to those others who do not understand how you could be different; how you can be independent, yet able to work together, in harmony sometimes; sometimes in less harmony, but able to succeed for the people. That is the beauty of the People's Partnership. No one has rampant authority over anyone else.

I have said this before and I will repeat it. If only you knew what happens in the Cabinet, the robust conversations and disagreements we may have [*Interruption*]*—*you could call it ol' talk, but at the end of it, it is absolutely new politics where you are able to come together with a consensual view and move forward and continue to succeed.

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Mr. Speaker, I am not intent on speaking much longer because I came late in the debate when many of the thoughts and ideas have already been expressed. It shows you now the commonality when good men and women come together; that your thoughts generally are very similar and that when you are criticized, you appreciate that. Criticism is from those who do not understand or who are malicious in intent when they do not wish a good thing to succeed.

Let me just say, when we hear [*Interruption*] Malicious, yes. Malicious when you know better and say something else.

I want to make this point—I hear the other side speaking about discrimination and I hear reference to how much work is going on in certain constituencies controlled by the People’s Partnership. I hear my dear friend, the Member for Laventille East/Morvant, saying how many millions of dollars have been budgeted for his constituency. I want to let them know that in St. Augustine, the flagship of the People’s Partnership on the East-West Corridor, I have gotten less, but we are able with that to do enough, slowly but surely, to improve the quality of life for the people of St. Augustine and elsewhere.

**3.00 p.m.**

While I am on that, let me just say, how grieved I am for all the families—the mothers, the fathers and the children—for that awful devastation of flooding that we had in the last several days.

May I also say how happy I am, that yesterday the Minister of the People and Social Development took the time to go with me, together with my friend, the Member for Lopinot/Bon Air West, to tour the areas and to give comfort—and not just give comfort in words—but to be able to provide for those who were in immediate need, immediate assistance. How that could possibly have happened under a PNM Government? It could not have happened, because they just did not care enough.

When they talk about discrimination—it is amazing how logic eludes us sometimes, because we are so blinded by what we want to do without understanding the consequences of what we are doing. I heard my friend, my beautiful friend, from Laventille East Movant—sorry, I forgot which seat it is. Anyhow, the issue was, there was a listing of work done in the constituency of St. Joseph and Mayaro. What was obvious to me was that they were looking after marginal seats, and not even looking after their home base. That is the kind of cheap politics that was exercised by the former administration, but they call it discrimination. Is it too much to have expected, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that when a

government comes in that you look after the areas which have been neglected for so long as your first priority and then as those immediate needs are dealt with, then you deal with the other issues? But they call it discrimination.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, you know, sometimes we must pause and appreciate the potency of what we do. A state of emergency was called. A political decision was taken based upon the advice of those who are responsible for national security. The forces of the State—that is the police and the army—were authorized under a state of emergency to do certain things. There was no political interference, no political direction as to how they must do their business, because they are trained to do these things. They arrested persons and as it turned out, there was no evidence upon which they could be prosecuted, because of an error by the police in that they assumed that evidence that they would have collected before August 15, could have been used in a court; simple and easy. The truth is a mistake was made.

Do we then pounce upon that mistake and put racial undertones to it? Do we realize the beast that we are creating in the society when we define it as a racist act? How could anybody who loves this country and who has been given the authority to be in the Parliament unleash the dangers? Have they not understood what is happening in other societies? [*Interruption*] I do not want to go there. Those are facts that would need to be brought to the public's attention.

Everybody is talking about statistics being in real time. Statistics is going to prove certain things. I am not going to go into that. I am talking about this one issue where the Opposition has put a racial complexion on the decision of the police to arrest persons. That is deadly dangerous. I would give you one example of unstable societies.

My friend, the Mayor of Arima, Ghassan Youseph, lost his father last week in Syria, and for those who know what is happening in Syria, there is a battle between the people and the government. Because of the instability in Syria, he was advised that he should not go to Syria, because his life or his liberty may be imperilled. That is a society in meltdown. We do not have that, but the very things that have led Syria to where it is today, we have to be careful that we do not now put them into our society, and that is the malicious recklessness I speak to, Member for Diego Martin Central. You do not ever introduce as a matter of fact or as a matter of conjecture, that an action of a government—

**Dr. Browne:** Member, would you give way?

**Hon. P. Ramadhar:** No, I will not, not at this point. Whenever I say this, this is across the board for anyone in politics: you do not introduce, unless there is

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excellent reason and good evidence that the reason that something is done is race based. If there are facts to support it, however, you do not close your eyes and turn your mind from the truth, because this is a society that was always intended to be a loving and great one. Where we grew up—I grew up in Freeport and I want to share this with you. I grew up in a shop, so the person I would go next door and eat by was, Madam John, an African woman who loved me like you would not believe.

**Dr. Browne:** A Trinbagonian.

**Hon. P. Ramadhar:** I was fed and I was loved by all races, and I grew up not understanding the separation of the people, but I have come into the politics, at the highest levels, and you see every effort to do it, so that the old belief that you divide and rule is what PNM philosophy has been. [*Crosstalk*]

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** Member for Diego Martin Central, you will have your turn to speak in a short while. Please do allow the Member for St. Augustine to speak in silence, please. When you are on the floor, you may at some time require the Speaker's intervention as well, so allow the Member for St. Augustine to speak in silence, please.

**Hon. P. Ramadhar:** Thank you so much, Mr. Deputy Speaker. [*Desk thumping*]

We are on the point of divide and rule. Race is the worst possible—the racial bogey is the worst possible weapon that could be used to divide our people, but that is not the only weapon they have used.

As I have referred, we are into our 50th anniversary of Independence, why is it that when there was great wealth flowing through this nation like the proverbial dose of salt, money was not invested or new industries created to take away a large portion of our population from the government largess—URP, CEPEP, and even the public service is huge in this country. What that means is that many of our citizens are dependent for their very livelihood on government, and the URP, as a prime example, has been used as a political weapon to sustain political parties in power.

I congratulate the People's Partnership's decision to truncate URP and split it into URP Social under the Ministry of the People and Social Development; URP into agriculture and URP into local government so that labour force could be put into productive employment, and not be used as a make-work programme. Let me make it very clear, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I am not against a social safety net, but a

social safety net is for citizens who fall into hard times, and require something to catch them so that they would not fall flat and their families go hungry. It was never intended as a foundation upon which lives are built and sustained where generation after generation expect that they will continue to have government employment. This Government is liberating its people, giving them independence by creating new industries, not government-based employment. I want us to pause for a moment and understand what that means.

When the Minister, my friend, the Member for Oropouche East spoke about the importance of this budget, this is what this budget is aimed at: finally liberating the people of Trinidad and Tobago from governmental employment and, therefore, dependency on a government; dependency on a political party to give them sustenance. How could we have treated people like this as if they were nothing less, or nothing more than toys and tools to be used? We know, as a fact, that CEPEP was used in the last election and before that to bring crowds to political meetings. *[Interruption]* Exactly, at Woodford Square, when it was packed with CEPEP employees who complained bitterly, many of them, that they had to be there otherwise they would not get a job. And we call this governance, and then you have the gall to criticize the People's Partnership when we attempt to liberate our people! *[Interruption]*

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I move on to the other point. The purpose of a budget, apart from setting direction, is about setting the expectations of a people. Many of our speakers have spoken about value for money. Let me just say that any fool could spend money, but it takes good and decent people to give value for money.

When you saw in the newspaper a couple weeks ago certain people who had bills outstanding of \$2 million and then it suddenly went to \$17 million, you ask yourself, how is that possible? What systems have we created that people believe they could do these things and get away with them or without going to jail? Where is the value for money? That is the question. The People's Partnership will restore value for money. *[Desk thumping]* We must!

When I came into Government one of the things—forgive me Members on both sides here—tell me something, for those who are Ministers now and Ministers of the past, was one of the criteria used to see if you are successful how much money you spent in your Ministry?

**Hon. Member:** No.

**Hon. P. Ramadhar:** Yes, absolutely. I could not believe the foolishness when my Ministry, the little Ministry of Legal Affairs, was marked as poor performing,

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because I did not spend the money. I operated it because I knew that every dollar that was spent in that Ministry came like a shop, the people's shop. You have to give them value for money. [*Desk thumping*] Mr. Deputy Speaker, I am sorry that you are sitting in the Chair, because I wanted to compliment you. As you know, he was the Parliamentary Secretary in the Ministry, and he took a hands-on approach together with the Permanent Secretary and the team, and sometimes programmes that we were embarked upon where the approximate expenditure was already had, they were able in the Ministry of Legal Affairs to bring it to one-third of the cost. Mr. Deputy Speaker, whether you are sitting there now, I congratulate you and thank you for that. [*Desk thumping*]

These are the things that the Ministry continues to the extent that the Ministry was able to do so much with so little that they cut my budget. [*Laughter*] I now have the smallest budget in the entire country, but that will only make us work harder to do more with far less. [*Desk thumping*] I ask all of us to have that vision in sight, because it does not matter what budget—whether it is \$53 billion or whether you have a deficit of \$20 billion or \$7 billion or whether you have a budget of \$100 billion and you have no deficit, if you do not give value for money it all comes to naught.

As my friend—I keep repeating it, because I thought it was pure genius this morning, his contribution—the Member for Oropouche East—when he spoke about the deficit in governance. That is what this country has lacked for too long. As we transition from a political budget to a budget for the people and the transformation of the people, many will not understand it. I have heard criticisms. I sat here and I was befuddled, completely astonished—I tried to imitate my friend, the Member for Oropouche East—when they said that this is a fake budget, it cannot be believed. [*Interruption*] I just ask them to pause and let logic return a little.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, there is no election in the air, but this Government, under this Minister of Finance, introduced no new taxes. Just think about that. Is that something that you would expect or is it that they expected us as the Prime Minister would say, “a tax, a tax, a tax”? Just tax it and raise revenues and damage our people, because when you tax the people, it is their money, and when you used it in bad ways, waste it and allow corruption to go rampant, you are basically stealing from them.

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

Mr. Deputy Speaker, we have not raised a single tax; we have not. We have not removed the fuel subsidy, but we are preparing the ground for a sustainable growth in different industries.

I just want to say this before I take my seat. Each and every citizen in this country has a duty to transform the economy, not just in terms of opportunity but to be each other's keeper. When this Government came into office we inherited a system, and we would be naive to believe that the corruption of the past administration has not left its legacy intact in some parts. We must be ever vigilant in every Ministry to see what systems exist and to keep a close eye on them. That is the call to every citizen, whether you are a labourer, a small contractor, big contractor, schoolteacher, whoever you are, keep your eyes open and your attention alert for those who are wishing to harm the population by their corruption.

Let us think about that, it is our duty, because corruption does not go away overnight. We are intent, in the People's Partnership, to cleanse it. That is why when you hear criticisms about the expenditure on forensic investigations, people become afraid. Maybe the figure is high, but the need is great, so that no person in public office would ever believe with great comfort, that they could do what they did under the PNM and be left unscathed. It is our duty to cleanse the society, to fix the evils of the past, and whatever it takes with the help of God and the love of our people, we will succeed in that.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I thank you very much.

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** Hon. Members, at this time leave is granted for the Minister of Foreign Affairs and Communications, the hon. Member for Tabaquite, to make a short statement.

**CHOGM 2011**  
**(Prime Minister's Attendance)**

**The Minister of Foreign Affairs and Communications (Hon. Dr. Surujrattan Rambachan):** Mr. Deputy Speaker, I have been directed by the hon. Prime Minister and the Cabinet to deliver the following statement regarding the upcoming attendance of the Prime Minister and her delegation at the Commonwealth Heads of Commonwealth Meeting, CHOGM 2011, which takes place in Perth, Australia, from October 28—30. The theme selected for CHOGM 2011 is "Building National Resilience, Building Global Resilience". Participating Heads will begin to address challenges of food security, sustainable development and natural resource management, challenges that lie at the heart of national and global resilience for many member States.

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The delegation to CHOGM 2011 will comprise the hon. Prime Minister, the Minister of Foreign Affairs and Communications, the Minister of Trade and Industry and the Minister of Energy and Energy Industries.

As my fellow Members are aware, the hon. Prime Minister, Mrs. Kamla Persad-Bissessar, as the sitting Chairperson-in-office of the Commonwealth, hands over the stewardship of the world's oldest Association of Sovereign States to the hon. Julia Gillard, Prime Minister of Australia, at this year's CHOGM.

This honourable House will undoubtedly appreciate that the Prime Minister, on points of duty and protocol, is required to be present in Australia for the upcoming Commonwealth Heads of Government meeting. As outgoing Chair-in-Office, the hon. Prime Minister of Trinidad and Tobago is scheduled to deliver remarks at the opening ceremony of CHOGM 2011, which will be attended by the Head of the Commonwealth, Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II, and participating Heads of State and governments of the Commonwealth of Nations.

At this prestigious gathering, the Prime Minister will briefly reflect on her tenure as the first female Chair-in-Office, and put forward her vision for the future of the Commonwealth in the global context, as well as her role as a Head of Government within the Commonwealth.

The Prime Minister has also been invited to attend and participate in several high level events and meetings, which take place as a forerunner to the Heads meeting. These high profile engagements will invariably provide important avenues for the Prime Minister to consolidate relationships and build on the networks which Trinidad and Tobago, under her leadership, has continued to develop and strengthen.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, CHOGM 2011 is indeed an historic occasion, as the 54-member Commonwealth will witness the handover of the baton of leadership from its first female Chair-in-Office to its second female chairperson. Certainly, such an occurrence is a fitting culmination of this year's Commonwealth theme, "Women as Agents of Change", a theme and position which our hon. Prime Minister has championed locally, regionally and internationally during her tenure as Chair-in-Office.

Let me state that the role and work of the hon. Prime Minister in promoting greater access for women's political participation has been noted. On Thursday, October 27, the eve of CHOGM 2011, the Prime Minister, as exiting Chair, has been invited to speak at a special side event hosted by the Prime Minister of Australia. This important event entitled "Empowering Women to Lead", is billed



as the first of its kind in the history of CHOGM meetings, and will feature eminent Commonwealth women discussing their experiences as leaders and proposing solutions that will make a real difference to women and girls. This forum will present our Prime Minister with the ideal platform to detail the events she has hosted on women's political leadership and articulate her vision for the future of women in political roles.

As hon. Members would recall, the Prime Minister hosted the Regional Colloquium on Women Leaders as Agents of Change in Port of Spain in June of this year. Last month, in the margins of the 66<sup>th</sup> Session of the United Nations General Assembly, the Prime Minister convened a high level meeting on women's political participation, which saw the participation of President Dilma Rousseff of Brazil and United States Secretary of State, Her Excellency Hillary Rodham Clinton, amongst others.

Quite appropriately, consistent with the Prime Minister's vision of gender equality, Trinidad and Tobago now boasts of a Ministry of Gender, Child and Youth Development. The Prime Minister has also named two special envoys to the Commonwealth Caribbean on women's and children's issues, in the persons of Miss Hazel Brown and Mrs. Brenda Gopeesingh. In addition, included in the national awards of this country, for the first time, is the medal for women, an initiative of our esteemed Prime Minister. It is these achievements that the Prime Minister will be able to share at CHOGM 2011, and recommend to the wider membership of the Commonwealth.

The hon. Prime Minister has also been invited to deliver the opening address at the Commonwealth Business Forum in the lead up to CHOGM 2011, on the morning of Tuesday, October 25. The CBF runs from October 25—27 and focuses on the theme, "Partnering for Global Growth: The Commonwealth, Indian Ocean and Pacific Rim", and is targeted to highlight new global partnerships for trade and investment.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, in keeping with the Prime Minister's thrust to promote Trinidad and Tobago's business and investment potential in all international fora, addressing a Commonwealth Business Forum is therefore an excellent medium to share this country's recent successes in the hosting of two significant marquee business events in June of this year, the first Caribbean Investment Forum held in collaboration with the Commonwealth Business Council and the annual Trade and Investment Convention. The hon. Prime Minister may also use this forum to expound on Trinidad and Tobago's growing economic relationship with the BRIC countries of Brazil, India and China.

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Hon. Members would also recall the Prime Minister's visit to Brazil in April of this year, as a special invitee to the Sixth Regional Meeting of the World Economic Forum. At that time, and on the initiative of the Prime Minister, key members of the local business community, representing the energy, financial services, telecommunication, manufacturing and ICT sectors, accompanied the official government delegation. As well, last month Trinidad and Tobago hosted the 3rd China/Caribbean Economic and Trade Co-operation Forum, which saw favourable discussions with the visiting high level Chinese contingent, led by Vice-Premier Wang Qishan.

From that forum, Trinidad and Tobago will not only benefit from enhanced diplomatic relations with the People's Republic of China, but also capitalize on trade, educational and investment agreements and exchanges. In fact, before they left Trinidad and Tobago, the People's Republic of China signed a contract to buy US \$50 million of Trinidad and Tobago's asphalt.

As hon. Members are aware, Trinidad and Tobago has embarked on an aggressive marketing strategy to encourage direct foreign investment into the country, while also creating avenues for our private sector to build partnerships which will enable greater diversification of our country.

The hon. Prime Minister is also scheduled to meet with the energy ministers of several African countries. With our rich 100-year history in the oil and gas sector, the expertise of Trinidad and Tobago in this arena is sought by many countries, as they seek to develop their fledgling oil and gas industries. These meetings will address the strengthening of economic ties and explore the exchange of expertise between Trinidad and Tobago and their countries.

Wednesday, October 26 again offers the hon. Prime Minister an occasion to market Trinidad and Tobago to the Commonwealth, thereby solidifying the work which commenced at the Caribbean Investment Forum. As a participant in the Commonwealth Business Forum's "Investing in the Caribbean" round, the Prime Minister will continue to raise the profile of this country as an ideal investment and tourist destination, which has continued to withstand an economic meltdown despite the global financial crisis, and this through prudent fiscal management and concerted attempts to diversify our economy.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, on the evening of Wednesday, October 26, the Prime Minister's presence has been requested at two events, distinctly different from each other, but each offering our distinguished Prime Minister the liberty to express the views and vision of Trinidad and Tobago.

At the first of these two evening events, the Prime Minister will deliver opening remarks at the panel debate hosted by the Royal Commonwealth Society and the NGO, Plan, titled, "Silence is not an Option: Strengthening the Commonwealth's Role in Protecting Human Rights". Hon. Members may recall that earlier this year Trinidad and Tobago was proud to be distinguished as the third best country in the Commonwealth to be born in and grow up as a girl. That study, "Because You're a Girl Growing up in the Commonwealth", was published by the Royal Commonwealth Society and the development NGO plan, to mark the Commonwealth's 2011 theme, "Women as Agents of Change".

Building on the findings of their research and to ensure tangible change as a result of this theme, the panel will debate "The broad role the Commonwealth can play in protecting and promoting human rights, especially the rights of women and girls". The hon. Prime Minister, herself a champion of the rights of women and girls, will vehemently put forward the position of this country on this burning issue, especially in light of her strong statement and successes at the recently concluded UNGA side event.

The second event on the evening of October 26 is an interactive meeting with the Trinidad and Tobago and wider Caribbean diaspora in Australia, as the Prime Minister addresses the Caribbean/Australian Association as the guest of honour. Here the Prime Minister will articulate to the association the Government's long-term plan for Trinidad and Tobago, and invite our compatriots in Australia to continue proudly flying the flag of Trinidad and Tobago high in Perth, while developing mechanisms to foster closer bonds and deepen relationships between Trinidad and Tobago and our nationals resident in Australia.

On the afternoon of October 27, just prior to the Prime Minister's attendance at the side event hosted by the Prime Minister of Australia, which I previously mentioned, our Prime Minister will deliver the closing remarks at the Commonwealth People's Forum. This forum is one of the major parallel summits which take place around CHOGM and is an established part of the interface between government and civil society.

On this occasion, the CPF will bring together over 250 civil society leaders and activists from around the Commonwealth. The theme of this year's CPF, the Commonwealth People's Forum, is "Driving Change for a Dynamic Commonwealth", and will touch on issues related to governance, democracy, gender and women's rights, education, technology, innovation and indigenous people.

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Hon. Members would note that the Cabinet has agreed to the establishment of a civil society board, voted for by delegates of local civil society organizations. The purpose of this board is to strengthen the voice and influence of civil society.

**3.30 p.m.**

The Prime Minister, in her closing remarks, may reference the positive developments taking place in Trinidad and Tobago with regard to civil society. As hon. Members are aware, this Government has adopted a people-centred approach to governance, allowing all stakeholders to have a voice in the development path of this country.

These are some of the key engagements which our hon. Prime Minister will attend during CHOGM, 2011. This House would note that on each occasion the Prime Minister will, by her appearance and by her communications, raise the profile of Trinidad and Tobago. Most importantly, the Prime Minister will place Trinidad and Tobago solidly among the Commonwealth as a nation committed to the intrinsic shared values and principles of the Commonwealth: democracy, freedom, peace, the rule of law and opportunity for all.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I take this opportunity to thank you and to wish fellow Members Shubh Divali. [*Desk thumping*]

**APPROPRIATION (FINANCIAL YEAR 2012) BILL, 2011**

**Dr. Amery Browne** (*Diego Martin Central*): [*Desk thumping*] Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, for the opportunity to contribute to this budget debate at 3.30 in the afternoon. And lest Members forget, the contribution that came before me in the debate was that of the hon. Member for St. Augustine. I believe the Member for Tabaquite had some other matters with which he interjected.

**Mr. Sharma:** It is a debate.

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

**Dr. A. Browne:** Mr. Speaker, what is going on? I listened very closely to the Member for St. Augustine, and it appeared to me that he found a very clever way to work into his contribution a complaint, that his constituency had received the least funding thus far in the year-and-a-half, and in addition, he complained that the funding for his Ministry, the Ministry of Legal Affairs, was also cut in this year's budget. It was a very clever interjection. But in listening to him, he did not realize that in his words, he had proven a fact that we have long held on this side, and that is that this is not a People's Partnership; it is a UNC-dominated coalition. [*Desk thumping*]

He did not realize the irony of his words when he worked those facts into the debate. Then he made a very interesting interjection, when he said, very emphatically, that the deficit is not being used to fund recurrent expenditure. He stated this as a fact, and I saw the Member for Caroni East sit up when he said it, because the Member for Caroni East is an economist in his spare time. He said the deficit is not being used to fund recurrent expenditure.

Nothing could be further from the truth. [*Desk thumping*] For the edification of my colleague, the hon. Member for St. Augustine, for the year 2012, the recurrent expenditure is estimated at TT \$53.7 billion. The revenue for the year 2012 is estimated by his Minister of Finance at TT \$45.7 billion, and that excludes borrowing. The deficit on recurrent expenditure is TT \$8 billion. [*Desk thumping*]

So, just to be clear to the Member for St. Augustine, when he was saying that the deficit is being used to fund development and not recurrent expenditure; it is the opposite. This deficit is not being used to finance development; it is being used to finance recurrent expenditure. [*Desk thumping*] All I want to say, based on that contribution, is thank God the Member for St. Augustine is not the Minister of Finance of Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*]

Speaking of the Minister of Finance, I want to do the same thing I did last year and congratulate the Minister of Finance and his team for the presentation of this year's budget, and I do so quite sincerely. I also want to congratulate the hon. Member for Diego Martin West and Leader of the Opposition, for what I believe was one of the finest budget responses in the history of Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*] And I see Members on the other side are agreeing with me—very good response.

I would not forget my colleague, the hon. Member for Oropouche East, who gave a very scintillating contribution earlier, but he began in, what I thought was a derogatory manner toward the Member for Port of Spain South and his contribution went lower and lower from there. We heard all the jokes and the comedy and the tragedy. They talked about almond cookies and vanilla cookies and whether it was salmon and what was the fish of the day, and UDeCott, et cetera. We just came from lunch at this Parliament and Members know that every single day these items and more items are consumed, not consumed, wasted right here in the parliamentary Chamber. So to make a massive case and a comedy out of cookies on a piece of paper, I think it really was a lowering of the budget debate and it did a disservice. [*Desk thumping*]

It is amazing to me, because coming from this Government, this is the Government this has crashed more Prados than the Toyota research—[*Desk*

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*thumping*] I am not going to point out where the Prados crashed. I am talking about vanilla and almond cookies in the Parliament in a budget debate. Absolutely ridiculous!

While the contribution was going on there was laughter and so on. This laughter occurs when hundreds of our citizens are being arrested and detained with zero evidence. That is during that merriment. [*Desk thumping*] These are the same Members who were talking about creeping dictatorship before. This scenario has never occurred in the history of this country. So if there was creeping dictatorship, what we are dealing with now is a galloping, leaping dictatorship. [*Desk thumping*] But there was merriment and joy.

Mr. Speaker, I listened, along with other Members and members of the national community, very carefully to every speaker that has contributed in this debate, and I feel there may be a few more coming a little later, and I, in particular, would like to salute my colleague, the hon. Member for Diego Martin North/East, [*Desk thumping*] for a very strong contribution which, in my opinion, completely destroyed the budget presentation of the Minister of Finance. [*Desk thumping*] The Member for Diego Martin North/East demonstrated that some of the figures presented by the Minister in his documents were quite questionable. That was his contribution. He also demonstrated that all the talk they talked about the Treasury being empty, was just “ol’ talk” and was not based on reality. [*Desk thumping*]

In his budget statement, the Minister of Finance boasted that our local economy was able to survive because of local financial buffers. He spoke about local financial buffers, and there is an entire section of this budget statement devoted to those local financial buffers that the Minister was speaking of. And what are they? They are three: the adequacy of our international reserves; the relatively low levels of public debt and the resources in the Heritage and Stabilization Fund. And he credited the existence of those buffers with the survival of our economy during these tough times.

At that stage of his statement, a more forthright economist would have declared to this nation that these buffers exist because of the vision and the policies of the People's National Movement. [*Desk thumping*] That is the reality. Where did these buffers come from? Jupiter? Mars? It is because of the vision and the policies of the PNM, Member for Caroni East, that these buffers exist. [*Desk thumping*] And we have the figures. We have the figures and the Member for Caroni East, as an armchair economist, would know these figures. Under the PNM

stewardship—and we have to talk about these things—the GDP was increased from \$52 billion to \$133 billion. The debt to GDP ratio, which we met as 55 per cent, was reduced to 38 per cent. [*Desk thumping*] Excellent!

When we came into office we met foreign reserves of US \$2.4 billion. Do you know what we increased that to? US \$11.3 billion. [*Desk thumping*] These are the buffers he was boasting about. And we reduced unemployment from 10.8 per cent down to below 5 per cent in Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*] Well, I see they are working on that one and unemployment is on the rise again. The big buffer that he boasted about, the Heritage and Stabilization Fund, we increased from TT \$300 million, right up to TT \$22 billion. [*Desk thumping*]

I heard the Member for Oropouche East a little while ago indicate that if they had the money from the oil windfalls back in the days they would have fixed WASA and they would have done all these other things that he was talking about, and I am here to tell him, no, you would not have, because this Government has already demonstrated its priorities. What you would have done would have been to build an airport in Central Trinidad and dig a tunnel to Maracas. [*Desk thumping*]

Do you know the irony of it? They are boasting about the Chamber and it was done under UDeCott under this Government. But the very building in which we sit, God alone knows if these Members had their way before where would the Parliament be today. We might have been in the savannah. We are here in this building because of the vision and the policies of the People's National Movement. [*Desk thumping*] The Parliament has a home, temporary or not! [*Desk thumping*]

**Mr. Manning:** I want to hear you. Let me hear you.

**Dr. A. Browne:** Mr. Speaker, we all recognize that the contribution by the Member for Diego Martin North/East was quite devastating to the Finance Minister's case. And yesterday after he spoke, we all waited with bated breath for the rebuttal to that contribution in particular. I sat here and I told myself if a Member of the other side rises and starts to talk about flooding and blames us for the flooding that occurred yesterday, I would know that the Member for Diego Martin North/East had a very solid case. Guess what happened. The Member for Chaguanas West rose to his feet and started to talk about his broken promises to stop flooding in Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*] I said, yes, this budget is in trouble. I said yes, true to form, he failed to respond and spoke about the broken promises to stop flooding.

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This population has learned the hard way. You cannot trust anything this UNC Government says. You cannot trust them—[*Desk thumping*]*—the UNC-dominated coalition. I just proved it through the Member for St. Augustine.*

True to form, the Minister of Works and Infrastructure talked about his promise to stop flooding. I remember a year ago in my last budget contribution I warned this new Government not to spend all of its time and all of its energy looking backwards and hunting for corruption; not all of it, and to reserve some energy to look and scrutinize for corruption to their left and to their right, because past governments have made that mistake. Reserve some energy to observe your own ranks. I said that in the debate. When the Minister of Works and Infrastructure was speaking yesterday, along came the Prime Minister and sat down beside him.

**3.45 p.m.**

Mr. Speaker, then what happened? Then the hon. Prime Minister rose in this Chamber and everyone was secretly thinking that she was going to announce a change in the Cabinet of Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*] The hon. Prime Minister had announced the dismissal of Mary King, a COP Minister right here in the Lower House of Parliament and the activities of that Minister were a lot less injurious to the good name of Trinidad and Tobago. [*Interruption*] Mr. Speaker, this is our Prime Minister, the Prime Minister of every citizen of this country, and she uses many catch phrases such as people centredness, meritocracy, transparency and accountability, and equity, and we remembered the case of Mary King. [*Interruption*] We are coming to that.

I remember right here in the Lower House, it was the Member for Chaguanas West who came proudly and gave Minister Martin Joseph a red card right on the floor of the Parliament—we all remember that—proudly, and there was thumping and celebration on the other side. On behalf of every right-thinking citizen of Trinidad and Tobago I now call on our Prime Minister, our dear Prime Minister, to stop procrastinating and stop vacillating and immediately suspend the Minister of Works and Infrastructure from the Cabinet of Trinidad and Tobago.

**Hon. Member:** What! [*Desk thumping*]

**Dr. A. Browne:** The *Express* is saying it, the *Guardian*, the *Newsday*; what is good for Mary King is good for the current situation.

**Miss Hospedales:** That is right! [*Desk thumping*]



**Dr. A. Browne:** The precedent is there, Mr. Speaker. [*Interruption*] There are many things that could be done: announce an official investigation, send out some pre-protocol letters; we heard about that yesterday. Do what you must, but my message to the Prime Minister, be not afraid. Be not afraid. “Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death I will fear no evil.” [*Desk thumping*]

In fact, all of you, all who are sitting on the Government Benches here today and attending meetings and pretending that everything is hunky-dory, everything is a-okay in the Government of Trinidad and Tobago, take it from someone who was the youngest Member of the previous Cabinet; take it from someone who was the youngest Member of the previous Cabinet, you have to grow up sometime. You owe it to the next generation and you owe it to the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago to help the Prime Minister to help T&T. Help her to help Trinidad and Tobago, Member for Barataria/San Juan. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Speaker, leadership is about being bold and about making brave decisions, and the Member for St. Augustine, I do not know where he is at this moment because he has disappeared from the Chamber, but the Member for St. Augustine is the leader of a political party in Trinidad and Tobago that talks a lot about new politics and about transparency and accountability and it is also the party of the former Member I referred to earlier, Mrs. Mary King. My question to the Member for St. Augustine on this issue, why so silent? Why so silent? Why so silent on this matter? Is it that he is afraid that nastiness would be thrown back at him? Is that the fear?

That should not be the fear, because if you stand on principle you would always stand on solid ground. If you stand on principle you would always stand on solid ground, and the Member for Barataria/San Juan knows this very well. This is nothing personal to any Member. This is nothing personal to any Member, but what is good for the goose is good for the gander and what is good for a COP Minister is good for a UNC Minister. [*Desk thumping*] Again, Member for St. Augustine, if he had any doubt this is not a People’s Partnership, this is a UNC dominated coalition.

Mr. Speaker, I remember a Cabinet meeting back in late 2008 when the Cabinet met to consider declining petrochemical prices and the negative global financial circumstances that affected Trinidad and Tobago that were confronting the country at the time. The decision was taken and my colleagues would remember it, a decision was taken to avoid curtailing expenditure in the social sector in education, in training, in welfare, utilities and all essential services for our citizens, but the decision was taken that—[*Interruption*] we are coming to it—

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all new major infrastructure would be halted until the prices rebounded. New major infrastructure projects would not be approved and would be halted until oil prices rebounded, and at the same time plans were accelerated to improve efficiency in service delivery and ensure preservation of the Heritage and Stabilization Fund. That is the reality.

Mr. Speaker, simultaneously however, there was a group of politicians on the other side who heightened their own response to the crisis that was confronting our country at that time, but the unfortunate choice that they made was to exert efforts to lower this country's credit rating and to damage the image of Trinidad and Tobago internationally. That was the choice that they made. They did so at meetings with Standard and Poor's and they did so at meetings with the US Embassy and other agencies.

**Miss Hospedales:** Very true, thank you. Very true. [*Desk thumping*]

**Dr. A. Browne:** Do Members on the other side dispute that this actually happened?

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** Yes. Yes.

**Dr. A. Browne:** Mr. Speaker, the Member for Caroni East disputes it, but I would refer him to a—[*Interruption*] Mr. Speaker, I would refer—I would speak to you and the nation. I refer the Member for Caroni East to a *Newsday* editorial of Saturday, August 29, 2009. The *Newsday*! [*Interruption*] The headline is “Bad-talk disgrace”. Mr. Speaker, listen to this editorial:

“While countries are battling to attract new and expanded foreign investment, the Opposition UNC, to be seeking to discourage foreign investors with its incredibly absurd stated position that Standard and Poor's...credit rating...to Trinidad and Tobago was flawed, as it was based on Government's ability to repay debt. It is a somewhat odd stance to be adopted by the UNC, particularly in the context of the global economic downturn. Trinidad and Tobago is seeking to attract foreign investment and with it increase its international market share, its revenues, its level of foreign exchange earnings and employment.

Any Government's ability to repay its debt, instead of being tacitly dismissed or indeed sneered at, should not only be saluted, but held up as an achievement in a period in which several nations, both developed and developing, have been experiencing difficulty in paying their debts. The UNC, following on a meeting with the Standard and Poor's Latin American Group

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Director...asserted that the credit rating agency could be misleading foreign investors about what they insisted was the ‘true state’ of the country’s economy.”

The editorial goes on, Mr. Speaker:

“What makes that claim preposterous, is that overseas companies interested in investing large sums in a country, particularly one in which they had not done business with before, view as a crucial factor in such investment the credit rating of that country.”

So investors were paying attention.

“It is to the independent judgment of agencies such as Standard and Poors that these potential investors turn to assist them in reaching the right conclusion.”

This is the editorial.

“Yet rather than the official Opposition seeing it as its duty to advance clearly positive factors in the battle to expand investment market share, has sought to be dismissive.”

Mr. Speaker, this is a very harsh indictment from the *Newsday* newspaper, directly contradicting the protestations of the Member for Caroni East. The editorial ended:

“Any discouraging of investment, however unwittingly, could impact negatively on jobs and money being turned around within the economy. Such bad-talking of our country should be condemned.”

Mr. Speaker, I condemn it here today in the Lower House of Parliament. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Speaker, there is no mystery in economics as the amateur economists would tell us. There is no mystery in economics and I totally condemn the actions of the UNC and the COP accomplices as treasonous to the nation of Trinidad and Tobago as demonstrated by—[*Continuous desk thumping*] I go further, some countries spend millions of dollars to engage in economic sabotage of other countries and a classic example is the embargo imposed on our brothers and sisters on the island of Cuba. Mr. Speaker, I know you have your own sentiments in that regard—economic sabotage of other countries, they spend money to achieve that, but the UNC has given this country and the world its first example of citizens seeking to damage their own economy, simply due to political ruthlessness [*Interruption*] and a desire to win office at any cost.

**Hon. Member:** True! True! [*Desk thumping*]

**Dr. A. Browne:** Mr. Speaker, those pronouncements have an effect today on this economy. The title of this budget is “From Steady Foundation to Economic Transformation”, but I believe that was a misprint, Mr. Speaker, and they are very fond of misprints. The real title of this budget is “From Steady PNM Foundation to UNC Deterioration”. [*Laughter*] [*Desk thumping*] “From steady PNM foundation to UNC deterioration”.

Mr. Speaker, it has been said that it is much easier to lose investor confidence than it is to gain investor confidence and they really helped erode investor confidence. Of course, the negative effects of what those who now govern the country did back then continue to echo to this day. They have become unfortunate victims of their own propaganda, but the most unfortunate victims have been the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago, the unwitting pawns in the UNC’s pursuit of power at any cost.

Mr. Speaker, whatever the global financial circumstances may be today, there is no doubt that we would have been a bit better off if those who are defending this budget did not shatter local and foreign investor confidence in our economy with their very foolish talk and actions. It is like trying to convince an investor not to buy a car because it will explode and then six months later you are in the driver’s seat trying to get passengers to come on board. It is simply not going to work. The prophets of doom and gloom back then have become victims of their own propaganda and we are paying a heavy price. They were economic hit men in Trinidad and Tobago and they are now the captains of our economy. What a condition this country is in!

Mr. Speaker, but that is not all, they then took many months and over a year in some cases to appoint state boards in Trinidad and Tobago. [*Interruption*] If you talk to anyone in the private sector, they hold that as one of the worst decisions that this Government has made, stagnating the economy and crippling any potential we have for rapid uptick. To this day some of them still have not been appointed. Then we listened to their guru who has said that the functions of these boards currently are being interrupted and damaged by incompetent political hacks. The guru himself said that and I think CNMG might be a classic example of a board being affected in that way. The state sector is now plagued by unjust firings, spiteful witch-hunts, chairmen who fight with their boards, chairmen who fight with their Ministers and chairmen who sometimes cannot go to work because they are being interviewed by the Police Service of Trinidad and Tobago.

**Hon. Member:** What! [*Desk thumping*]

**Dr. A. Browne:** Mr. Speaker, while this is going on two notorious financiers are walking free and undeclared bribery money is spirited into and out of Trinidad and Tobago. Undeclared!

This is the new politics that the COP and the UNC have given to Trinidad and Tobago. But the citizens at the soonest opportunity are readying themselves to tell them, thanks, but no thanks. [*Laughter*] Keep your bribes and your money to yourself. At the next election we will choose a government that can give us full employment [*Desk thumping*] as opposed to a truckload of demonization, deception and deficits. Mr. Speaker, but that is not all, they have further weakened our prospects for economic growth via the imposition of an unjust state of emergency and curfew in Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Speaker, it goes further, from the biggest companies to the smallest companies in our land, the private sector is united in consensus that the current conditions of—Mr. Speaker, the Member for Arima is disturbing me.

**Miss Hospedales:** The Member for Arima, why is the Member for Arima behaving like that?

**Mr. Speaker:** I would like to appeal to the Back Bench—

**Hon. Member:** Yes, wet him!

**Mr. Speaker:**—to observe the relevant Standing Order. Member for Arima, I would like you to observe the relevant Standing Order and allow the Member to speak in silence. Hon. Member, you can continue.

**4.00 p.m.**

**Dr. A. Browne:** Mr. Speaker, thank you. The private sector is united in consensus that the current conditions are bad for business in Trinidad and Tobago. Mr. Speaker, we might disagree among ourselves on the perceptions of peace at night, and the value of those perceptions. But what is patently obvious, is that this abatement of crime in this country is only temporary, given the imposition of this state of emergency. And worst of all what we can all recognize is that the economic impact of this SoE will continue to hurt Trinidad and Tobago for a long time in the future.

Mr. Speaker, in the private sector many businesses are reporting losses in revenue of between 15 and 35 per cent. If one looks at the *Express* of today one will realize that businesses are feeling the pinch and restaurants are closing down.

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What happens when that occurs? Lives are affected, Mr. Speaker. Human lives are affected. Many are predicting that this Christmas will be even slower than the last Christmas with regard to business. Shift workers have had their hours shortened right across the hospitality sector. And every one from the doubles vendor, to the taxi drivers, to the lady who sells produce at the wholesale market at night, to the customer service agents at fast food restaurants, they have all seen a reduction in the amount of money they can take home to their families. No one is going to deny that, because that is the reality in Trinidad and Tobago today, thanks to the UNC-dominated coalition. This is not a joke. This is not a joke, especially as this SoE has never been fully justified—properly justified to the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago in an honest fashion. [*Desk thumping*]

We asked questions about some of the regulations in the emergency order 163, and not a single member of this Government has even attempted to justify those regulations: prohibiting public marches, public meetings: prohibiting the use of an amplification device on a vehicle or a handheld amplification device; prohibiting the possession of a document that can lead to discontent or disaffection or photocopying such a document. Mr. Speaker, those activities as you know, are normal after a budget. Political parties and trade unions normally produce, why we like the budget, why we do not like the budget. That is now illegal in the western democracy of Trinidad and Tobago. Never responded to, never justified. How is that fighting crime? Mr. Speaker, this is a Government we cannot trust, and the trade unions know it. [*Desk thumping*] They have misgoverned Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Finance, last time—well he was part of a team so I am not going to blame him in any way—the Government at that time, back then, found a way to cut the take-home pay of a large number of the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago. And this time around, true to form, he and his team have found a way to cut the disposable income of a large number of citizens of Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*] This can only result in people spending less money and the economy contracting even more in the future as they continue to misgovern Trinidad and Tobago. So it is factor upon factor, upon factor.

The Ministers involved in the social sectors could walk with their cameras all over the country, all over the country and give out cards—however they are doing it—helter-skelter, that could occur but that is not going to compensate persons who have lost the source of revenue for their families. That is not going to be compensation for that. They can have a million photo opportunities with poor

people anywhere in Trinidad and Tobago, but as long as this Government continues to do things that increase unemployment and reduce employment and contract the economy, you are spinning top in mud. Mr. Speaker, it would be a very cruel measure if the Government repeats its stunt it pulled last year, when it assembled so many children and families and gave them Christmas gifts with a little photograph of the Prime Minister inside of it, while the earning power of their families was being stripped away by the decisions and actions of this Government. But, Mr. Speaker we in the PNM are very different to those in the United National Congress. While in Opposition we will never seek to strong arm, Standard and Poor's or any agency to make Trinidad and Tobago look bad or to reduce our credit rating. We will never take actions to try to reduce our standing in the world. We want investors to come here, whether we are in government or whether we are in Opposition, because we are patriotic citizens of Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*] Let us be honest, everyone in the private sector knows, they know, we all know, that the private sector does better under a PNM government than under any other. [*Desk thumping*] It is a fact, it is a fact; we know that; always, every time, it does better under a PNM government. We know everyone knows that employment is always higher under a PNM government than any other government. [*Desk thumping*] [*Crosstalk*] History is clear. We all know that the economy does better under the PNM and look at today, than any other government. [*Desk thumping*] Right now the only ones who seem to be doing better are the Ralph Gopauls of this country—and who is the other one, the Latchmi Singhs and the Concacaf representatives, clutching their envelopes leaving the airport quietly. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Speaker, that is not all. We all want the official forecast of negative economic growth this year to be wrong. We want it to be wrong. But this Government has made that less likely, due to the terrible industrial relations climate that they have helped create in Trinidad and Tobago. And think about it, Mr. Speaker, how bad the betrayal—how bad their betrayal of the trade unions must have been to result in workers' representatives campaigning with them at one point in time, with jerseys on, and just a few months later to find them in the streets protesting against the same people they campaigned with. The betrayal must have been a very bad one for that to have occurred so quickly. And it is a testimony to the arrogant and provocative nature of this UNC administration. [*Desk thumping*] It is affecting Petrotrin. Let us not fool ourselves. It is affecting

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workplaces across Trinidad and Tobago in spite of this state of emergency. The Minister of Finance may have the luxury afterward, after this debate of going back to his offices and pretending that this atmosphere of mistrust is not affecting our economy, but we know otherwise and every citizen of this country knows otherwise.

Mr. Speaker, the Member for Couva South had a lot to say a little earlier, but I am sure his comrades are hoping that he can help solve this situation and he might be able to do something about it.

The morale of workers in this country has never been lower than it is at present under this UNC team. Mr. Speaker, that is especially so in the protective services of this country, morale has never been lower. Mr. Speaker, what happens when the state of emergency is lifted? What happens in this country? What happens to crime? What happens to the police service who are now fully overworked due to all of the triple and quadruple shifts? What happens after the state of emergency is lifted? Already we are seeing some very ominous signs, worrying signs and I hope those signs do not—are not predictive of what will happen in the future.

Mr. Speaker, think about it as well. We are talking about morale of the protective services. Second division officers are forced to retire at the age of 55, but must wait five long years for the NIS payments to begin. I am hoping that the Minister of Finance will find a way, maybe in his winding up to quickly deal with this to close that gap for second division officers. This affects police, it affects army, it affects fire and of course our hard working prison officers.

There is still significant back pay owed to retired police officers based on past increases in their benefits and we have to at least try to improve their morale, not just by their \$1,000 allowance but by dealing with some of these other issues. Well, we cannot ask the Minister of Finance to deal with this issue and that is the devastating and demoralizing effect of the newest Canadian millionaire in Trinidad and Tobago, the police commissioner, Dwayne Gibbs.

Mr. Speaker, we also encourage the Government not to think of any efforts to try to cheat hard-working officers out of the overtime that they have already worked for, and there is some newspaper article indicating various administrative ways being taken to try to restrict claims for overtime work that has already been done.



Mr. Speaker, where is the Minister of National Security in this budget debate? We are reliably informed that yesterday, Monday, the Santa Rosa Prison that was the source of so much controversy and was just recently constructed had to be completely evacuated. [*Desk thumping*] Not a single prisoner at that facility now after all of that excitement in the constituency of Arima. Leaking roofs, gypsum partitions, have you ever heard of gypsum partitions in a prison? And these are the people who have been criticizing [*Laughter*—these are the people what have been criticizing PNM construction. When they are doing that, they are sitting down in a very brilliantly constructed building housing the Parliament of Trinidad and Tobago and spending money—irritating the constituent of Arima—spending money to build—I do not know what to call it—I have heard talks of “cow shed”, attached to the building, I do not want to use that kind of reference—but an unfit structure in the faces of the constituent located in Santa Rosa.

Mr. Speaker, leaking roofs and gypsum partitions. This UNC team cannot build anything, they cannot deliver anything, they cannot do anything for the citizens of this country. [*Desk thumping*] And they criticize the past while they are sitting in a waterfront and spending time at a hotel, at a waterfront that was constructed due to the vision and the foresight of the People’s National Movement. Very sad, Mr. Speaker, very, very, sad.

This is the second time that the hon. Minister of Finance has given us a budget that everyone agrees—[*Cross talk*] [*Interruption*]

**Mr. Speaker:** Could we have some silence please.

**Dr. A. Browne:**—is a bit short on details. Those on this side say it is woefully and totally short on details. Those in the media are saying the budget was light on details. So, Mr. Speaker, there is some agreement on that. There is a lack of true vision in the budget despite the protestations of the Member for Oropouche East and it is virtually silent on how the borrowing of these billions of dollars is going to generate a single dollar of revenue for the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago. That is a dilemma that is going to face us all over the next year.

Mr. Speaker, this budget—unfortunately, I have to conclude—is the result of visionless leadership. [*Desk thumping*] And unless the team opposite finds ways to help this leadership to improve we could very well be seeing a local example of what happened in the United States a few years ago, where you had a government—you remember that a former President who spent time borrowing money and hiding out at a ranch in Crawford Texas and Obama then inherited a situation that was close to mission impossible. Mr. Speaker, to this present UNC-

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dominated coalition that includes my friend from Mayaro, we hope that you will start investing what you borrow into avenues that will actually stimulate this economy and generate revenue for our citizens. And we hope that you will spend less time down at a ranch in another part of the country and start governing Trinidad and Tobago with a vision for the future because that is what we need. If this Government is asleep at the wheel they need to be reminded that the population is waking up every day to a reality where they know they made a very bad decision on May 24, 2011. [*Desk thumping*]

They have increased the deficit, they have been boasting about not raising taxes, they have been borrowing in record amounts and they are mortgaging the next generation of Trinidad and Tobago.

Mr. Speaker, just briefly, I heard some talk yesterday, it started off in the context of race. The Prime Minister seems to be a legendary detective in this country to examine a list of names of citizens of Trinidad and Tobago and to determine miraculously who are of Indo-Trinidadian origin and who are Afro-Trinidadian. I have a message for the Prime Minister, my grandmother was a Hindu—she has passed on now. You cannot look at me and say that. You cannot look at my name and say that. [*Interruption*]

**Dr. Moonilal:** Mr. Speaker Standing Order 36. The report drew that conclusion, not the Prime Minister.

**Mr. Speaker:** Yes, I want to sustain that. It was a report she was quoting from and therefore I do not think you should attribute that to her.

**Dr. A. Browne:** Mr. Speaker, I apologize if I in any way misquoted the Prime Minister of Trinidad and Tobago, but in selecting this time to bring such a report based on documents—[*Interruption*]

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

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

*Question put and agreed to.*

**4.15 p.m.**

**Dr. A. Browne:** Mr. Speaker, I was saying that you cannot tell, whoever did the report or whoever read or misread the report, you cannot tell by looking at a list of names, the ethnicity of citizens of Trinidad and Tobago. My paternal

grandmother was Hindu. You cannot tell by looking at my name, and my maternal grandfather was a white man from Laventille. You also cannot tell that by—I know the Member for Diego Martin North/East would be excited. Mr. Speaker, my colleagues and I consider ourselves 100 per cent Trinbagonian.

One area in which we heard quite a bit in this budget was in the area of the health care for the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago. I remember a time, not so long ago, when we had an Opposition that engaged in such a rabid politicization of health care in this country. It seems like just yesterday we were regaled with tall tales from the then Member for Caroni East, the Member for Oropouche East and the Member for Siparia in their desperate quest to exploit the dengue situation in this country, which is endemic to this country; to exploit it for political gains. Week after week after week these Members engaged in fear-mongering and presented to the public the most sensational interpretation of every health-related event in this country. He is smiling because he knows I am telling the truth.

They blamed the former Minister for every death. They blamed the former Minister every time the press covered delays in someone getting a bed in the hospital. A baby's hand gets burned on the ward, it is political. It is the former Minister, you cannot hide from it, Member. And, of course, every single dengue death was political in nature. Magic happened on May 24th. Yes, I know they would agree with that. But, then every death became quite different in interpretation. What are we dealing with on the other side? It is not honesty; it is deception.

I hear the Member for Caroni East, but the greatest treatise I have heard came from the Member for Caroni East when—[*Interruption*—I would tell you—he trumpeted to every patient in Trinidad and Tobago that the use of the generic drugs under the CDAP programme was putting people at harm and killing patients. I do not know that at all. Because, fast-forward to 2011, and those same generic drugs are being used today under the CDAP programme. That is a fact. I know what I am saying. The same drugs are being used. Back then they were killing. You are reviewing it. You took a year and a half to review something that is killing people? Mr. Speaker, this is a shame and disgrace and they are saying the wrong things here in the Parliament.

No, I am not accepting that. [*Desk thumping*] I am not accepting that! I am not accepting that. That was a shameful treatise. This is what we have to deal with. Now we are here in Opposition and the same people who were making those types of statements are now in Government, managing our economy and running ministries and give a facade of strength and competence. No, no, no, no! That is

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how they treated with health care while they were in Opposition. Now the Member for Caroni East is a lot mellower in his outlook and he spends his time dealing with textbooks and falling tins and other things.

**Hon. Member:** Laptops.

**Dr. A. Browne:** Not “Tin” Gopeesingh, Tim Gopeesingh. All their posturing has now been unveiled. And after a year and a half we have not yet seen the positive changes in this sector.

The present Minister does have his work cut out for him, because his predecessor spent a lot of time in office making a lot of noise and denigrating the foundation that she found when she moved into office and I hope he will not spend all his time doing the same; maybe some of it, but not all of his time. He might be more sensible than that.

I remember the talk in the health sector was when that Minister, not this one, would have walked through the corridors and she would find a patient and she would say: “Are you waiting to be seen? Nobody? See that patient now! Are you waiting for surgery? Take this patient down to the operating theatre now and operate” [*Laughter*] not realizing—that is what went on—that the surgeons have to complete a case and the patient has to leave the theatre for another case to come in. That is what we were dealing with, and for a year and a half we were faced with that in the Ministry of Health. The present Minister has his work cut out for him. He has met a good foundational plan, a health sector transformation plan, which was approved by Cabinet in 2008, and which has given some good ingredients to build on. The Minister does not have to reinvent the wheel in this sector and we hope he will use his energies in the right direction.

Building on the 105 primary care facilities we have across the country, CDAP programme benefiting 550,000 citizens, 24-hour point of care testing, training of nurses, over 2,000; increase in free surgeries from 20,000 to over 38,000; a modernized radiotherapy centre in St. James coping with increased client load; an advanced e-health card which was developed and piloted at eight health facilities. We wonder what had happened to that particular initiative. We also—while here I would ask on behalf of those at Queen’s Park Counselling Centre and Clinic, they would really like a larger clinic and some more space from their temporary arrangement.

Mr. Speaker, on the issue of HIV/AIDS, this Government has made some unforgivable and abrupt decisions in shutting down the National AIDS Coordinating Committee without consultation with the stakeholders of that sector.

It was completely shut down. The staff have all lost their jobs. The committee no longer meets. There is no chairman of the NACC. That is the reality. Please, do not fool yourselves, Members on the other side. The Minister of State has not kept his word and brought legislation to establish any statutory authority. So many months have passed since earlier this year. Here we are now with a budget and they have not given us any word on the future of this. That is not acceptable; lots of PR gimmicks. Mr. Speaker, all their PR gimmicks have been exposed during this particular budget.

I am very concerned as well about some of the situations with regard to NIS. They have told us that those who currently receive NIS, some of them will be affected by a reduction in senior citizens pension as their NIS goes up. So, on the one hand the Government is giving and on the other, it is taking away. They also have not told us that this increase in NIS is not any generous gift by the Government but it is to correct an anomaly that they themselves created in trying to fulfil a political promise last year, whereby persons who had never worked were getting more money in their retirement years than persons who—in their later years, their golden years—those persons who worked and served Trinidad and Tobago. That is the anomaly that is being corrected now; being spun and cast as a generous gift to citizens.

Mr. Speaker, I would want the Member for Caroni Central to pay attention to persons such as Caroni (1975) Limited pensioners, over 20,000 in number, who, if receiving a Caroni (1975) Limited pension of \$650 and NIS of \$2,000 presently are currently eligible for \$1,200 senior citizens pension, a total of \$3,850. With the NIS increasing to \$3,000, this gives them a monthly income total, of \$3,650. They will now be ineligible for the senior citizens pension and their take-home money would actually be reduced, unless some additional measure is taken. Some of these seniors were celebrating in their living rooms when the budget was being announced, not realizing their pocket is actually going down. But that is the Government they are dealing with. It was not presented in a forthright manner.

This Government likes floods. This Government does well, at least they did at first, during flood conditions; quick to put on their boots and head out into the flood waters. I want to give an example of this; of the response to flooding in Trinidad and Tobago. I have an article in my hand from the Government website, August 23, 2010. It outlines.

The hon. Minister of Foreign Affairs and the Minister of the People and Social Development, on August, 21, 2010—the day before—received donations—I am quoting—on behalf of the Government.

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The title is: “Government Ministers receive donations for flood victims.” The Ministers received donations on behalf of the Government from the Church of Latter Day Saints, Missions International and the T&T Orthotics and Prosthetics at the Offices of the Red Cross, Wrightson Road. Red Cross and several other NGOs also benefitted from these donations. Government Ministers received donations for flood victims on August 21, 2010.

This was on the Government’s website. Were these items ever stored at the Ministry of Social Development or any other Government warehouse or site? One would expect that when this Government receives donations, two Ministers received donations from a foreign organization—these would be supplied to our citizens through the offices of the Ministry of Social Development, through the health centres, through our Ministry of Health, et cetera, or through state agencies. That would be the transparent thing to do. This was received on behalf of the State for all citizens of Trinidad and Tobago. But, seven days later, there was a sensation in central Trinidad using the same items, not at any Government Ministry, not at a social welfare office, not at a health centre.

There is an article in the *Newsday* seven days later, Wednesday, September 01, 2010:

Scores of persons, mostly elderly, flocked to the office of Caroni Central MP—and he is named—to collect donated items which they could not afford: 13 wheelchairs, boxes of food, clothing, toiletries, et cetera. The MP explained that his office was becoming very congested with donations from abroad. I am happy to give away these items. They come from a collaboration. I want to salute our Minister of Foreign Affairs.

The recipients are photographed smiling. This is not the way. I want to ask whether the Permanent Secretary in the Ministry of Social Development received these consignments of items and signed these items out for delivery to a particular Member of Parliament’s office. I could tell you the MP for Diego Martin received none of those donations on behalf of the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago. I do not know if any Member of Parliament’s office on this side did. The question remains whether the Member for St. Augustine or other Members received. This is a donation to the Government from Missions International being provided at an MP’s office. I am not implying or imputing anything, but it is just to be clarified.

I also want to ask about the Children Bill. It was debated here, went to a special committee; the Member for Caroni East was there, Mickela Panday was on that committee as well. We came to an agreement. Hard work was done; many,

many meetings. It was just to bring that Bill back to Parliament. Both sides agreed on the measures. It never came. A year and a half has passed. So many children have lost their lives in the interim. That is a Bill that we brought, along with several other children's legislation and debated in this Parliament.

How much more time do I have?

**Mr. Imbert:** You have plenty.

**Mr. Speaker:** Eighteen more minutes.

**Dr. A. Browne:** Mr. Speaker, you are very generous. I would try to use it to good effect. With regard to the Government of Trinidad and Tobago, I also want to make reference to some of the items for action within the constituency of Diego Martin Central. The Member for Oropouche East mentioned his drive to deliver houses and complete houses that were incomplete, and there are two major developments, the Victoria Keys and Chaconia Crescent, that were started. A lot of work was done and it is a matter of just finishing those developments. I know some modifications were made, very interesting ones, but the citizens are waiting, and it is not just Diego Martin Central, but across the western peninsular and across the country. They are anxiously awaiting the completion of those structures.

There is a community centre in Cocorite that I spoke to the Member for Naparima about. He has not gotten back to me as yet, but I am hoping he is taking some action and we would be able to proceed. There is another community centre in Petit Valley that does not fall within Diego Martin Central, but it is very close to Diego Martin Central and also requires some attention.

**Mr. Imbert:** No, no, we want a new one.

**Dr. A. Browne:** And it will benefit us. They want a new one in North/East.

We also propose the renaming of the Diamond Vale Community Centre in honour of the late Kenneth Cyril Valley. I have already recommended that to the Member for Naparima. He said he would consider it. There is also the need for the handing over of the Simeon Road Youth Multipurpose Complex and that is something that the Minister of Sport would have to pay attention to, in addition to facilities at Surprise Grounds and the Northern Savannah.

The Diego Martin Highway expansion project still requires attention. It was stopped. It has to be restarted. No gimmick involving "Starlight" and cones in the road and so on is going to solve one of the biggest traffic gridlocks in Trinidad

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and Tobago. The plans are there already approved. Phase one is completed. It is just to finish the project and I am hoping that it would be done some time in the very near future.

**Mr. Speaker:** Hon. Member, I think this is a good time for us to pause. We will have some tea and we shall resume at 5.00 p.m. This sitting is now suspended until 5.00 p.m.

**4.30 p.m.:** *Sitting suspended.*

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

**Dr. A. Browne:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In the time that I have remaining, I was in the process—[*Interruption*]

**Mr. Speaker:** Please, please.

**Dr. A. Browne:** I am not going to be tempted. Mr. Speaker, I was in the process of referring to some constituency related matters, and we were talking about the Diego Martin Highway and the expansion project which was in process—started, phase 1, completed by the People’s National Movement and the goodly Minister of Works who is now the Member for Diego Martin North/East.

Mr. Speaker, on February 18, 2011, the current Minister of Works responded in a Motion, right here in the Parliament, on the *Hansard* record and indicated that all construction work would resume on May 09, 2011 on this highway expansion project, and he berated the Member for Diego Martin North/East and said, “stick break in yuh ears” and all sorts of very harsh words with regard to this project. But, Mr. Speaker, we are now well into October and the other phases of that project have not yet commenced, resumed and certainly have not been completed.

Mr. Speaker, there are also issues with Early Childhood Care and Education Centres at Four Roads Primary School and one possibly near the Diamondvale Community Centre. Even though it is not in Diego Martin Central there is a Diego Martin Health Centre which is adjoining and serves persons in Diego Martin Central and requires attention.

Then, there are some security issues. Even during the state of emergency, some residents—some constituents in Blue Range, Cocorite, Greenhill Village, Simeon Road and other places have actually found themselves falling victim to some unfortunate members of our protective services who, it seems, we need protection from as citizens of this country. Mr. Speaker, that is something that the Government would need to pay attention to if they look to extend the state of emergency beyond today.



Mr. Speaker, there has been a lot of talk during this debate about the legacy of the People's National Movement and the legacy of—well, there has been no talk about the legacy of the UNC because, frankly, it is not something that anyone really wishes to talk about. But, Mr. Speaker, there is talk about the buildings, even though we are in one of the tall buildings they denigrated; we are in it. Even though many Members stayed last night at one of the tall buildings—the Hyatt Hotel—that they denigrated; and somehow, we seem very comfortable doing that.

Mr. Speaker, I want to share with this House a little more about the legacy and the vision of the People's National Movement. Many of these advances benefit us to this day; many of these advances were opposed vehemently by those who are on the other side.

Mr. Speaker, the liberalization of the economy of Trinidad and Tobago; that was a PNM decision, a PNM vision. Mr. Speaker, the floating of the currency in Trinidad and Tobago was vehemently opposed by those opposite who had brighter ideas. The modernization of gas for revenue in Trinidad and Tobago; Mr. Speaker, the Point Lisas Industrial Estate. [*Desk thumping*]

So, Mr. Speaker, when social grants are given out; when roads are paved; when a bridge is built; when the Member has a cultural show—when anything that involves expenditure occurs in Trinidad and Tobago—when medication is given out or a hospital is built, you are actually benefiting; the citizens today—this day—even under your Government, are benefiting from the vision and the legacy of the People's National Movement. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Speaker, we are benefiting every time a LNG tanker sails through Grand Bocas; that is the PNM's vision and legacy. Everytime a family receives keys for housing units; that is the product of the PNM's vision and legacy. Everytime my dear colleague gives out a TT card; that is the PNM's vision and legacy, to this day. Everytime an ambulance drives down the bus route; that is the PNM's vision and legacy benefiting us to this day. [*Desk thumping*]

When the Member for Chaguanas East opens in a grand fashion and show, the Tamana Park, and we have investors and businesses, you know what? They would be benefiting from the PNM's vision and legacy. Mr. Speaker, everytime our dear Prime Minister arrives at the Diplomatic Centre and Residence, she is benefiting from the PNM's vision and legacy. Everytime a foreign guest checks in at the Hyatt Hotel for whatever reason; PNM's vision and legacy. So do not let them come here and—everytime a vehicle moves down the Diego Martin Highway; again, benefiting from the PNM's vision and legacy.

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Everytime a game is played at the stadium in this country; NAPA, when people go to a show at the NAPA with their family and are entertained and edified, that is the PNM's vision and legacy. [*Interruption*] We are coming to you and I still owe you some time. [*Desk thumping*] Mr. Speaker, everytime a family utilizes a multipurpose community tele-centre or a seniors' activity centre or a senior citizen does tai chi; that is a benefit of the PNM's vision and legacy. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Speaker, everytime a young person from Laventille or Cocorite or Charlotteville or Morvant or Grande Riviere registers at the University of Trinidad and Tobago or the University of the West Indies or even private tertiary institutions, free of charge, they are beneficiaries of the PNM's vision and legacy. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Speaker, so this Government in all their boasting, in all that they have presented here today, they do not even realize that citizens of this country, every time they turn on a light switch; every time they drive down the road, they are benefiting from PNM's vision and legacy. [*Deskthumping*] Mr. Speaker, that is the reality in this country; we cannot escape it and I gave you the examples.

We started off talking about the Minister and his economic local, financial buffers, and he will admit that those buffers exist because of the PNM's vision and legacy. We went through that, you were not here, Minister, and that is the reality. Let us not pretend otherwise—[*Interruption*] He knows what he is talking about some of the time; do not say that to the Member. That is where the situation stands right now in Trinidad and Tobago. That is the reality of the situation.

Mr. Speaker, this budget has been well discussed in this Chamber to this point. The Minister of Finance does have some work to do in responding to a number of the challenges that were made—request for clarification, et cetera, and there will be more.

There are some things that I am very happy about. The grant for the caregivers and so on, that is something nobody could oppose, and we are very happy for that; and we are glad when anyone gets some additional support, of course. But, Mr. Speaker, there are some other concerns, for example, the disability assistance grant and the special child grant were not increased; but I am hoping the next time around, the Members would find some way of giving those persons some additional assistance.

There is some change with regard to targeting of these services as well, reduction in targeting, that is something I am sure your technical officers would

be advising you on. It is not really, in harsh economic times, you would want to target more and not less. And anytime you could have a wealthy family, a very wealthy family, a millionaire family, benefiting legitimately—because they would be qualifying now if some of these grants are automatic—it is something to think a little further about. But I am sure the Minister has the advice required to assist.

So, Mr. Speaker, there is a lot for us to continue discussing in this House, but I would want the Minister of Finance to be forthright in terms of his conclusion on this particular budget debate to respond to the issues that have been presented because I do not think that the last time around, that was done in the appropriate fashion.

Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister and the Government of Trinidad and Tobago continue to demonstrate judgment that is not of the level that is required to run this country appropriately. [*Desk thumping*] They appear to have been demonstrating an addiction to public relations gimmicks and to weekly scandals that have besieged the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago. They also appear to be obsessed about the past in a very negative way and seem to be blind, deaf and dumb to corruption that might be occurring right among them. Mr. Speaker, it is called “distraction politics”, and the citizens of this country are fully aware of it by the games of—and that presentation by the Prime Minister yesterday, it is obvious to every citizen that was the exercise of “distraction politics”, but the issues are not going to go away. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Speaker, you are no longer in the Opposition and you have a job to do, I suggest you get down to it. I would like to remind Members of this House as I close of the words of our own President of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago who said and I quote:

“We all need to focus less on the next election and more on the next generation.”

My words to the Members opposite are that you are no longer in Opposition. I demand you stop using this cliché about accountability and transparency because you seem unable to apply it to your own Government. Mr. Speaker, they are no longer in Opposition but by the grace of God, there they shall return in the near future. [*Desk thumping*]

**The Minister of Finance (Hon. Winston Dookeran):** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, we have come to the end of a discourse that had its heights and had its low points, I reflected for a few moments on what are the issues and the choices that this Parliament placed before the nation.

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On one hand, what I sensed and what was glaring for the entire population to see is the choice between policy and performance that were tried, tested and failed that were going to be resuscitated here by the Opposition forces. On the other hand, we were facing new, bold and courageous policy and performance to take us into a new future.

If we were to read between the lines of those who spoke, they would want us to go back into those tried and tested and failed policies; we shall do no such thing. [*Desk thumping*] It is our challenge to move towards the new future and leave behind all those tried, tested and failed policies and programmes for which the electorate has chosen, and for which the electorate has demanded that we do. That, to me, was the choice before us in this debate, and every speaker who spoke on the Opposition Bench tried to reincarnate that glorious past that brought us to where we are today.

In pure political terms, what we saw was Members of the Opposition attempting to take credit for the gains of the People's Partnership Government; and trying to lay blame on the People's Partnership for all that went wrong during the period of the PNM. [*Desk thumping*] In political terms—and I will go further, this is what we saw—taking credit for what the People's Partnership has been able to do in steering this society and this economy and this people to a point of safety from the cliff from which we started; and then trying to ascribe blame to the People's Partnership for the failures that they have done.

For instance, I believe it was the Member for Diego Martin West who spoke about the Central Statistical Office and the need to give it a level of integrity and independence, so that we can rely on that data. Little did he tell this House that it was during his government that an entire set of policies were prescribed to do just that and nothing happened when he did that. [*Desk thumping*]

There is a report, and today the Ministry of Public Administration has taken up these findings and is working to create the very thing that they failed to do in 2007.

**5.15 p.m.**

**Dr. Rowley:** You found the data!

**Hon. W. Dookeran:** We do not operate like the PNM, and we shall never be judged by the standards of the PNM. If we do that, we will be there and you might be here. Let us leave the standards of the PNM to the period when the PNM was in office. Let us now subscribe to new standards; the standards of the People's

Partnership Government. I raise that as one example of trying to lay blame on this Government for their failures to have done what was right then.

I was a bit surprised that the Member for Diego Martin Central fell for the temptation. He too claimed credit. He went so far as to claim credit for every possible thing that has been done in the past and said that was the basis upon which the foundation was laid; including his last comment on the buffers. The truth is, we in the People's Partnership Government built on what we received, and what was good we built upon that, and what was wrong we decided to make it right and that is what responsible government is all about. When you say, Member for Diego Martin Central, that you must not look for the next election, you must look to the next generation, all I can say to you is that you have exemplified looking for the past election which you have already lost. [*Desk thumping*] If you had indeed convinced the electorate otherwise, what you have said here today, this will not have been the situation that we face politically.

Mr. Speaker, the reality is that the foundation was shaky and that what we needed to do was to fix that foundation as the first step in building for the future. What was the foundation that they claimed was so solid, that was indeed the inheritance that we had to confront and take head-on? Much has been said about it, but I do not think this country or this region understands the gravity of the mistakes that were made and the misdiagnosis that was done by that government in dealing with the Clico fiasco. History would have to record what was the cost of a public policy failure to this country, our citizens and the Caribbean; a colossal misdiagnosis, and I have, in the past in this Parliament elaborated on that and suggested that was an issue which we had to confront directly.

I think the Member for Diego Martin West was saying something to the effect that we were dismantling Clico. They had no solution. For 18 months they stood there wondering what to do, having misdiagnosed the situation. For 18 months, it was left to the People's Partnership Government to come and put direction to a solution to this matter. [*Desk thumping*] While, today we will not claim that all is over, what we do know is that the worst is over and we are about to move.

**Dr. Rowley:** Anyhow, I did not say that. [*Interruption*]

**Hon. W. Dookeran:** That, is one of the misdiagnoses.

**Dr. Rowley:** If you want to make a point, make a point, do not subscribe it to me. [*Interruption*]

**Hon. W. Dookeran:** This is one of the misdiagnoses. I think I have his *Hansard* somewhere. [*Interruption*]

**Dr. Rowley:** I did not say that!

**Hon. W. Dookeran:** But, you said the difference between life and death is strife.

**Mr. Roberts:** “Yuh getting on like ah wajang.”

**Hon. W. Dookeran:** You said we should not have dealt with the issues of life and death in the way we have done it. In fact, I took note of that because, in your contribution you said national security was a matter of trite and safety of the citizens of this country is a matter of trite. [*Interruption*]

**Hon. Members:** “Yuh did not say that?”

**Mr. Roberts:** He said do away with the balisier.

**Hon. W. Dookeran:** And I wrote here in my note: is the Member saying here that the issue of life and death is trite in Trinidad and Tobago? Is that the fundamental thinking? [*Interruption*]

**Mr. Roberts:** “Smile nah, when yuh frown, yuh does look ugly.”

**Hon. W. Dookeran:** Mr. Speaker, I accept anything he said now that he did not say before, as if it was true.

**Mr. Imbert:** “Dat sentence eh make no sense.”

**Mr. Warner:** Flog them. Flog them.

**Hon. W. Dookeran:** What were some of the inheritance in this shaky foundation that we had to deal with? Not only was the size and the gravity and the enormity of the impact of the Clico financial situation, we had unsettled obligations of which you have heard a lot here today; unsettled negotiations with respect to the wage issue in the country; unsettled bills to be paid for VAT refunds. Do you know that during the course of this year—and this will explain partly and I will come to that in a minute, why the increase in provisions for VAT revenue—the Government was able to pay out \$3 billion in outstanding VAT refunds and we will not have to do that in the next year, in terms of the current—[*Desk thumping*] \$3 billion.

**Mr. Roberts:** And they did not pay it.

**Mr. Warner:** They did not pay it.

**Hon. W. Dookeran:** We talked earlier, the Member for Oropouche spoke about the issue with respect to contractors' obligations, \$1.5 billion. This is the shaky foundation which we came into office to have to handle. Mr. Speaker, it placed a heavy burden. Even with respect to financing arrangements, we have seen substantial contingency liabilities in the public debt account and letters of comfort which we had to convert in guarantees.

On the same principle that the Member for Diego Martin Central was speaking on, obligations of a financial nature made by that government became the burdens of this Government. We honoured it and we honoured it with courage, without remorse and with the expectation that we are setting the standards upon which all governments must operate. *[Interruption]*

**Mr. Imbert:** That is why you cancelled the contract?

**Hon. W. Dookeran:** Anything that is not in the national interest we shall cancel and anything that is in the national interest we shall go with. We do not hold to something in the past because it was in the past, we hold to that because it was right for the future. *[Desk thumping]* If you understand that then you will understand how the decisions have been made by this Government to make courageous decisions; decisions that were made not on the basis of what was in the public interest; decisions that were made on other bases, which we had to correct.

My good friend, the Member for Pointe-a-Pierre—*[Interruption]*

**Mr. Roberts:** “Look him dey. ”

**Hon. W. Dookeran:**—when the Member for Diego Martin Central was speaking, whispered to me: what about the Soldado investment that would have cost this country somewhere between TT \$300 million to TT \$500 million and increase the production of oil in this country? Rather than choose that, they went on to choose another project, which is referred to as the GTL Project—*[Interruption]*

**Mr. Roberts:** Oh, oh!

**Hon. W. Dookeran:**—costing the country \$3 billion—*[Interruption]*

**Mr. Sharma:** What a shame!

**Hon. W. Dookeran:**—without having the rewards of having that increased production; that we inherited a situation of fall in production. But that decision which was made, I was told, in 2006/2007, was the kind of inheritance that they

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want us to give them credit for. That is why we had to reap the rewards of that wrong investment decision, and today our oil resources are not as good as we would like them to be. [*Interruption and crosstalk*]

**Mr. Speaker:** Member for Diego Martin North/East, I know that when—no, no, please, please!

**Mr. Imbert:** He is harassing me.

**Mr. McLeod:** I would not waste time with you boy!

**Mr. Speaker:** Hon. Members, please!

**Mr. Imbert:** He is attacking me.

**Mr. Speaker:** Please, hon. Member for Diego Martin North/East—

**Mr. McLeod:** He is a clown!

**Mr. Speaker:** Member for Pointe-a-Pierre, please.

**Mr. McLeod:** Sorry, Mr. Speaker.

**Mr. Speaker:** You cannot refer to Member of Parliament in those terms. Member for Diego Martin North/East, I want to appeal to you specially—

**Mr. Imbert:** Me?

**Mr. Speaker:** Yes, you specially. Would you allow the hon. Minister of Finance to speak, and even if you have to speak, could you speak in undertones? Or I would ask you to regulate yourself, so I would not have to regulate you. Hon. Minister of Finance, you may continue. Thank you.

**Hon. W. Dookeran:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The foundation, which we had to build on was based on the fiasco of wrong diagnosis with respect to a financial situation; wrong investment decision, with respect to the energy situation; and wrong levels of commitment, with respect to our obligations. That is what they are claiming credit for. If they want to claim credit for that I shall give it to them, but it makes no sense for Members opposite to come and claim credit for everything else in the past and simply ignore what was about to put this country into a financial collapse. It is true that there are other areas that were strong and I have always acknowledged it, but what we are facing, fundamentally, is an issue of financial stress and strain at the time.

Mr. Speaker, it is no doubt that the Members opposite, some of whom have spoken, have attempted to create doubt. The strategy, and the political strategy



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was to create doubt in the people's mind as to the credibility of the figures in the budget. They could not argue in this budget on the basis of how it was shaping the future, or how it was connecting the dots between the different measures, but they came on what I call the arithmetic budget.

The Member for Diego Martin North/East, I have always said, perhaps, has the best ability—*[Interruption]*

**Dr. Moonilal:**—to mislead.

**Hon. W. Dookeran:**—to use data and come to wrong conclusions that I have ever seen. He did it here and he has done it in the past, and I am sure he will do it tomorrow. *[Laughter and desk thumping]*

**Hon. Member:** He talented.

**Hon. W. Dookeran:** What was one of the data? I believe it was the Member for Port of Spain South who said that we should be a data-driven society, and she is right. I am proud that she was one of my students. *[Desk thumping]* I am happy by the way she spoke. As a good student, she asked the right questions and I think she is still a good student. *[Laughter and desk thumping]*

**Hon. Member:** A very good student!

**5.30 p.m.**

**Hon. W. Dookeran:** Mr. Speaker, I take the point which was raised by the Member for Diego Martin North/East, in trying to raise doubts as to the level of expenditure which we are about to approve, I do not—let me just leave that alone. *[Crosstalk]*

Mr. Speaker, in trying to raise doubts he argued that this budget was indeed not an expenditure of \$54.6 billion, but indeed was a figure somewhere about \$57 billion. He failed to understand that the difference between \$54.6 billion and \$57 billion which is about \$2.8—\$2.7 billion is really a financing item—

**Mr. Imbert:** It is still an expenditure.

**Hon. W. Dookeran:**—a financing item is not an expenditure.

**Hon. Member:** He has no intelligence.

**Mr. Speaker:** Hon. Member for Diego Martin North/East keep going down.

**Hon. W. Dookeran:** I just wanted to technically get this point across, because he, in a manner which could have commanded some attention, raised that issue,

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but he was basing it under wrong assumptions using data and coming to wrong conclusions. And it was a financing item to finance sinking funds and finance capital repayments which were included in the financing of our budget and, therefore, could not have been included twice.

**Mr. Roberts:** “He count it twice?”

**Hon. W. Dookeran:** He counted it twice and ended up wrong on both occasions. So, Mr. Speaker, I thought that I should make that point very clear. The budget figures are what they are: total expenditure of \$54.6 billion; recurrent expenditure is \$47 billion—he said \$50 something billion—capital expenditure of \$7.68 billion; total revenue projected at \$47 billion; yielding an overall fiscal deficit of \$7.6 billion.

I was pleased that the Member for Oropouche talked about deficits, and he said the only deficits which we are talking about in the budget are the fiscal deficits, but the deficit to which we should really tackle is the moral deficit in which this country has had to fight and climb out of; the governance deficit.

And almost supporting in a supporting act by the Member for Diego Martin West who spoke earlier, he cast doubt with respect to the revenue which we have projected. It was the same story last year, I remember that very well, and I went at great pains then to tell him that these are based on assumptions, and true, if the assumptions do not materialize we would take account. But as it turned out, it happened last year, in other words the assumptions were materialized and were perhaps materialized more than our expectations. This year we budgeted revenue in 2012, in the case of oil companies, at \$14.1 billion, whereas last year we budgeted that at \$11.7 billion.

Mr. Speaker, what was the basis for the change? The most important base for this change has to do with our administration of the tax revenue from the oil companies. People do not understand how you could increase your revenue without increasing your taxation. That is one of the mistakes which I believe Members could not understand, you know in that era, in that time if you we had to increase your revenue you increased your taxation.

**Hon Member:** Tax! Tax! Tax!

**Mr. Roberts:** Pickpocket.

**Hon. W. Dookeran:** So we went, Mr. Speaker, into the details of this arrangement and we looked at the processes for calculating the taxation, which was why we introduced as one of our measures transfer pricing.

We also introduced, Mr. Speaker, an accelerated programme to deal with audit accounts of the oil companies which were long outstanding, and we said we do not wish them to be outstanding anymore, that they must be up to date. We got a commitment to take those long outstanding complex issues and bring them forward, so we were able to extract more revenue from the past. I would not put the numbers here, but all I could tell you it is significant.

In addition to that our price assumption admittedly is \$2.75 for gas, \$75 for oil, last year we budgeted at \$65 and we adjusted it when the situation changed to \$75. And this year we have it at \$75. Persons have queried this assumption, but this assumption has been based on our judgment on the economic intelligence which is before us; both in terms of the intelligence which we received from external sources, and from the perceptions of those in the oil industry. These assumptions, Mr. Speaker, are, therefore, the assumptions which we wish to make as the basis for our calculation; \$65 last year, \$75 this year; we did increase \$65 to \$75. We do believe it is a matter of judgment, because rightly so oil prices have fluctuations not only of supply and demand. The Member for San Fernando East perhaps knows this better than anyone else, it is a fluctuation of supply and demand and due political developments. He did not understand the politics and that was why he called an early election. [*Laughter*] [*Desk thumping*]

**Mr. Roberts:** “Twelfth man, you geh hit for six?”

**Hon. W. Dookeran:** We made our judgment call not out of thin air, we heard it mentioned here and we will monitor that closely. Every day the situation changes; yesterday, Mr. Speaker, there was a sense of optimism when it appeared as if there was going to be a solution to the European debt crisis, and this optimism began to reflect itself not only in the share markets of the world, but it began to reflect itself in the commodity prices in the world, including oil.

Today, there was another development, a slowing down of the growth rate of China, and the situation began to react to that. We monitor these things very closely and we make the best judgment, but when we do that we do that with the level of intelligence which is before this Government both from outside and internal sources.

**Mr. Warner:** And it is not scarce on this side.

**Hon. W. Dookeran:** Thirdly, Mr. Speaker, on the question of revenue. I indicated that we are projecting more revenue in the VAT, because we have paid out a lot of the debts from previous years which we would not have to pay out this year so, therefore, the VAT intake will not be used for that purpose anymore, and I

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said earlier that we paid out \$3 billion during the course of this year in VAT refunds. Today all those who have had to get VAT refunds are very happy, they were surprised, because they know as they always have done in the past that Ministers saying something will not happen, that was in their time. In our time [*Desk thumping*] I told them when Ministers say something, it would happen. I was very pleased to have received a letter from, I believe, one of the Chambers saying that they were astonished and surprised after they met with us that we had indeed begun to deal with that issue, but \$3 billion was spent.

Finally, with respect to our revenue estimates, we anticipate based on the growth rate which we believe is conservative of 1.7 per cent and an inflationary impact which we believe is a little too high, but as of now at 7 per cent, because of our innate tendency to be conservative, that we will have the increase in VAT intake. Those are the two issues of arithmetic which required some explanation: the size of the deficit as the Member for Diego Martin North/East said and the level of the revenue as the Member for Diego Martin West.

When that debate was taking place someone called me when he heard Members speaking about these figures, and he said: “Do you know what the problem is?” I said well, what I heard is what I have heard. He said: “No. The problem is that in their period they used to measure GDP as GDP plus corruption and we measure GDP as GDP without corruption”. [*Desk thumping*] [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Speaker, the issue of the arithmetic went beyond that, but those are the two which I needed to answer very directly, and assure this community, our citizens, that those figures which we have put out are indeed the figures which had been worked out by our technical persons, and the gas price we have kept at \$275. We know it is touch and go, but we decided to keep it there, because of the same assumption we have made with respect to supply and demand and geopolitical issues.

**Mr. Manning:** What was it last year?

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** “Yuh want to know that?”

**Hon. W. Dookeran:** It was the same be last year. [*Interruption*] Well, we budgeted the same, I can let you have what the actual outturn was, but I think it was very near to that.

**Mr. Manning:** It was nowhere near that.

**Mr. Roberts:** Why did you not speak?

**Hon. W. Dookeran:** If the Member had availed himself of the opportunity to tell the country that, I would not have had an opportunity to respond to it. [*Desk thumping*] [*Crosstalk*] Parliament is where we speak, and Parliament is where we do speak.

**Mr. Warner:** Parliament is where he sits. [*Crosstalk*]

**Hon. W. Dookeran:** Mr. Speaker, I called it the adding up problem and I called up ten issues for adding up the arithmetic; the arithmetic of this budget. Some have argued that the growth rate is too optimistic, but I was very pleased to have heard a Member opposite, I believe it was the Member for Port of Spain South—

**Mr. Warner:** Your student.

**Mr. W. Dookeran:**—who painted the picture of growth rates in the world, and argued that because of that maybe we should take that into consideration. We have obviously taken into consideration too the new scenario of lower growths in the world. As I mentioned earlier even China which is supposed to lead us out of the international dilemma has now begun to show some reduction, indeed also India.

The Member for Port of Spain South was quite correct in saying that we are in a period of low growth rates and she gave the numbers and, therefore, 1.7 is what we used. I do not know where these predictions came from, but I saw on the same day, or the day after the budget was presented when the IMF came to Barbados and was giving a scenario of the regional economy, it ended up in the headline in one of our newspapers, I guess it was the *Business Guardian*: “IMF predicts a 2.6% growth for T&T”. You see if you are in Standard 1 you cannot be in Standard 1, and Standard 5 at the same time. [*Laughter*] Okay?

So if you want to ask me Standard 1 questions then let us get you to Standard 5 before you get there. [*Laughter*]

**5.45 p.m.**

Mr. Speaker, I spoke earlier about revenue stabilization, they said it was too optimistic and I tried to explain to the Member for Diego Martin West in the best of parliamentary tradition. If a Member opposite asks a serious question I think he deserves a serious answer, and the Member for Diego Martin West has asked many serious questions including questions about UDeCott, for which he has paid a high price but for which we are today benefiting. [*Desk thumping*]

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The question of the fiscal deficit, the question of the debt profile, they said it is unsustainable. Well, Mr. Speaker, we are very careful about that because the ability to do deficit financing depends on your level of debt. And if you do not go into deficit financing then you will not have the necessary investment stimulus, but you are limited by the level of debt. We are well aware of that, and we are well aware that that is what caused the problem in Greece, and to some extent a similar problem in the United States, but we are fortunate in Trinidad and Tobago that we recognize that. I agree, it was not only a recognition of this Government, it was a recognition of the previous government, and the data before me have shown a very prudent approach to debt management, and we have projected what it is likely to be in the next two years, and we are conscious of the fact that we must maintain that within profile.

Now let me make a point of clarification on the issue of debt. The debt figure that is really the figure that is the one that people look at is the central government debt, domestic and external. But there is also the issue of contingent liability and we have incorporated that as one of the areas to watch very carefully—it used to be outside the radar screen in calculating the percentages—and then there is also the question of liquidity management debt. So when you hear different figures—I just want to outline that—it depends on how you measure the debt. And it depends on which figure you are using, so when I hear figures like 60 and 70 per cent, I realize that they did not or they were using different definitions of debt.

The truth is that we have maintained a debt profile that as of 2011 was 36 per cent of our GDP. It was 38 per cent in 2010 and that was on the contingent liabilities. Therefore, the ability to finance depends on this—on the debt profile.

There was some discussion in this Parliament about the expenditure pattern, and although it did not appear as if they were calling for a reduction in expenditure, at times you wondered whether they were seeking to reduce expenditure. Some have called for reducing expenditure in the fuel subsidy. Let me explain; what we have done is to introduce two measures. We have introduced an aggressive programme for the use of CNG, and I indicated some of it in the budget speech. I indicated also that we will introduce punitive measures for illegal use of the fuel. But in addition to that the Ministry of Energy and Energy Affairs—and I am sure when the Minister of Energy and Energy Affairs goes to the Upper House he will explain—has introduced a new administrative system, a new administrative system involving the sale of bunker fuels.

So we have taken steps to assure the general community to deal with this issue which amounted to nearly \$3.5 or \$4 billion accumulated over some years, it did

not happen overnight. It is another inheritance which the Member for Diego Martin Central should not just simply ignore. And we have been able to deal with the fuel subsidy that way. We of course would be looking at that very carefully because we believe that there are ways to handle these situations. We can increase our revenue without increasing our taxation and that requires a fair amount of inside analysis of how it can be done.

Mr. Speaker, we are told that our unemployment figures perhaps were low, and I recognize in the budget speech that 50 per cent or thereabout of the unemployment figures can be attributed to the young population.

**Dr. Rowley:** Where are the figures?

**Hon. W. Dookeran:** The figures are not here, because I am relying on the official figures of the CSO, and as I pointed out to you earlier, if you had implemented those proposals for the CSO when you were in charge of the CSO, we would have had real time statistics today. [*Desk thumping*] We would have had real time statistics. I do not wish to guess these figures, I use the statistical office and we said that we will improve the quality, but I think the important point was that that should have happened a long time ago. I would have loved to have that inheritance, but unfortunately we did not have it.

And in order to deal with that there were many measures that we had taken to deal with community employment, measures to increase or to clarify what is considered to be tax deductible for microenterprises which I announced in the budget. Measures that the Member for Pointe-a-Pierre, the Minister of Labour, Small and Micro Enterprises announced here; in closing he did not have enough time to elaborate, which is the Integrated Business Incubator System, that if and when it gets off the ground will create a whole new spontaneous set of opportunities for microenterprises. Measures that allow those who are engaged in educational activities with respect to the environmental issues, to access the Green Fund and in so doing to utilize the Green Fund for the purposes of developing community-based activities, in addition, to what we have had in place before which we are trying to streamline as fast as possible. So we are tackling this problem of youth unemployment where it matters, with deeds on the ground, with measures in place to start tackling that problem.

We were told for instance that our inflation projections are too optimistic, well I am glad that we can have a situation where our inflation projections are seen as optimistic. The truth is, we have made an assumption of a higher inflation rate

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than we expect based on current situation, because we know that it is dependent not only on local situation but on international situation and we have projected our figures on the basis of a higher rate.

So we are not optimistic in our projections, but the performance has been much better, and as I pointed out in the budget statement, by a combination of external pressures in our favour, domestic liquidity management by the Central Bank and increased credit availability to the agricultural sector and hence food production, we were able to achieve the lowest inflation rate for 42 years. These are all policy inspired measures, and this is why I said earlier if I were to adopt the policies of the past government then I would not be able to handle the management of the economy in the way it is being handled today. But that is what the Member for Diego Martin North/East—but I do not really blame him because it is very difficult to unlearn what you already have learned.

Mr. Speaker, that is the arithmetic of the budget which was a major source of doubt that was created in the minds of the electorate, and I hope that what I have said would clarify some of those issues, and perhaps I could just add the point, that the budget statement is not the only statement before you; there is the Review of the Economy, there is the Medium Term Framework, there is the Public Sector Investment Programme, there is the Social Sector Investment Programme, there are all documents that are laid at the same time, and unless you wanted me to speak for ten hours, which I am sure you would not have liked, I had to summarize. Mr. Speaker, adding up the sums is what they talked about. What they did not talk about is how you connect the dots.

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

*[The hon. Prime Minister and Dr. Keith Rowley stand]*

No! No! No! I have to deal with that.

**Mrs. Persad-Bissessar:** I think he wanted to move the motion to extend time. I will give way. I will give way. *[Desk thumping]*

**Dr. Rowley:** Mr. Speaker, I am moving the extension and I am bringing some efficiency to the House by posing a couple of questions to my colleague at the time.

**Mr. Speaker:** No, you cannot have a motion and ask questions. A motion is separate.

**Dr. Rowley:** Mr. Speaker, I am moving the extension.



**Mr. Speaker:** Hon. Prime Minister, Leader of the Opposition, we have to move a motion for the extension, and having done that, if for instance the Minister of Finance is willing to give way, then you rise. We cannot do both at the same time. Hon. Prime Minister

*Motion made:* That the hon. Member's speaking time be extended by 30 minutes. [*Hon. K. Persad-Bissessar*]

*Question put and agreed to.*

**Hon. W. Dookeran:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. May I thank the hon. Prime Minister for her graciousness in moving this extension on my behalf.

Mr. Speaker, I was speaking about the arithmetic of the budget, and I was indicating at the time that there are a number of other supplementary documents that provide many of the details of which Members spoke about that were missing. I think someone said that he was supported in that charge by the media. As we talk about the media, I was looking at the commentators, the professional commentators—and I would not go into detail—*Focus on the Trinidad and Tobago Budget*, Ernst and Young, and they outlined in great detail all the measures that were enunciated in the budget and went further to identify the likely impact. It takes about 10 pages to do that in this document, but for the purposes of public information there are other sources of information to explain.

### **6.00 p.m.**

Mr. Speaker, I said the second objective of this budget—apart from getting the arithmetic right—was to ensure that we have the a budget that connects the dots, that establishes what our social and economic goals are, and in connecting the dots there were fundamental shifts in the paradigm—I would not go into all the details because they are outlined in the document that I have just referred to. But one important one has to do with the issue of the pensions support programme.

We are aware that our senior citizens need to be given more and more protection for the latter part of their years since they would have worked hard and long, but we also recognize in a modern state of the future, the Treasury may not be the source of funding for all times, and certainly, if it is the source it cannot fund the total ambitious programme that we spoke about.

So, we began to shift the focus, and in deliberations with the National Insurance Board decided to have fundable programmes for pension support. Incidentally, the increase to the contribution rates were agreed to by the previous regime and comes into effect on January 1, 2012 because they too recognized that the arithmetic required that.

**Mr. McLeod:** And that is the next tranche of the increases they had agreed to.

**Hon. W. Dookeran:** That is right, but we have gone a little further than that, and we have now worked out by increasing the bands a bit to give greater funding source, and I am told that on the average when the rates are increased and contributions, it will have the impact of 1 per cent increase on employees and 2 per cent increase on employers to be able to fund a wider net at a higher level. And we shall go further and encourage the private sector or the self-employed as it is called, to join this programme.

**Dr. Rowley:** I thank the Minister of Finance sincerely for giving way particularly at this point. I would like the Minister to clarify, is the Minister saying that the increases which are to come into effect now, of \$3,000 a month, those increases are based on the last actual studies where the increase is due the third tranche in 2012, and secondly, has there been actuarial review of the NIS since 2007 which recommended the increase that you are proposing now?

**Hon. W. Dookeran:** I thank the Member for giving me the opportunity and it is an important question. The last actuary review did propose the increases that would go into effect from January 1, 2012, but beyond that I said, we have been about to increase more funding through the higher band on the basis of a new actuary work study that has been done.

**Dr. Rowley:** What year?

**Hon. W. Dookeran:** It is current, I cannot give you the exact date, it is current. I met with the board and we discussed in great detail, and we did not say that it would go into effect tomorrow, we said it would go into effect in 2012 because they have to put everything in place.

And I think you are right when you indicated it in our speech, it has to be laid in Parliament, and it will be laid in Parliament. So, it is based on a new—you see we are looking ahead and we—the objective was two-fold, to improve the net for those who can receive pensions, and this time we looked at many of the senior citizens, and this will benefit, as I said, many of the retired public servants, and many of the retired teachers and others who have had to subsist on pensions of yesterday's income.

We were looking also at changing over time the provision of pensions on a fundable basis. You see, if you are building the society for the future you cannot build it on the basis of going to the Treasury all the time. We are not ignoring the responsibility for old age pension in the process, and that is one of the shifts that have taken place in connecting the dots.

While we have increased the expenditure we are doing so while we change, slightly perhaps, the pattern of expenditure. And one example of that is the way we propose to deal with the GATE programme creating more efficiency in the use of the funds, changing the structure of the expenditure pattern.

We are moving also from the philosophy where everyone is a client of the State, including the private sector, and we have said to them that is an era of the past, we must now get up and shape our destiny and earn our income and create the jobs that are necessary, and that we must move from that philosophy of the clients of the State into a new kind of confidence that we can take responsibility, not only for our investments on a personal basis but also for our expenditure nationally. These are some of the issues that are underlying the budget's proposals.

We are also increasing opportunities for the citizenship by our programme to deal with the stock market, but while we are doing that and therefore, embarking on a programme to distribute opportunities for ownership widely, we are doing that at the same time to ensure that there is more activity in the stock market. And although we have seen some improvement in the last year as perhaps the first manifestation of the beginnings of economic recovery—and the Prime Minister spoke about that in her contribution—we believe that there is much more to be done on that.

We recognize that while there is indeed falling demand for business loans in an environment of high liquidity, we have done what we can and what we must do to have an enabling environment, an enabling environment of a low interest rate environment. An enabling environment of the fiscal incentives that we announced last year and we added some additional ones this year, that will boost exploration activity in the exemption of VAT for those vessels and rigs, that will also generate some more stimulus for the wider development of the economic base of which I spoke.

That leads me to the third area on which this budget focused. These were not discussed here, the arithmetic was discussed but the algebra was not discussed—crossing the t's—connecting the different policy measures, showing the deviation from the past.

The Member for Diego Martin Central was adamant that there was no need to go towards a new policy direction, or so it appeared. That is why the third area that we focused on and on which I had hoped we would have had a full discussion is, shaping the contours, shaping the economic space that we talk about.

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Diversification has been an elusive goal, and we recognize that there are limits to that diversification, there are limits to diversification in the Caricom market for the manufacturing sector. There are limits to diversification with respect to the very narrow base, including the energy of this economy. That is why we decided to work out an ambitious programme.

Last year it was first announced when we set the seeds for the growth poles in the different areas, and as we pointed out the decision to increase the transportation link in the south-west peninsula is the beginning of the process of opening up that sector to economic activities.

Across the sectors, we are saying that this country, small as it is, limited as it is by size, as well as population, does have the capacity to move into sectors that I referred to as missing sectors, and here is a big challenge for the private/public sector partnerships of which I spoke; a different dimension to the instruments for development. While we have identified some winners that we think on the basis of information that we have are areas that we must pursue, we recognize that this is a whole new ball game now for new investors both locally and abroad.

Across the borders; the Caricom region has reached its limits in terms of its economic potential, but we must deepen it and widen it. That is why I talked very specifically about integrating the mineral economies of the Caribbean with the financial capacity of countries like Trinidad and Tobago, and the natural gas advantage that we, for now, and for the foreseeable future will have.

**Mr. Manning:** “Oh, it ain’t go run out?” All of a sudden it would not run out.

**Hon. W. Dookeran:** For the foreseeable future.

**Mr. Manning:** I see.

**Mr. Roberts:** You see or Pena see?

**Mr. Manning:** We take note of that.

**Hon. W. Dookeran:** I always remember the letter that hon. former Prime Minister read in Parliament some many years ago—

**Mr. Manning:** 1905.

**Hon. W. Dookeran:** —that was written in 1905 in which someone had written to him saying that oil will never run, and he said that those were saying it will, he used that letter to justify that it will not run out. I always remember that.

But we are well aware of the need to move the economy into a wider space, and that is why we are setting the stage and that is why this budget has been called, “the beginning of the economic transformation”. A deliberate strategy to broaden the base in anticipation of lesser reliance on the energy sector in years to come. But I can assure you based on the discussions we have had, in terms of energy security, I feel confident that our immediate future is not really being threatened by the reserve position. [*Desk thumping*]

**Mr. Manning:** Frist time we are hearing that!

**Mr. Roberts:** Motel six, calm down.

**Hon. W. Dookeran:** Okay, Mr. Speaker, some have argued that we should not have deficit budgeting, and that even if we have, we show a date on which we must not have it any more. As I indicated to you it is a dynamic world, you do not have—you cannot decide what is the level of deficit financing that you can afford until you understand the rest of the dynamics.

The argument is given the world situation, given the fact that we too have not yet come out of the impact of that situation on our economy over the last three years, given the fact that there was a new set of anxieties and uncertainties in the world economy, the question posed to us is; would you recoil or would you expand? Would you recoil and say that things are going to be difficult and recoil into safety—or what we perceive to be safety—or whether we expand into the possibilities of new investment?

We chose the deliberate decision to expand, to open up the space, to widen the opportunities, to take on frontally, the challenge that has been before us, and it is in that context, Mr. Speaker, we adopted the policy of expansion versus recoil. And in so doing we talked about sharing, sharing the opportunities to the wider citizenship, not only in terms of the programmes to which I referred earlier on which we had no discussion, but also in terms of the new offerings—the public offerings—which we will start so we can share across the citizenship the rewards of the economic value of our country.

We must indeed not be contented to protect the profit levels of the past unless such profit levels are converted into wealth creation of the future.

**6.15 p.m.**

That is the premise on which we are working today. In so doing, we are building the capacity to find rewards for productivity changes. This week as part of the social dialogue programme of which the Member for Pointe-a-Pierre spoke,

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we had agreed to the re-establishment of the Productivity Council. We have already established the issue of the Competitiveness Council and in this budget we see the beginnings of a new ownership structure emerging.

This is the underlying thesis on which the fiscal measures were based and on which the arithmetic was calculated. My friends opposite were able to calculate the arithmetic and even that they calculated wrongly.

They were not able to engage in the discourse of policy shifts or in the discourse of widening the opportunities for the people to deal with the issues of safety, to deal with the issues of investment and to deal with the issues of jobs. Every time a proposal was put forward, they said it would not happen without blinking an eye. Does it reflect those who are willing to see a different future? Or does it reflect those who are comfortable in retaining a past that we have come from? That is the issue that we are facing.

As we go through this entire budget, we will see, therefore, that we were able to put the arithmetic in some kind of framework of sustainability, so fixing the foundation, steadying the foundation and setting the different directions for transformation—setting the basis for that.

This has been an elusive goal and it has been done within a medium-term framework. We are well aware of the fact that we must build a firewall to prevent contagion to our financial system. We must deal with our debt situation frontally. Many have attacked us for having some pay haircuts in this solution.

Today, what is being discussed in Europe are large haircuts for the investors in Greece. This is not haircuts for policyholders but for the investors who are investing in the bonds of Greece. That is one of the conditions being imposed abroad to try to put the European economy back on track. The sustainability of that depends on the financial balance sheet of the countries. If you do not put the financial balance sheet in order, then any talk about going beyond that will be hollow talk, empty talk, talk about where we came from and not where we ought to go.

The recapitalization of the banks: we are conscious of the need to ensure that the banks continue to play a significant role and they have joined us to some extent in the solution to the Clico problem, but they recognize, too, that the society must benefit from their operation and commitment fees that they charge. Their method of calculating interest is a matter I know that is being discussed in those quarters.

So, at all times, we are searching for measures that will remove the pains of the people.

**Dr. Rowley:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and I hope that you will assist me within a few seconds, Mr. Minister. I wanted to make sure you did not close without answering the particular question I had put to you, which you promised to answer. It was whether the Republic Bank Limited shares that form part of the NEL 2 solution, were encumbered and in what way—they had been encumbered. Just a brief comment on that.

**Hon. W. Dookeran:** The proposal that I outlined in a little more detail in the budget speech has to do with the establishment of the Trust Fund, the Clico shares and of the NEL. Professional work is being done; the policy has been laid out. I cannot give you a time, but I know that within a reasonable time we will complete the professional work.

**Dr. Rowley:** Well, that is what I am asking.

**Hon. W. Dookeran:** Oh, sorry. No, that is also being worked out by the technical people and all the issues pertaining to that. It was, as you will recognize, a very innovative way of handling the problem.

I was about to say, Mr. Speaker, that while we try to ensure that there was a solid amount of fiscal responsibilities and fiscal balance and that we fix the foundation, we are also very conscious that we must not have the burden of the pain of that adjustment on the people themselves. That was one of the fundamental premises on which we operated—that the pains of the people must not be increased. They have inherited enough pains from the past and we must not incur more pains. That is why many of the measures we have taken, small measures and big measures, focus on keeping the pain at the lowest level and, wherever possible, improve the uplift of our people as we did this time around with respect to senior citizens, retired public servants, teachers and others.

The underlying political philosophy that guided us was to fix the arithmetic, steady the foundation, build the prospects for transformation and, at the same time, ensure that the adjustment does not fall on the ordinary citizens of Trinidad and Tobago. That was the underlying framework.

I would have thought that the Opposition would have questioned those assumptions as to whether or not we are able not to inflict more pain on the people, but rather some of them said you should inflict some more pain by introducing the property tax. In time, that matter will be dealt with.

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**Mr. Manning:** What do you mean by that?

**Mr. Warner:** Just what he said.

**Hon. W. Dookeran:** Just what I said. I thought the fundamentals of the budget of connecting the policy prescriptions would have been attacked as being not right and not likely to achieve the societal goals we set at all times, of safety, investment and jobs.

I did not speak in this part of the debate on the issue of safety and I notice that there were very few calls asking us to be accountable for safety because they know we are in the right direction; [*Desk thumping*] and the right direction is where we will continue to go. [*Desk thumping*]

All these require courageous steps. All these require a leadership ready to take on the challenges of the country as hard as they are. That is something that the People's Partnership has an abundance of as reflected in the hon. Prime Minister. I thank you.

Mr. Speaker, I beg to move.

*Question put and agreed to.*

*Bill accordingly read a second time.*

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

**Mr. Speaker:** Before the House goes into Finance Committee, I ask the members of the public, who are in the public gallery, to excuse themselves until the Finance Committee does its work.

Only members of the Ministry of Finance would be allowed to remain. All other members of the public are asked to vacate and you can return after Finance Committee does its work. Finance Committee work is held in private, so all persons who are not members of the Ministry of Finance are asked to vacate the Chamber at this time.

Hon. Members, the House will now go into Finance Committee and the hon. Minister of Finance will take the Chair.

*Bill and Estimates committed to Finance Committee.*

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

**7.00 p.m.:** *House resumed.*



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*Question put.*

*The House divided.* Ayes 29 Noes 12

AYES

Moonilal, Hon. Dr. R.

Persad-Bissessar, Hon. K.

Warner, Hon. J.

Dookeran, Hon. W.

McLeod, Hon. E.

Sharma, Hon. C.

Alleyne-Toppin, Hon. V.

Gopeesingh, Hon. Dr. T.

Peters, Hon. W.

Rambachan, Hon. Dr. S.

Seepersad-Bachan, Hon. C.

Seemungal, J.

Volney, Hon. H.

Roberts, Hon. A.

Cadiz, Hon. S.

Baksh, Hon. N.

Griffith, Hon. Dr. R.

Ramadharsingh, Hon. Dr. G.

Ramadhar, Hon. P

Khan, Hon. Dr. F.

De Coteau, Hon. C.

Indarsingh, Hon. R.

Baker, Hon. Dr. D.

Samuel, Hon. R.

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Douglas, Hon. Dr. L.

Roopnarine, Hon. S.

Ramdial, Hon. Miss R.

Partap, Hon. C.

Khan, Mrs. N.

NOES

McDonald, Miss M.

Rowley, Dr. K.

Cox, Miss D.

Hypolite, N.

McIntosh, Mrs. P.

Imbert, C.

Jeffrey, F.

Browne, Dr. A.

Thomas, Mrs. J.

Hospedales, Miss A.

Gopee-Scoon, Mrs. P.

Manning, P.

*Question agreed to. [Desk thumping]*

*Bill accordingly read the third time and passed.*

#### ADJOURNMENT

**The Minister of Housing and the Environment (Hon. Dr. Roodal. Moonilal):** Mr. Speaker, I beg to move that the House do now adjourn to a date to be fixed.

#### Divali Greetings

**Mr. Speaker:** Hon Members, before putting the question to the House, as you all know Divali will be celebrated on October 26. I now call on the hon. Prime Minister to bring Divali greetings. *[Desk thumping]*

**The Prime Minister (Hon. Kamla Persad-Bissessar):** Mr. Speaker, if you would permit me, I crave your indulgence to just congratulate the hon. Minister of Finance on the presentation and passage of his budget in this honourable Chamber. [*Desk thumping*]

It is said that Divali is celebrated on the darkest night of the year and, therefore, this is symbolic of eternal hope that no matter how bad things may seem from time to time, there will always be light that will light the way. So there is always hope in the human breast.

So as we celebrate Divali this year in circumstances that we would have preferred to be different, that is to say, we are celebrating it within the time of a state of emergency as we attempt to deal with the crime problem in the country, I want to use the opportunity to thank all those Members of the protective services who continue to give service to bring a greater measure of security and safety to our land. So I want to thank them first of all. [*Desk thumping*]

Secondly, I want to thank all those citizens out there who have been very cooperative, who have been making sacrifices at this time. We want to thank them as well for their understanding and cooperation. [*Desk thumping*]

To the Hindu community, in particular, to the national community at large, we say Shubh Divali to you. May this Divali season bring greater happiness to you and your loved ones. Whilst we celebrate it as a festival of light, let us not escape the symbolism of what that light stands for. So let us remember that it is also a holy season and we wish all Mother Lakshmi's blessings on each and every one of you in in this Chamber and each and every one of our citizens.

I say Shubh Divali to all of you, Mr. Speaker; to you and your families and to all the families of Trinidad and Tobago. Shubh Divali.

I thank you. [*Desk thumping*]

**Dr. Keith Rowley (Diego Martin West):** Mr. Speaker, once again it gives me great pleasure to join my colleagues in this House on behalf of all those whom we represent, to say that we recognize the philosophy, the history and the hope embodied in the celebration of Divali, and for the people of Trinidad and Tobago, a multicultural, multi-religious, multiethnic society, on occasions like these we should reflect how fortunate we are to be enjoying the fruits of our harmony in diversity. On this occasion we particularly identify our fellow citizens of the Hindu community for whom Divali is a religious celebration, and for the rest of us it might just be a holiday worth noting, but it is more than that; it is a sharing and learning from.

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Unfortunately, as the Prime Minister has pointed out, on this particular Divali we are celebrating it under circumstances which we much would have preferred not to have been under, and I need not express our point of view again. However, so be it. We are in a period of a state of emergency, but I am sure, with the best of efforts, that the light would not be put out and that the people of Trinidad and Tobago, both in and out of curfew, in and out of a state of emergency, would continue to recognize what Divali means for all the people of Trinidad and Tobago, and that is the triumph of light over darkness.

So on behalf of all of us on this side and those on the other side whom we consider our colleagues at all times, and for all the people we represent, recognizing Trinidad and Tobago as one body, one people, we say to all the families in Trinidad and Tobago who are celebrating Divali and those who are enjoying the public holiday, a safe and happy Divali. Shubh Divali to all. [*Desk thumping*]

**Mr. Speaker:** I would like to join with the hon. Prime Minister and the hon. Leader of the Opposition in extending warmest Divali greetings to the Hindu community in particular, and the national community in general.

Hon. Members, as we all know, Divali is the festival of lights. It symbolizes light in its most literal and profound sense. The message derived from Divali is to eliminate darkness from the world filling each individual with self-illuminating light. Divali also portrays good over evil. It enjoins our people to fight against ignorance and malice. The burning deyas are a constant symbol of an illuminated mind and the triumph of good over evil.

It is my fervent hope and wish that Divali will continue to foster the spirit of inclusiveness and promote cultural and religious tolerance and understanding among all citizens of our great nation. I do hope that the divine Mother Lakshmi shower all her choicest blessings of peace, prosperity, good health, harmony and peaceful existence on all. Shubh Divali. [*Desk thumping*]

#### **Expression of Appreciation to Staff**

**Mr. Speaker:** Hon. Members, if I may indulge you for one moment again. Having come to the successful end of the 2012 budget debate in this honourable House, I would like to express on your behalf, our collective appreciation to the staff of the Office of the Parliament who worked tirelessly behind the scenes to provide various support services to all Members of this honourable House. [*Desk thumping*] Tomorrow at 1.30 p.m. the budget debate commences in the other place and they will, no doubt, provide support in equal measure to the Members of that other place.

In particular, I would like to say a special thank you to the following units of the Office of the Parliament: the Secretariat; the Hansard; the staff of the Library; the Information System staff; the members of the Broadcasting Unit; the Food and Beverage unit; the mail office and, of course, our parliamentary security.

Hon. Members, over the past three days we have had a chance to look at the functioning of these facilities at Tower D for parliamentary purposes, and very quietly we have made improvements where necessary and will continue to do so in order to ensure your comfort and convenience, as well as the convenience of all those who work in the Chamber. We ask that you continue to bear with us during this transition process.

This House will be on a short break as the Senate begins its work on the budget. Allow me, therefore, the opportunity to wish all hon. Members and their families, once again, happy Divali.

Now, it is my pleasure to invite all hon. Members to join me for some light refreshments in the Members' dining room on Level 2 on the adjournment of this honourable House.

*Question put and agreed to.*

*House adjourned accordingly.*

*Adjourned at 7.12 p.m.*