

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

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HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Monday, September 15, 2014

The House met at 10.00 a.m.

PRAYERS

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

APPROPRIATION (FINANCIAL YEAR 2015)

BILL, 2014

[Third Day]

Order read for resuming adjourned debate on question [September 08, 2014]:

That the Bill be now read a second time.

Question again proposed.

The Minister of State in the Ministry of Works and Infrastructure (Hon. Stacy Roopnarine): Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It is certainly my pleasure to be able to join in this fifth budget debate as prepared by the People's Partnership Government. I firstly wish to congratulate the hon. Prime Minister and the Minister of Finance and the Economy for delivering what I term to be a true people's budget. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Speaker, I really believe that this Government has done quite a lot over the last four years in a very difficult environment, and it is very heartening to see that we have had three years of positive growth during the period 2012 to 2014, in particular in the context of job creation and inflation rates which are 3.6 per cent and 5.1 per cent, respectively. Therefore, Trinidad and Tobago remains in a very good position for further growth and development.

Mr. Speaker, I wish to begin my contribution today where our society really begins and that is in our nation's youth. Being a young person myself, I understand that youths are indeed an integral part of our society and our overall development as a country. Therefore, it is our goal to harness the energy, the imagination, the intelligence and the innovativeness of our nation's youths and assist them in overcoming the challenges that they are faced with on a daily basis.

Trinidad and Tobago has a youth population of approximately 35 per cent young people and therefore, it is imperative that any government recognize youths

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as leaders of today and tomorrow. I do not think any government in the history of this country has given the attention to young people as this administration led by the hon. Kamla Persad-Bissessar. [*Desk thumping*] In fact, I believe it is the very first time that we are seeing young persons being called to serve their country, whether it is at the level of the Parliament or at the level of our state boards, and that is indeed an accomplishment.

I want to briefly outline some of the initiatives that this Government has put in place to assist the youth of this nation and what this budget brings to the young people. I really want to say that, in my view, I think this is indeed a swag budget as the young people would say. It is certainly a swag budget. I start, first of all, with the document which guides the policies with respect to our young people.

You would recall that in 2010, we promised in our People's Partnership Manifesto which was later adopted as Government policy, we promised that there would be a review of our national youth policy to ensure that it is relevant for today, because the then policy, I think was in 2001. In addition, there were also certain inefficiencies in the current structure of not only the policy but also in that of the National Youth Council. And as a matter of fact, I would go so far as to say the then PNM administration treated the formation and the implementation of the National Youth Council as a party group of their party and I will tell you how.

You would recall in 2009, the Trinidad Youth Council, Executive Secretary, Mr. Ravi Lutchman, made statements regarding the unceremonious removal of the Trinidad Youth Council from the National Youth Council of Trinidad and Tobago, and I quote from a *Newsday* article, July 15, 2009:

“EXECUTIVE secretary of the Trinidad Youth Council (TYC) has renewed calls for fresh elections for a new executive of the National Youth Council...

Ravi Lutchman, of the TYC, said on Monday, the council wanted the June 29 elections declared null and void by the Ministry of Sport and Youth Affairs, and for a new election to be held.

Lutchman expressed concern that the TYC was taken out of the constitution of the NYC, without the consent of the group's executives.

‘This means that the TYC will not be able to take part in any of the NYCTT election and voting processes in the future,’ said Lutchman.”

So you see, Mr. Speaker, in the past, the PNM administration played politics when it came to our young people. We are saying that it is time that that level of dictatorship be corrected, and I am very pleased to report in this honourable

House that through the Ministry of Gender, Youth and Child Development, a new National Youth Policy 2012—2017 was implemented and continues to be implemented today. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Speaker, a part of this plan is to have a national youth commission which would allow for the inclusion of more youth groups and therefore more youths in general so as to prevent what happened in 2009 with the unceremonious removal of the Trinidad Youth Council from the National Youth Council of Trinidad and Tobago, so as to allow more young people to be involved in the decision-making process and to be a part of that policy, that youth policy document. Mr. Speaker, we do not believe in playing politics with our youth. We believe in equity, we believe in freedom of our young people and we believe in allowing them that freedom to take their own future into their hands.

I turn my attention now to a critical area of the development of our youth, and that is in the education sector. Education is one of the major pillars of our economic development, especially for the development of our young men and women. We have to ensure that our young people are literate, numerate and they possess critical-thinking skills. I am pleased to report through the Ministry of Education, they have implemented literary and numeracy coaches in 118 schools, and they have also implemented 2,700 teachers who are now trained to develop these skills in our children. Through that Ministry, they have also delivered laptops; all students, from Forms 1 to 5, by September of this year, would have now been given laptops under this administration.

Dr. Gopeesingh: Ninety-five thousand.

Hon. S. Roopnarine: The Minister of Education is telling me that amounts to 95,000 laptops in the hands of our children. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Speaker, 83 new schools built under the Ministry of Education from 2010 to date, and I must make mention that one of those schools is in my own constituency, that is the Tulsa Trace Hindu School. I will never forget that it was the past regime that allowed that school to collapse to the point where the children had to be housed in the annex of a temple from 2009 until we rebuilt that school and opened it under this Minister of Education and the hon. Prime Minister. Currently, there are 67 more schools under construction.

Mr. Speaker, our young students continue to excel in SEA. In 2014, the mean score of Mathematics, 61.3 per cent, and English was the highest ever since 2008. In the CSEC exams, 2013, 56.2 per cent students successful with five or more

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subjects; and in the CAPE exams, 93.4 per cent passed unit 1 while 93.1 per cent passed unit 2. Therefore, I can say without a doubt that our young people, our young students continue to excel. So we have to find ways to continue to help them in that process of gaining education, whether it is at the primary school, secondary school or tertiary level institutions. So I focused a bit on tertiary level education and more and more young people are really able to go to these institutions because of the expansion of the GATE Programme.

You would recall in 2010, we promised in our manifesto that we would expand and develop tertiary education until we achieve at least 60 per cent participation rate. You would have heard the Minister of Tertiary Education and Skills Training saying that after four years, we have now reached 65.2 per cent participation in tertiary level institution. [*Desk thumping*] This is indeed a huge accomplishment for our young people and for ensuring that their future is well taken care of.

Mr. Speaker, we continue to expand tertiary level education institutions. In fact, many of us know that the University of the West Indies Debe Campus is well on the way to completion, and I am sure that this will benefit students from across the country. You see, we on this side, we understand the plight of rising rent at the University of the West Indies, St. Augustine Campus. That is an institution that I would have left some 10 years ago, and I can tell you that it is indeed a challenge for students who have to stay there. You have to pay rent, your parents are inconvenienced to some extent where they bring food on a weekend, clothes and so on. So it is really an inconvenience to the student who should be studying rather than looking after all of these other affairs, as well as it is indeed a stress for the parents of those students. That is why by building this University of the West Indies, Debe Campus, it would allow not only more students to gain tertiary level education but it will make it easier for our students.

Let us not forget that when this plan was announced by the Minister of Tertiary Education and Skills Training, there were very loud noises from those on the other side. In fact, I refer to a *Newsday* article:

“Rowley knocks Debe campus plan”

That article is from Tuesday, January 25, 2011 and the article says:

“Opposition Leader Dr. Keith Rowley yesterday described as a ‘dangerous development’ an initiative by the Government to establish a campus of the University of the West Indies (UWI) in Debe, south Trinidad, without the sanction of the management of the regional institution.”

So, you see, while we want to send our children to school and while we want to build more accommodation for them in the schooling system, the Opposition is seeing this as a “dangerous development”. Why?

Mr. Speaker, was it not the former founder of the PNM who said that the future of our nation’s children is in their school bag? But what is the current Leader of the Opposition saying? He is saying the building of the university campus in Debe is a “dangerous development”. And you know, Mr. Speaker, I think this is a word that the Member for Diego Martin West seems to like because in his budget contribution in this honourable House, in his response, he also described the budget as a “dangerous approach to fiscal management”. So what is he trying to do? They are trying to put fear into the population. The University of the West Indies, Debe Campus, a dangerous development; the budget 2015, dangerous. What is going on here? Is he a dangerous Member of Parliament? [*Desk thumping*] I do not know.

Mr. Speaker, today, we have expanded the GATE Programme to include technical and vocational training so that we now have 67,000 persons benefiting from the programme. We continue to expand campuses such as the University of the West Indies, UTT, COSTAATT, MIC, so that they can also increase their intake of students. We continue to have programmes such as the HELP, HYPE, MUST, which together saw 3,570 students benefiting from October 2013 to May 2014.

10.15 a.m.

Mr. Speaker, the OJT Programme continues to be expanded, where we had, during the period October 2013 to May 2014, 6,885 students benefiting from that OJT Programme.

Our programmes continue in tertiary level education and we look forward in 2015, to continuing these initiatives. I know one area as well that is beneficial to a lot of young people is that of the scholarship programme. Under this regime, we have really tried to put the checks and balances to ensure that those students who are most qualified and those students who are most in need benefit from those scholarships. In the past, this was used as a personal slush fund of the PNM.

I wish to quote from another *Newsday* article of Saturday, November 23, 2013:

“PNM’s \$60M Slush Fund”

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The article says:

“Attorney General Anand Ramlogan says an audit report on a more than \$60 million ‘secret scholarship slush fund’ by the previous People’s National Movement (PNM) administration, contains sufficient evidence to warrant charges for misconduct/behaviour in public office and for conspiracy to defraud against a former community development minister and fund administrators.”

Mr. Speaker, they do not like when we talk about this. They do not want the population to be reminded of what a PNM administration did in this country and what we can expect from a PNM administration. This is how they treated the young people of this country. They played politics with our youth, and we are saying that it is time that that has ended and that is why, under the Scholarship and Advanced Training Division of the Ministry of Public Administration, they are projecting to spend some \$686.5 million over a three-year period from 2015 to 2017, to offset student expenditure, both locally and internationally.

Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to announce that approximately 1,935 scholarships were awarded to nationals for fiscal 2014, at a cost of \$124 million. [*Desk thumping*] As I outline initiatives, in both the education and tertiary-level education sector, when you look at the total allocated for fiscal 2015, that amounts to \$10.13 billion invested in the youth of this nation. That is our commitment to the young people of this country. That is where we are putting our investment. “So dey want to know where de money gone?” It goes into the hands of our young people because they are the future of tomorrow.

Mr. Speaker, I turn my attention to the area of sports and our young people. Mr. Speaker, we have to ensure that we have all-rounded youths, and this is why we recognize sport to be a very integral part of the growth of our children from early childhood level all the way up to tertiary level.

I too understand the importance of sport, because I had some fond experiences at my former high school playing football. [*Desk thumping*] As a matter of fact, it was through that experience at the Secondary School Football League, together with the FIFA body at that time, we were able to have, in the schooling system, referee training and it was through that training that I became a qualified Grade C football referee. [*Desk thumping*] In fact, that is where I would have met the Member of Parliament for Chaguanas West.

So we recognize sport to be a very critical part of our development of our young people, and that is why I am pleased now to outline a number of initiatives

and opportunities for young people in sport. On a national level, we are developing three major facilities, these are the National Aquatic Centre, the National Tennis Centre, the National Cycling Centre, all of which are being constructed. These facilities are well on their way.

I want to tell you, Mr. Speaker, that it is Government's intention to ensure delivery within time and budget, much unlike what we saw in the previous regime. Their track record will show Tarouba Stadium cost overrun, \$800 million. I cannot name a single major infrastructure project under this Government with cost overruns. But when you look at the PNM's track record, look at NAPA, \$234 million over budget; NAPA south, \$238 million over budget; Ministry of Education Towers, \$300 million over budget. That is the legacy of the PNM, and they come today to talk about dangerous fiscal management. This is the track record of the PNM.

Mr. Speaker, you would recall the former Minister of Sport came to this House in his very first budget contribution and he told us that the Ministry of Sport has to pay \$57 million a year, from 2010, for a loan taken by a PNM Cabinet dated November 19, 2009 for \$497 million to complete the Tarouba Stadium. Mr. Speaker, this country will pay for those things for years and years to come. The taxpayers of this country will pay for that for decades. That is the legacy of the PNM. Do you know what we could have done with that money? We could have put that money into the development of our young people in sports. We could have put that money into the Elite Athlete Programme. We could have put that money to help our young athletes internationally, more money for our Soca Princesses who will open the final round of World Cup qualifying for the Concacaf Women's Championship against the United States, October 15 in Kansas. I take the opportunity to wish them all success in their upcoming games.

Mr. Speaker, I certainly believe that sport starts in the community. It starts with a group of young persons in their villages, in their communities, coming out on an afternoon playing cricket. I used to do things like that in my own village in Goodman Road in Penal, and it is something that you really enjoy as a young person, and this is why it is important that community sporting groups continue to receive financial assistance from the Ministry of Sport. And, therefore, last year there was some \$28 million allocated to community sporting groups.

Mr. Speaker, while we look at sports in the community, we also have to look at infrastructure upgrades in our community grounds to allow young people to utilize these facilities. Mr. Speaker, a simple thing like lighting on a recreation ground—in my own constituency, when I became a Member of Parliament, I had

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nine recreation grounds, I still have nine, and of those nine recreation grounds only two of those grounds had lighting; two grounds out of the nine. I want to tell you that today, through the Ministry of Public Utilities, T&TEC, there is only one ground left to be lit. That is the delivery of this Government. That is our commitment to the young people of this country.

Mr. Speaker, sport remains a vital part of the development of our young people to keep them away from a life of crime. So, when you put lighting on a recreation ground, it gives these young people something positive to do, going into a late afternoon into the night. Do you know how many times I pass and see on the Pluck Road, Evergreen Recreation Ground—you see young people playing cricket and football up to 10.00 in the night. That is the kind of positive development that we want to see in our young people. Mr. Speaker, I also wish to report that there is some \$42 million assigned between the Ministry of Local Government and the Ministry of Sport to focus on the upgrade of these recreation grounds.

Mr. Speaker, another programme that continues to benefit our young people is that Hoop of Life Programme. I want to tell you that I was very happy to attend the launch of that programme, where persons from my own constituency, the La Romaine Jet Stars, would have played their opening game and I have really seen the positivity of that programme. I have really seen some fine young gentlemen playing a sport which they love and doing something positive for their own personal growth and development.

Mr. Speaker, this year, for the first time in our nation's history, we will also see the Trinidad and Tobago National Games in 2015, where we are focused on developing a critical mass of athletes in five disciplines: football, cricket, netball, basketball and athletics. So you see, Mr. Speaker, we are really committed to putting an investment in our youth in sports, unlike the previous regime where you had a Sport Company spending \$2 million on a flag or \$55 million on Caribbean Games that never came off. We have to put the investment where our young people are.

Miss Cox: What about the man who got \$34 million and did nothing?

Hon. S. Roopnarine: Mr. Speaker, we also have to continue to engage—
[*Interruption*]

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, please. May I appeal to all Members, especially those who have already spoken, to observe Standing Order 53, particularly 1(g), which reads, Members:

“shall avoid running commentaries when another Member is speaking;”

The Members know who they are, I do not have to identify them, but I will have to rise again if Members ignore this Standing Order. Continue, hon. Member.

Hon. S. Roopnarine: Thank you very much for your protection, Mr. Speaker.

I move to our young people in the communities. There are so many programmes that I could talk about, but I just want to spend a few more moments talking about the youth and their development. The Trinidad and Tobago Cadet Force, we continue to expand this. We are looking at, at least eight schools in 2015; the National Youth Mentorship Programme, under the Ministry of National Security from October 2013 to May 2014, 315 persons benefited from that programme. The Citizens Security Programme, this also continues to be expanded, where 30 communities benefited in the last year and we are looking at expanding into eight new communities in 2015, at a projected cost of \$28 million. The Youth Development and Apprenticeship Centres, under the Ministry of Gender, Youth and Child Development, we saw this year in January 2014, 53 persons graduating from that two-year residential programme. The National Youth Volunteerism Programme of the Ministry of Gender, Youth and Child Development, strengthens the youth participation in the involvement of community projects, in particular projects such as beach clean-up campaigns and so on.

There is also the Respect Me, Respect You Programme of the Ministry of Gender, Youth and Child Development to deal with school bullying and violence in schools. There is also the Civilian Conservation Corps Programme. This is to raise the self esteem of youths at risk between the ages of 16 to 25. From October 2013 to May 2014, this programme saw that 1,151 at-risk youths benefited from this programme. Mr. Speaker, we continue to see the expansion of our police youth clubs. This is something done internationally in many other countries: Canada, Australia, Europe and so on. So, Mr. Speaker, you see, there is quite a lot being done for our young people.

I really wanted to spend a few more minutes, in terms of the development of our young people in employment and entrepreneurship. Economic growth is taking place in the context of job creation, as during the period January to September of 2013, the Minister of Finance and the Economy told us in his budget presentation that there was an average unemployment rate of 3.6 per cent. According to the *Review of the Economy 2014* document, young persons in the age group 15 to 29 years of age accounted for 40.4 per cent of unemployed

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persons in the fourth quarter. The good news being that there was a decrease from 49.3 per cent in the previous quarter.

Mr. Speaker, we try our best to ensure that our young people are trained for the workplace and then we also have to encourage them in entrepreneurship as well and, therefore, this is why you have the National Business Incubator System, through the Minister of Labour, Small and Micro Enterprise Development, as well as NEDCO. NEDCO continues with their aggressive programme and there is also the FairShare Programme.

I also want to spend a moment on one area that really is a challenge for a lot of young persons, especially young professionals, persons who have now started working, young couples, and that challenge is in the area of housing. It is this Government, under the Ministry of Housing, the Member for Oropouche East, who implemented the 2 per cent mortgage programme for persons earning up to \$10,000 a month. Previously, this figure was \$8,500 and these persons can now qualify for properties up to \$850,000, moving from \$625,000 to \$850,000. What does this mean? It means now that more young people can qualify for a low-rate mortgage.

10.30 a.m.

In addition to that, Mr. Speaker, this will also be supplemented with a 5 per cent mortgage programme, for persons earning between \$10,000 and \$30,000 a month, and they can now qualify for properties up to \$1.2 million. [*Desk thumping*] Mr. Speaker, this means that you could now have more young people, a wider cross section of young people accessing these low-rate mortgages and, therefore, it helps in their quest to become homeowners. So, when you look at all the programmes that I have spoken about today, you can certainly tell that this is a Government committed to the development of our young people. I really believe that the investment we make in our young people today, we will reap tomorrow, as Franklin Roosevelt once said, and I quote:

“We cannot always build the future for our youth, but we can build our youth for the future.”

Mr. Speaker, as I stand here in this honourable House, I feel that I really need to speak as a woman in society, and I really have to speak to the efforts made by the Government of Trinidad and Tobago in closing the gender gap. The Social Sector Investment Programme 2015 shows that the Global Gender Gap Report reflects, that the Latin America and Caribbean region which accounts for 70 per cent of its overall gender gap in 2013, shows the biggest improvement last year in

comparison with other regions. [*Desk thumping*] Furthermore, Trinidad and Tobago improved in its ranking from 43 to 36, a jump of seven spots. [*Desk thumping*]

It is the first time in our nation's history that we have seen a female Prime Minister, and I think that her rise to that position certainly represents every woman's struggle in this country. [*Desk thumping*] And, therefore, we are seeing now more and more women in the Parliament. [*Interruption*] We are seeing more and more women taking up leadership positions. We are seeing more and more women coming forward to serve on state boards, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, according to the *Review of the Economy 2014* document, women unemployment decreased marginally from 4.8 per cent in the third quarter, to 4.7 per cent in the fourth quarter of 2013. In addition, during the fourth quarter of 2013, 58.6 per cent of the unemployed were males, while 41.4 per cent were females.

Mr. Speaker, the Social Sector Investment Programme, 2015, will show that almost 37.7 per cent of the poorest households were headed by women, compared with the national average of 32.5 per cent. Therefore, we have to continue to place emphasis on the development of our women and our single mothers. This is why I believe that the Baby Care Grant will certainly go a long way for these women. [*Desk thumping*]

Many of our underprivileged women are taking care of several children on their own. In fact, in my own constituency when I see constituents on a Tuesday, you know, you really meet some women who are in very difficult situations, multiple children, and they are taking care of these children on their own. So, therefore, I say that if we can find some way to help these mothers take care of their babies, then it is a responsibility collectively of all Members of Parliament to support this initiative, to support our mothers, especially our single mothers.

The Ministry of Gender, Youth and Child Development continues to have several programmes to assist women, such as the Women in Harmony Programme, to empower single females, heads of households and help with the challenges of socio-economic problems. And, Mr. Speaker, I know that work also continues on the gender policy and we do hope to see this to its fruition. But, Mr. Speaker, why do we promote gender equity? There has been one inequity in a particular programme, and that programme is now under the Ministry of Works and Infrastructure, and that is the URP Women's Programme. This programme benefits over 3,000 women on a fortnightly basis. I must say that these—I have

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had the opportunity to work with these women, and some of them are very, very hard-working, very dedicated, [*Desk thumping*] and I really want to commend them for the job that they have been doing.

But, Mr. Speaker, I do not know how many of you will know this, but the URP Women's Programme actually has a lower salary than in the URP core programme. So traditionally, these women would have received \$58.00 a day, whereas in the core programme, they receive \$69.00. I speak on behalf of all of those over 3,000 women, when I say thank you to the hon. Prime Minister and the hon. Minister of Finance and the Economy, for equalizing this inequity in the system. [*Desk thumping*] I am very happy that we could have found the money in this fiscal 2015 to make that change necessary to continue to assist in the development of our women.

So, Mr. Speaker, we continue with the expansion of the URP Women's Programme in two major areas. One is that of training and the other one is that of beautification. The training aspect of it, I must make mention that when we are training these women, we actually have programmes that are NTA certified. So that they leave there with certification to help them in getting better jobs, Mr. Speaker. The beautification also continues where we try to make work more efficient in our schools' systems, in our community centres and public spaces.

Mr. Speaker, I turn my attention now to the Ministry of Works and Infrastructure for a few minutes. I really want to say that this Ministry continues to deliver not only in our roads, our bridges, our landslips and so on. One of the projects that is of great interest to this country is that of the Port of Spain East-West Corridor Transportation Project. There has been significant success in this project, Mr. Speaker. I will briefly make mention of some of them: the Churchill Roosevelt Highway to St. Joseph River has been widened; the Beetham Highway access route in and out of Port of Spain is being widened; improvements to access in and out of Port of Spain; installation of a traffic control and surveillance system within the corridor from the Uriah Butler Highway to Colville Street; the Churchill Roosevelt Highway interchange upgrade programme, packages A, B and C have been completed; and we also have the National Traffic Management System, where we saw the establishment of a National Traffic Management Centre together with CCTV cameras. We are now looking at deploying pilot projects for red light enforcement and spot speed enforcement. So we have more work to do in terms of that project, but we are certainly keen on utilizing technology to develop some of our programmes in the Ministry of Works and Infrastructure.

A key area of our nation's road network is that of our highway system. And it was to this end that we undertook the Diego Martin Highway expansion project. But, Mr. Speaker, you know, I listened in awe to the Leader of the Opposition in his contribution in this honourable House, when he said that it was this Government that stopped the Diego Martin Highway expansion project in 2010. Mr. Speaker, nothing is further from the truth, and I will tell you. He went on and he gave credit to the Member for Diego Martin North/East. He said his colleague came to this honourable House to lobby for the project. Mr. Speaker, I want to ask today, if it was not this same Member who served as Minister of Works and Transport for five long years. So what, the Diego Martin Highway expansion project was not a priority in the five years for their own constituents, but 2010 Government comes into office, they come knocking on the door all of a sudden, the project becomes a priority now under this Government. Mr. Speaker, let us look at the facts, and the fact remain that it was this Government, it was this Prime Minister who this year officially opened the Diego Martin Highway expansion project. [*Desk thumping*] So you see, when they talk, we continue to deliver.

And, in fact, I would like to thank the Member for Diego Martin Central, and the Member for Diego North/East for their attendance at that function, but I did not see the Member for Diego Martin West. Interestingly, I did not see him present, but he comes in this House to say we stopped the Diego Martin Highway expansion project. Nothing is further from the truth.

Another highway that we continue to expand is that of the Point Fortin highway—the highway to Point Fortin, 47 kilometres four-lane highway and 2.5 kilometres two-lane highway, continue to go on. To date, we have officially opened the Golconda to Debe segment, total payments include fees to OAS AECOM. I wish to outline briefly some of the accomplishments we have made in terms of the relocation of persons and communities, because I know that this has indeed been ventilated in the public domain. So I wish to state for the record that to date, 342 persons have been settled for their properties at a cost of \$320 million. [*Desk thumping*]

Today it is reported that there is currently 91 per cent local content in that project, Mr. Speaker. [*Desk thumping*] I also wish to advise that in terms of relocation, the Government undertook to relocate residents to the Petit Morne area, squatters to the Picton area, and we are in the process of developing lands in Golconda for the farmers. To date, Mr. Speaker, 88 squatters have received lots, in Picton, 50 residents received lots in Petit Morne with an additional 60 offer

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letters going out, and we continue to develop the land for our farmers. That is the commitment to treating with the social aspect of this highway.

You know, Mr. Speaker, in the past, Governments have built highways and byways and roadways and so on, and persons have to wait all kind of 10/20 years. As a matter of fact, there are people in this country [*Desk thumping*] who have not gotten paid for highways built decades ago. We are trying our best to settle as much as we can, without having any huge disturbances to the people so affected, who have to be relocated.

We understand that there are challenges and we try our very best to minimize those challenges, as we know that there is always a price to progress, and it is about managing that price. Because if we do not manage that price, then what, we will never build anything in this country. So we are trying our best as a responsible Government to take the steps necessary to address those persons so affected. And as I speak here, the Valencia bypass project, also continues in the east.

Another important area of focus is our bridges, landslip and transportation programme. Under the Bridges Reconstruction Programme, repairs to 62 bridges in need of urgent repairs, requiring over \$404 million over a six-year period, have to be undertaken. In 2013, Mr. Speaker, awards were made for 10 bridges, two on the Eastern Main Road, two on the Toco Main Road, the Talparo Main Road, Valencia Main Road, Cedar Hill Road, Sisters Road, Guayaguayare, Mayo Road and in my own constituency, in Pluck Road, Mr. Speaker. And you know, this is a bridge that has caused much inconvenience. As a matter of fact, I went there just a couple of weeks ago and one of the residents who live just in the vicinity of where we are now building that bridge, Mr. Ghisiawan, told me that along that roadway, every week there were several accidents, because it was an unsafe bridge, very dilapidated and so on. So I am very happy to see the award of that bridge and that construction has started and it is well on its way.

Mr. Speaker, under the landslips reconstruction programme, 486 landslips were identified over a five-year period at a cost of \$418 million. In 2014, six were awarded, including two on Mayo Road which were completed, two on Bonne Aventure Road, and one on the Southern Main Road and also one along the Pluck Road in San Francique. Mr. Speaker, we continue with the development of this programme, and I wish to turn my attention to the traffic management situation in this country.

You know, traffic really affects everyone. Whether we are going in our own cars, whether we are taking our maxis, our taxis and so on. It is a situation that affects all of us, and it also affects the productivity of our country. So what do we do, Mr. Speaker? Aside from upgrading our highways, our major roads and, of course, our secondary roads, because when you upgrade secondary roads, you are taking traffic away for the main road and creating alternative access routes. Mr. Speaker, we have also implemented new traffic schemes. A couple of those areas where we have seen success, in Tacarigua, Arima, Port of Spain, Curepe, Endeavour, Chaguanas, Woodbrook, San Juan, just to name a few, and, Mr. Speaker, we continue to manage the situation. We continue to put measures in place to manage the traffic on our nation's roadways.

But, Mr. Speaker, what is indeed very disturbing to me, is that the PNM's solution to traffic has been and continues to be, the rapid-rail project. So this is a project that they were focused on while they were in Government. People voted against it, and then they come back with it today to say that if a PNM Government returns, they will bring back the rapid rail. Mr. Speaker, I am very surprised by this, because I thought the population made it very clear, in 2010, what their view was on this rapid-rail project, but I really believe that there is more than meets the eye with this project.

10.45 a.m.

Let me tell you how. You see, Mr. Speaker, the last PNM administration awarded a design/build/operate and maintain contract to the then TriniTrain Consortium for the construction of the Trinidad Rapid Rail project. So it is a design/build/operate/maintain contract. What was interesting in the process of this award was that there was no transportation study; there was no socio-economic feasibility study before the award of any contract, but a design/build/operate and maintain contract was awarded to a particular company.

The second thing very strange with this project is that the oversight consultant engaged by NIDCO reported directly to the former President of NIDCO. There was very little interaction between engineers, planners, both in the Ministry of Works and Infrastructure and the National Infrastructure Development Company Limited. That is not normal.

We have had many huge infrastructure projects going on in the Ministry and it is very critical that your engineers and planners are involved in this process. But they had a system whereby their consultant reported directly to the President of NIDCO. In fact, when Dr. Carson Charles took office as the President of NIDCO,

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they came knocking on his door saying they came to report for duty. Dr. Charles had to tell them, as a professional in this very engineering profession, that is not how we do business. You cannot report directly to the President of a company. But that is the PNM style—no accountability, no transparency—you award a contract and then the consultant reports directly to the President of the company.

Mr. Speaker, contract awarded, nobody knows what they are building and consultant reporting to the President of the company. Further to this, it was only at the end of phase 1 of this project that TriniTrain Consortium was able to estimate the cost of the project at US \$7.36 billion.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, your speaking time has expired. Do you want to move that your speaking time be extended?

Hon. S. Roopnarine: Yes.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, the question is that the speaking time of hon. Minister of State in the Ministry of Works and Infrastructure be extended by 10 minutes.

Question put and agreed to.

Hon. S. Roopnarine: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. So, contract awarded, nobody knows what they are building; consultants reporting to the President of NIDCO.

At the end of phase 1, TriniTrain Consortium was able to estimate the cost of the project at US \$7.36 billion. This equates roughly to TT \$46 billion. But there would have been additional costs. The alignment of the route of the rapid rail would have gone through the Port of Port of Spain, so you would have had to look at costs for relocation of the port. You would have also had to add costs for acquisition, which was not factored in at the time.

NIDCO's consultant calculated that the project would have been economically feasible at 10 per cent rate of return at a cost of US \$4 billion or less than half of the estimated project cost when acquisition costs are included.

The very unfortunate part of all of this was that \$500 million later, this was determined. What is even more interesting to me is that, in the contribution of the Member for Diego Martin West, he came to this House and he said that a PNM Government would engage the IDB to do a review and technical feasibility for a mass transit system and, if feasible, they would proceed to build the rapid rail. So,

while we spent \$500 million to say the project is not feasible, they want to come back and do another feasibility study. At what cost? [*Desk thumping*] Mr. Speaker, there is a word that has the definition of “doing the same thing, expecting different results”. That word is “madness”. Today, I think that is what is going on here.

In terms of managing our traffic, we continue to expand our traffic warden system. We have seen, from March 2011—and it was this Government that implemented the Traffic Warden System. You all planned it for 11 years; we implemented it; so you all talk while we deliver. [*Desk thumping*]

We now have 424 wardens recruited, working on our nation’s roadways. As at August 2014, 9,495 tickets were issued by our traffic wardens, at a cost of \$8.9 million. Perhaps, with the proposal of the hon. Minister of Finance and the Economy to increase some of these fines by 50 per cent, we would perhaps see either more revenue or, perhaps, less persons now inclined to break the law.

Road safety continues to be a key initiative of the Ministry of Works and Infrastructure and that is why we have implemented the cable barrier system. From 2010 to 2013, we have installed 44 kilometres of high tension cable barriers along the Solomon Hochoy Highway with a further three kilometres to be done by this month, as well as a further nine kilometres along the Uriah Butler Highway between the Churchill Roosevelt Highway and Munroe Road Overpass. And, in fiscal 2015, we intend to continue installation along the Beetham Highway and the Churchill Roosevelt Highway.

Mr. Speaker, there is so much more I can say with respect to the Ministry of Works and Infrastructure, but I know the Member for Tabaquite will deal with that in his contribution in terms of our PURE Programme, coastal protection and so on.

I want to turn my attention briefly to the Constituency Development Fund. As the Member of Parliament for Oropouche West, I really want to say that I think this is something that will certainly benefit my constituents and it will certainly give Members of Parliament the ability to deliver to their constituents.

If we look at the new proposal in the Constitution (Amdt.) Bill, which was passed in the Lower House and also in the other place, I think that the Constituency Development Fund is certainly needed. If you are saying that we are now giving persons the right to recall their MPs, then you must give MPs resources so that persons can actually measure their performance in their constituencies.

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I want to ask: what is the PNM's position on the Constituency Development Fund? Is it something that you support as Members of Parliament? We saw that you voted against the Constitution (Amdt.) Bill and, therefore, you do not support the people who have elected you into office. You do not support them having the right to recall you. Therefore, one would have to assume that the PNM is certainly not in favour of democracy and freedom of our people.

Let us not forget that it was this same PNM administration, since 2006, that delayed the local government election—postponed it for four long years until people voted them out, and it took this Prime Minister, the Member for Siparia, to call those local government elections.

You see, those on that side, on the Opposition Bench, they deny the people their constitutional right to vote for those four long years and now they want to deny people the right to recall their Members of Parliament. I also want to ask if they are going to deny people the right to receive goods and services from their Members of Parliament.

I want to tell you that as Member of Parliament for Oropouche West, my constituents certainly support this initiative. As a matter of fact, I think, as MPs, we always need more resources in our constituencies and I think we also have a responsibility, as MPs, to account to our constituents for the work that we are doing.

In my own constituency, I prepare, every three to four months, a newsletter and this newsletter identifies and outlines some of the major infrastructure projects and some of the major plans in the constituency as well as some of the major activities. So it is a way of accounting to the people. It is a way of allowing them to see the work that you are doing as an elected representative of the people. I hope that with the Constituency Development Fund I will be able to have many more pages in this document.

In my own constituency, I think it is only through this Government that we have seen delivery in the constituency of Oropouche West. People tell me horror stories. I invite the Member for Diego Martin Central to come and take a drive to Oropouche West and see for yourself some of the development that we have.

We continue with the upgrade of our road infrastructure, landslip—it is so many that I cannot even begin to name; but there are some things that we take for granted. In one particular instance I recall, this Government, we built a bridge, a Bailey bridge, we implemented in the vicinity of the Tulsa Trace Hindu School to connect Tulsa Trace to Gayah Trace. You know, that is something that meant so

much to that community because it was for 60 long years that they never had a bridge and so both communities were disconnected. They had to go all the way around to meet their families and relatives on the other side.

So, Mr. Speaker, we continue with—I mentioned the Tulsa Trace Hindu School. We also have the construction of the ECCE Centre at Suchit Trace. Minister Gopeesingh, you have to come and commission that school. I mentioned as well the lighting of our recreation ground. I also wish to mention, in my own constituency, there were some 30 new communities that benefited from water projects. This means 30 areas that never had a pipe-borne supply of water before and are now getting water in their pipes.

Community centre upgrades: the Woodland Community Centre, under this Government, received an upgrade for the first time after 15 years. Why? Because there was some level of discrimination in the sharing of resources under the past regime. And I make no apologies for saying that, Mr. Speaker. The Hermitage Community Centre is currently being upgraded and we are also now in the process of construction of two activity centres: one in the Doorbassa Trace area and one in the Tulsa Trace area.

Mr. Speaker, delivery continues. I have a long list of achievements that I wished to have been able to outline, but our speaking time is a little less. *[Interruption]* Yes, I will share it in writing with my colleagues.

So, we continue with the delivery. As a Member of Parliament, I would really like to see the Constituency Development Fund implemented so that we can have access to resources to assist our constituents.

After my contribution today, I think it is clear that while they on the PNM Benches talk and while they have talked for years and years, we on this side continue to deliver, and I think it is clear to the population that when 2015 comes around, we will be reinstated to office with a resounding majority. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Colm Imbert (*Diego Martin North/East*): *[Desk thumping]* Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I do not have much to say about what was said by the previous speaker, except to say that that Member is living in a fool's paradise. Cloud Cuckoo Land, I think, is the best way to describe it. I will use one example to prove my point.

The completion of the Diego Martin Highway between Victoria Gardens and Acton Court was approved by Cabinet in 2009 and Cabinet approved all phases,

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phases 1—4. Phase 1 started in the Powder Magazine area and phase 4 ended in Acton Court.

It required, not only design, which was based on an earlier design done in the 1980s—I understand there is some COP activist parading, saying that he designed the highway, a highway design that I saw, designed in 1980, when he was about five years old, but such is the kind of people that associate with Members opposite.

Be that as it may, we refined the design; I got Cabinet approval in 2009 and commenced phase 1 of the project, which is the section between Powder Magazine and Victoria Gardens. Anybody who lives in that area, I forgive the hon. Member for—from where?—Oropouche West, for not being aware of the fact that the construction of that section of the Diego Martin Highway began in 2009 and not—I forgive the Member for not reading the Cabinet records to see that it was approved by Cabinet in 2009. I also forgive the Member for not being aware of the fact that the land acquisition process was bungled by her administration in 2010 where the Section 4 notices were allowed to lapse. The Government did not enter the site. You see, what happened, Mr. Speaker, my colleague, the Member for Chaguanas West, has since apologized for his behaviour. I have not yet accepted his apology, but I may in due course.

What happened in 2010, they were so ebullient and so full of themselves that they said that the areas that did not vote PNM would eat grass. So we had started this project. It was to continue all the way down to Acton Court, and it was stopped in 2010. The land acquisition process was stalled. The Section 4 notices lapsed; grass started to grow on the construction site; equipment was decommissioned; the demolition of properties that were under acquisition stopped. It stayed like that for two years, until I came into this Parliament in 2012 and protested the abandonment of work on that project and because, Mr. Speaker, I did not get your permission to show photographs of—and I understand the rules—I did not get your permission to show photographs of the grass growing and the abandoned project, I was told to leave the Parliament.

11.00 a.m.

Mr. Speaker, they stopped that project from 2010 to 2013; stopped it, and resumed work just a little while ago, and have the audacity to come in this Parliament and make up that Anancy story that I heard there. [*Desk thumping*] Everybody who lives in Diego Martin; everybody who travels to and from Diego Martin would have seen the abandoned project for two years; would have seen the

commencement from Powder Magazine; would have seen the project stopped; would have heard my hon. friend, the Member for Chaguanas West say those who vote PNM—I am paraphrasing—will eat grass—well something to that effect. People who voted PNM will suffer, something like that. [*Crosstalk*] You said that, but it does not matter. You said you have apologized for your errors, and I may one day accept your apology. But, apart from that, Mr. Speaker, I really could not handle anything else said by the Member. Everything was just pie in the sky, illusionary, delusionary, whatever nonsense. Nonsense!

But let us go to the Minister because he is under review here, not the ridiculous comments of the junior Minister of Works and Infrastructure. [*Laughter*]

Miss Roopnarine: What kind of thing is that?

Mr. C. Imbert: You could say what you want, you know. You just spoke for 55 minutes and said nothing [*Desk thumping*] but, Mr. Speaker, let me deal with the Minister. It is difficult to say which of the five budget statements produced by this Government is the worst. They are all so bad. But this 2015 budget statement is a strong contender for the most misleading budget statement ever presented by any Minister of Finance anywhere. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Speaker, the Minister has no regard whatsoever for the truth and has chosen, like his colleagues—like the one I just heard—to say anything. They are prepared to say anything, no matter how preposterous it is. Let me give you an example. At the beginning of his speech he says this:

“growth has been restored after 3 years of decline. We have had in the period 2012—2014, 3 years of positive economic growth...”

He beats his chest and his colleagues banged the table. If you did not know better, you would think we had three fantastic years of economic progress in the past three years, but the Minister’s own lack of regard for the truth is betrayed by his own budget documents.

Look at the *Review of the Economy 2013* because when he said that, I say, “Let me go and check his document from last year”; his document. And when I went into the *Review of the Economy* presented in this House by the current Minister, and took a look at the economic situation in 2011, for example, I saw an economic decline of 2.6 per cent, not any growth, an economic decline of 2.6 per cent.

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I went back into the 2012 documents, the 2011 documents, and in all of these documents presented by his predecessor and presented by him, there is a consistent report of an economic decline in 2011. What has happened in 2014? Well, this Minister is a magician. He is a magician because he has converted an economic decline of 2.6 per cent that appeared in the 2012 review, the 2011 review, into growth of 1.4 per cent. It is an economic fraud; it is a political fraud.

Miss Hospedales: Shame on them!

Mr. C. Imbert: Let me look at the document. The *Review of the Economy 2014* on page 66, Appendix 2: “Gross Domestic Product of Trinidad and Tobago at Constant...Prices”, the man is converting decline to growth, with the wave of a wand; converting decline to growth. Mr. Speaker, he is also changing the estimates of GDP.

Let us look at the GDP figure in last year’s document. I mean, they have no regard for the truth. None! And they are trying to tell us these figures come from the Central Statistical Office, a derelict organization that has been kicked out of its building. It has been condemned by the IMF, not producing proper statistics for the last three years under this administration, the Central Statistical Office, but they are telling us that this revision of the economic data was done by the Central Statistical Office.

So let us take a look and let us see what in the 2013 review they said was the GDP at constant prices, and then let us take a look and see what they say in the 2014 *Review of the Economy* for the same period. What do they tell us? In 2013, just one year ago, when they were banging and pounding the table too, when the Minister was presenting his first bogus budget, the gross domestic product of Trinidad and Tobago—I am reading from page 63 of the *Review of the Economy 2013*, a UNC document—2011 gross domestic product at constant prices \$86 billion.

What do they tell us, Mr. Speaker, in 2014? [*Crosstalk*] Yes, he is worse than his predecessor. At page 65 of the 2014 *Review of the Economy*, a miraculous transformation: the GDP has grown from \$86 billion to \$88 billion; \$2 billion adjusted at constant prices. They are just making up these figures and the GDP for 2012—[*Crosstalk*]*—*that means you are “ratching” it; “r” is for “ratch”. That is what it is. That is what it means “r” is for “ratch”.

Mr. Speaker, I had made the point that every year this Government has been forging the figures in these documents in order to present a false picture or reality. [*Desk thumping*] How dare you come in 2013 and say GDP was \$86 billion in

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2011 and \$87 billion in 2012, and come back in 2014 just to pretend and say GDP had gone from \$86 billion to \$88 billion and \$87 billion to \$89 billion, just because you decide to just take a pen and change the figures! It is craziness; absolute craziness.

Mr. Speaker, when you look at the collections from value added tax and the revenues, it is obvious that we had an economic decline in 2011. When you look at the core data, it is obvious, but this Government wants to fool people. So, instead of showing the decline, they magically turn it around with a pen to a growth, just like that, and say it is the Central Statistical Office. I am sorry I cannot use unparliamentary words.

And, then, Mr. Speaker, hear the Minister:

“the fiscal deficit is on course to meet our 2016 objective of bringing the fiscal accounts into balance;”

Check this nancy story:

“notwithstanding the budgeted deficit of \$6.357 billion for fiscal 2014, a surplus of \$1.967”—you are talking about almost \$2 billion—“had been realized as at the end of June 2014;”

He stood up in this Parliament and told us that they had a fiscal surplus of \$2 billion just three months ago. And you would think from this statement that he somehow balanced the budget, because that is what he is going around saying, you know, he is balancing the budget.

But, Mr. Speaker, if you go into the documents, this alleged \$2 billion surplus, three months ago, is somehow transformed into a \$5 billion deficit three months later, because the Minister is reporting to us that the fiscal deficit for this year is now estimated at about \$4.9 billion. So he has converted a surplus of \$2 billion, three months ago, into a deficit of \$5 billion, three months later. So what is the point of telling us you had a surplus of \$2 billion three months ago when you are now reporting that you have a deficit of \$5 billion three months later? Obviously, it is just posturing. They are just making up numbers; that is all they do.

Look at the next statement that the Minister makes. This Minister, you know, they pulled him out of the private sector. They pulled the hon. gentleman out of the private sector at great expense to the Treasury, \$10 million, ex gratia payment that he was not entitled to; [*Crosstalk*] not entitled to that \$10 million payment.

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They pulled him out of the bank, they give him \$10 million he is not entitled to, and look at what he is rewarding us with, Mr. Speaker. These fictitious statements; this gerrymandering of the economic figures.

Mr. Speaker, but let us go on to another bit of posturing and political deception by this Minister, the same page:

“public sector debt remains at a sustainable level at 43.0 percent of Gross Domestic Product...”

Now, Mr. Speaker, when I went to school, and I am sure when you went to school, the word “remain” had a meaning. Right? But this man, this hon. gentleman is telling us it remains at 43. So I went to check just to make sure, that my understanding of the word “remains” was the same, and it means to continue in the same state or condition. So the word “remains” remains the same. [Laughter] It is the same, but this hon. Minister tells us that the debt remains at a sustainable level of 43 per cent, but that is not so.

In 2010, the debt to GDP ratio was 37 per cent. It has grown from 37 per cent to 43 per cent under this administration. The public debt was \$50 billion, it has grown to almost \$80 billion under this administration, and when they are finished with us with their election frenzy, the debt might almost hit \$90 billion, because they have a programme to borrow \$7 billion in this fiscal year. So they are going to take it to \$86 billion, and then when they come back—because they always work this “ratchiffee”—they will come back in March or April for a Supplementary Appropriation, and tell us some nancy story about oil revenues, Mr. Speaker, and they will send the debt up to \$90 billion.

But the fact is that in 2010 our debt to GDP was 37 per cent and it is now 43 per cent so it has not remained at 43; it has increased from 37 per cent to 43 per cent. The debt was \$50 billion, it is now \$78 billion, so it has not remained the same; it has increased by almost 60 per cent. [Crosstalk] Mr. Speaker, I am being disturbed by the Minister of Finance and the Economy. I am being disturbed by him. I want your protection. “Ah know he cyar take it yuh know”, but I want your protection.

Mr. Speaker: You have my protection.

Mr. C. Imbert: Thank you. [Crosstalk] Stay there! That is where you were doing something useful. But anyway, Mr. Speaker, the expenditure, the public expenditure has grown from \$45 billion to \$65 billion; 45 per cent increase under this administration, and they are telling us—hear what he says: that we are better

off now than we were before. So, the public debt gone from \$50 billion to almost \$80 billion; debt to GDP gone from 37 percent to 43 percent unsustainable expenditure gone from \$45 billion to 65 billion, but we are better off and VAT collections in 2014 is less than 2013; it gone down. Let me just deal with that right away, because they always have some ridiculous answer, you know, for their mismanagement of the economy. Let us go to VAT.

The 2014 estimate for VAT, \$6.4 billion; 2014 revised estimates, \$5.2 billion. So they have lost \$2 billion in VAT, and they would tell us is refund, but everybody gives VAT refund. It is tax in and tax out. You are not collecting the VAT. Now, how could you have a decline in VAT of \$2 billion or \$1 billion, sorry? How could you have a decline of \$1 billion in VAT but the economy growing? How is this possible? You see, the Minister is betrayed by his own figures because he cannot forge everything. He could put misleading information in his speech, but he cannot forge the *Review of the Economy* because it is public servants doing that, and he cannot forge everything inside here because he does not have the time; he does not have the time.

Mr. Speaker, our public debt has gone from \$50 billion to \$78 billion and they plan to borrow another \$7 billion in this fiscal. But listen to this Minister; listen to this ten-million dollar Minister. Listen to him!

Mr. Speaker: No, no.

Mr. C. Imbert: I am so sorry, Mr. Speaker. Are you saying he is not worth \$10 million? [*Laughter*] All right, I take that back.

11.15 a.m.

Dr. Rowley: It is 11.

Mr. C. Imbert: Yes.

Mr. Speaker: Please.

Mr. C. Imbert: Mr. Speaker, in August of this year—[*Interruption*] Yeah, it is a joke when you take \$10 million of taxpayers' money and give it to somebody [*Desk thumping*] who is not entitled to it, but anyway, this same hon. Minister told—[*Interruption*]

Dr. Moonilal: Mr. Speaker, 48(6).

Mr. C. Imbert: What? What? Taking up my time. [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Speaker: Please. No, no, it is not about the truth here, [*Crosstalk*] you bring a substantive motion. When you are dealing with a personal conduct or you are reflecting personally—[*Interruption*] No. No. No. If you are reflecting on somebody's person and a Member objects, I have to rule, and I am saying that the hon. Member is fully aware of it. So I ask you, do not go down that road. The personal reflection on the character of a Member is not allowed in this House. Continue, hon. Member.

Mr. C. Imbert: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This same hon. Minister told the media in August of this year that the focus for fiscal 2015 would centre—listen to his words, they just pluck these words out of the air, they say anything—would centre on his Government's commitment to reduce our public debt to GDP ratio. Can you believe anything this Minister says? This is in the *Guardian* of August 16, 2014, and they have a nice picture—"all ah dem here, man".

"Minister of State in the Ministry of Finance and the Economy Rudranath Indarsingh,...Minister of Labour and Small and Micro Enterprise Development Errol McLeod, Minister of National Security Gary Griffith, Minister of Finance Larry Howai, Minister in the Ministry of National Security Embau Moheni, Minister in the Ministry of the Environment and Water Resources Ramona Ramdial and Minister in the Ministry of Works and Infrastructure Stacy Roopnarine were among members of the Cabinet at yesterday's budget meeting..."

Listen to what the hon. Minister had to say in August, just about six weeks ago.

"Don't expect an election budget filled with goodies."

"Ah sorry ah cyah use unparliamentary words."

"Instead, Finance Minister Howai said yesterday, his ministry's focus for the 2014-2015 fiscal package would centre on government's commitment to reduce T&T's national debt to Gross Domestic Product (GDP) ratio."

"Yuh gota be kiddin me." The debt to GDP went up by 6 per cent under them and it is scheduled to go up even higher in fiscal 2015.

"Howai was addressing a special media conference on the 18th floor of the San Fernando Teaching Hospital..."

After that mamaguy about our public debt he then tells us, boasting, that by

July 2014 the gross official foreign reserves had reached \$10 billion. Sounds good, but in July 2014—you live here, Mr. Speaker—July 2014, the same year he is saying, the same time, he said all foreign reserves had exceeded in unprecedented levels—\$10 billion, carrying on—[*Interruption*]

Dr. Gopeesingh: \$10.5 billion.

Mr. C. Imbert: Look at this next one. [*Laughter*] Yet in July 2014, the same month, Trinidad and Tobago was embroiled in a foreign exchange crisis—[*Interruption*]

Dr. Gopeesingh: He say, “next one”. [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. C. Imbert: Mr. Speaker, they are interrupting me. I beg for your protection, they are interrupting me.

Mr. Speaker: Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. The Member has taken objection and we all know we refer to Members by their title in terms of portfolio or their constituency, so you know better.

Mr. C. Imbert: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. They cannot take it you know.

The same month that the Minister boasted about record foreign exchange reserves, Trinidad and Tobago was embroiled in a foreign exchange crisis where citizens could not get foreign exchange to travel abroad—could not even get \$500 when you go to the bank. [*Interruption*]

Hon. Member: Fifteen dollars—

Mr. C. Imbert: Fifteen dollars?

Hon. Member:—to buy a magazine.

Mr. C. Imbert: Fifteen dollars, you could not get it. You could not pay for medical expenses, you could not pay for tuition fees for your children, manufacturers were bawling. Listen to this, Thursday, July 17, 2014, a release from the Trinidad and Tobago Manufacturers’ Association (TTMA):

“The T&T Manufacturers’ Association (TTMA) has said its members continue to experience severe problems accessing United States currency.

In a statement issued yesterday,”—

This is in July, the same month he boasted we had record reserves you know:

“the business body said, ‘Our manufacturers have continued to express their frustration at being unable to access US currency to make...payments to’—their—‘foreign suppliers.’ TTMA has met with the relevant authorities...and despite assurances...”

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Normal thing, they are just saying whatever comes into their heads:

“surveys within our membership have shown that the problem persists for most companies and in some cases have worsened...

‘The TTMA calls on the Central Bank, the Ministry of Finance...to work together to fix the problem.’”—

And here is the point, and I could not have put it better myself.

“‘It is no comfort to be told that there is enough foreign exchange to meet demand when all evidence is to the contrary.’”

That is what the TTMA is saying. I could not put it better myself. So while the Minister boasts about record levels of foreign exchange, people cannot get \$15 to buy a magazine in the bank—ineptitude and incompetence, Mr. Speaker.

Now the next mamaguy—I only reach page 6 of the document, it is a pity we reduce speaking time. Page 6, eh. They have about 50 pages, I reach page 6. The Minister boasted that the Heritage and Stabilisation Fund now amounts to US \$5.6 billion—as if he had something to do with that. In reality, despite benefiting from significantly higher oil prices than estimated, the Government has not deposited “one red cent” into the Heritage Fund for this year. The increase in value that he boasts about is from unrealized gains on investments made in previous years. You know, as the stock market goes up, as the Dow goes up and the International Stock Market is recovered, the securities and the other investments in the fund, made years ago, go up in value. So it is unrealized gains on investments. They have not put “one red Trinidad and Tobago cent” into the Heritage and Stabilisation Fund.

Now let me explain to the population what this fund is all about. The Heritage and Stabilisation Fund Act of 2007, which was enacted by the former PNM administration—not them—as a measure to provide security for our country, states at section 13:

“Where petroleum revenues collected in each quarter of any financial year—

- (a) exceed the estimated petroleum revenues for that quarter of the financial year by more than ten per cent, the currency of the United States of America equivalent of the excess revenue shall be withdrawn from the Consolidated Fund and deposited to the Fund...”

In simple language, if you estimate “x” dollars from petroleum and it is “x” plus

10 per cent, you have to put the excess into the Heritage Fund, and petroleum revenues are defined as the aggregate of supplemental petroleum tax, petroleum profits tax and royalties.

So, Mr. Speaker, if royalties from oil and taxes from oil are more than 10 per cent over budget you would expect any self-respecting, law-abiding Government would deposit the surplus into the Heritage Fund in keeping with the law, but not this Government. They took all the excess revenue from oil and spend it. They did not put a cent into the fund, and to explain his Government's irresponsibility, the Minister told the *Express* that no transfers were made to the fund because oil revenues fell below budget. You could believe that? "This is the same man who say he go balance the budget because oil is booming." He said that a few days ago you know, but when they "ketch" him he said, "No, oil revenue is below the budget figures".

I am going to read what he said, *Express*, September 10, 2014:

"No money from the energy sector was deposited in the Heritage and Stabilisation Fund...Finance Minister Larry Howai has said.

In an e-mailed response to questions about the Fund yesterday, Howai said...

'Deposits were not made since oil revenue fell below the budget...transfers are made when oil revenue exceeds the budgeted projection.'"

I said they will say anything. They would just pluck words from the sky. That is how he takes "remains" and he changes the meaning of the word "remains" to "increase".

Let us see what has really happened, Mr. Speaker, because I cannot believe anything this hon. Minister says. The same day, *Newsday*—the same day he tells the *Express* that oil revenues are below the budget figures, hear what he told the *Newsday*, "Larry thanks God"—[*Laughter*]*—he has found God:*

"FINANCE and Economy Minister Larry Howai yesterday publically thanked God that his gut instinct in relation to levels of oil and gas prices...turned out to be right....

He said one risk taken was the decision to pitch the last two budgets on the same oil price of US\$80 per barrel.

'Perhaps I may have gone against the current in terms of where I saw oil and gas prices would be,'... 'I did think they would stay...and therefore I thought I

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could take the risk of running a Budget deficit in the orders and magnitude that we were talking about and thank God...I was right!”

Listen to this. This is the same man and on the same day told the *Express* oil price below revenue:

“What is working for us is...Russia has invaded Ukraine and that is a good thing...because it sends up the price of gas and then all of a sudden we can get close to balancing the Budget.”

So, on the same day he told one paper, “I did not put any money in the fund because oil prices were below budget”, and he told another paper, “I thank God oil prices and gas prices have gone up because Russia has invaded Ukraine—that could almost balance the budget”. I cannot believe anything this man says, Mr. Speaker. I cannot believe anything he says.

And he goes on to say that:

“...the National Gas Company (NGC) was exploring the idea of investing in the shale oil industry in the United States of America...

‘If you can’t beat them, you might as well join them.’”

But this is the same NGC that they have taken \$6 billion in cash savings from to cover their profligate expenditure in 2014. The same NGC that he wants to invest in shale gas, same NGC, they have bled that company to the tune of \$6 billion in 2014 and they want to bleed it again. If you look in the *Estimates of Revenue*, it is a next \$5 billion they want to bleed out of NGC in 2015. So that is how they run this country you know. *[Interruption]*

Mr. Rowley: It was \$12 billion there, it stop at \$11 billion; all they going after, you know.

Mr. C. Imbert: Yeah, that is how they run this country. They take—NGC had \$12 billion or \$13 billion in cash which it needs to invest in projects to diversify our economy, to improve our infrastructure; that is what that money is for, for capital projects, for projects that will create economic activity. They took \$6 billion out of that for recurrent expenditure to pay for LifeSport and all these kind of things, and they want to take a next \$5 billion in 2015, Mr. Speaker. *[Interruption]* Yeah.

Mr. Speaker, you know, he has paid propagandists in his Ministry, because when the Leader of the Opposition made this point that they are bleeding national gas of its cash, the propagandists came out and say, “Well, that is no big thing.” I

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think they said, “You know that is a usual thing. That is very, very normal, you know. That is what is done, you know”. Let us look at it, “Finance Ministry rebuts Rowley claims”, Monday, September 15, 2014—I think that is today—and they go on to say that:

““Of the total \$13.9 billion, a total of \$6.6 billion has been or will be paid as dividends to December of this year.””

Sucking almost \$7 billion out of NGC, and hear what they say:

“The ministry explained this is not unusual and ‘allows the NGC to retain sufficient funds for its expansion programme.’”

They want to suck a next \$5 billion out of NGC in 2015.

But let me deal with the facts, Mr. Speaker, the true facts—and for those of you who do not know anything about the phrase “true facts”, it is almost 300 years old, having originated in 1726—and you see, Mr. Speaker, there are “facts” and there are “facts”. It has long been recognized that a fact is sometimes an allegation of a fact, you know, like an “Oropouche East fact” is not always a “fact”. So let us deal with what we call the “true facts”, Mr. Speaker.

Let us look at what was taken by successive governments from state enterprises from 2010 to now to see whether it is usual or unusual. So in 2010, if you go to the *Estimates of Revenue*, you would see that the Government took \$1.1 billion from the state enterprise sector—\$1.1 billion; that is usual. In 2011 they took \$1.2 billion. In 2012, \$1.6 billion—[*Interruption*]

Hon. Member: They are going up.

Mr. C. Imbert: Yeah, a pattern under them. In 2013, \$2.2 billion—it is all right. They went back down in the budget that the hon. Minister presented to us last year where they estimated that they would take \$1.7 billion in dividends out of the state enterprise sector, Mr. Speaker. That is the estimated, but what is the actual? Instead of taking \$1.7 billion, which would be usual, because it is \$1 billion, \$1.3 billion, \$1.4 billion for the last however many years—Mr. Speaker, that is the level of dividends that had been taken by the Ministry of Finance and the Economy out of the state enterprise sector—they took \$6.2 billion in 2014, four times the normal amount and five times what was taken in 2010 and 2011; and the estimate for 2015, \$5.6 billion.

11.30 a.m.

Dr. Rowley: In three years \$11 billion.

Mr. C. Imbert: So his propagandists in the Ministry said, “Oh it is usual; is Rowley wrong. How Rowley could say these things?” [*Laughter and crosstalk*] I really cannot believe anything this Minister says. There is nothing he says that is correct or accurate, Mr. Speaker; nothing.

Look at what he says on page 7. “Ah only reach page 7.” He says:

“...the work on the ease of doing business has been further consolidated with the...proclamation of the Bankruptcy and Insolvency Act, 2007. This is the first major overhaul of this legislation in almost 100 years...”

“You hear the date of the Act?” It is the Bankruptcy and Insolvency Act of 2007.

Hon. Member: It was 2014.

Mr. C. Imbert: No, it was passed in 2007. “All dey do is write de President and tell him proclaim de Act in 2014”, but sending a letter to the President to say, “Proclaim the PNM Act” is, according to them, “the first major overhaul of this legislation in 100 years”.

Hon. Member: Lie!

Mr. C. Imbert: I had to sit down here and hear the Minister take credit for GATE. I had to hear him talk about the Tamana InTech Park. I had to hear him talk about that, that the Tamana InTech Park—listen to this:

“...we are focusing on a trade policy and strategy which has at its core diversification of our production base...Our newest economic zone: the Tamana InTech Park...is leading the drive to attract high-value tenants who...create high-quality...jobs.”

The same Tamana InTech Park, “dey cuss PNM, dey want to lock up all de directors of eTeck; dey have dem in court”, this is now the centrepiece of the UNC’s diversification thrust, the Tamana InTech Park, and if you give them another couple of years they would have conceptualized—

Dr. Browne: Like de highway!

Mr. C. Imbert: Yes, like the Diego Martin Highway—they would have conceptualized and constructed the Tamana InTech Park. It is like the interchange. I am seeing an ad on TV—the interchange that I had the pleasure to

open in 2009, “I see” a video on TV, cars driving, and they are saying this is testimony to the UNC’s transportation policy. I had to see that. [*Laughter*]

Miss Mc Donald: “They trying to rewrite history.”

Mr. C. Imbert: All the houses built by the Member—[*Interruption*]

Hon. Member: “Oh God, doh say dat!”

Mr. C. Imbert: Yes, yes, a whole set of pictures of houses built by the Member for Diego Martin West, they say this is the UNC testimony to housing construction, Mr. Speaker. [*Crosstalk*]

Hon. Member: Fast ferries!

Dr. Moonilal: He said he was not responsible for that.

Mr. C. Imbert: Mr. Speaker, in a state of bliss—listen to the Minister in a state of bliss. He has the courage to tell us that the corruption riddled and scandal tainted FCB IPO “was successful by any standard of measurement”.

Dr. Rowley: Could you imagine that!

Mr. C. Imbert: Is he living on Mars?

Hon. Member: La-la land!

Mr. C. Imbert: Has he fallen down the rabbit hole to meet Alice and the Mad Hatter in Wonderland? [*Laughter*] I mean, I went back into my files and just pulled up—look at this. [*Mr. Imbert lifts documents*] This is all on the IPO, Mr. Speaker:

“Seeterram’s \$m investments”; “Howai on shares bought by Rahaman”; “More time for SEC probe of FCB”; “Shareholder activist calls for probe”; “Chairman of...stock exchange quits following controversial shares purchase”; “More probes after Rahaman’s firing”; “Criminal probe into IPO looms”

Mr. Speaker, and he is telling us—what did he say?—that it is one person—the whole board. He sent his Permanent Secretary to the annual general meeting of FCB to fire the board, the PP-appointed board—the whole board. He could only fire four of them, because only four of them came up for renewal, but he subsequently “fire all”. But he says one person, only one person. [*Laughter*]

It was a resounding success. A corrupt IPO which caused them to take the unprecedented step to fire the entire board of FCB; has FCB officials and their

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associates under investigation by the police for fraud, he says it is successful, and now he wants to sell 20 per cent of Phoenix Park. He wants to sell shares in VMCOTT, he wants to sell shares in National Helicopter. I wonder which members of the board and management, put in by your administration, are waiting in the wings to benefit from the divestment of Phoenix Park and the divestment at National Helicopter, and VMCOTT. [*Crosstalk*]

Continuing his tale of unreality, so similar to that tale from Macbeth, the Minister boasted that his Government:

“...has dealt effectively with investors in the short-term investment products,...”—in Clico—“more than 13,600 of whom have become unit holders in the CLICO Investment Fund,...”

You know what he would not tell you? Two years ago his predecessor came to this House, they all banged the table and said that they were coming up with this Clico Investment Fund, where people will get back 100 per cent of their money, and the shares would appreciate in price, and “It is a fantastic investment”, Mr. Speaker. What he would not tell you is that they encouraged policyholders through their misleading statements to exchange their bonds for units in the Clico Investment Fund, and asked them to exchange them for a price of \$25 a unit. As we speak, the units are trading for \$22. So after two years, the value of the units that they exchanged for \$25, the policyholders are now holding units valued at \$22, a decline of 12 per cent. And no one on that side—they skirt around everything.

They are boasting about how 13,000 people have units in the Clico Investment Fund, but they would not explain. They would not face the population and explain why the value of that fund has declined by 12 per cent in the two years since its launch. All the elderly, all the infirmed who believed their propaganda and agreed to exchange bonds for \$25 a unit, now looking at units worth \$22. They will not face the population; instead they tell us, they have settled the Clico crisis, everything is so wonderful.

He talks about the board and management of Clico, as he spoke about Caroni GREEN. “He come and say, ‘Caroni GREEN is the future’.” They send home everybody from Caroni GREEN, but Caroni GREEN is the future. And he talks about the board and management of Clico. He talks about the insurance company. He says, you know, they have done so well, but what are the facts? June 10, 2014:

“Clico workers face off with Central Bank

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Irate CLICO staff clashed with Central Bank officials including a newly appointed special advisor at the insurance company's...Head Office yesterday."

This was just a couple of months ago:

"The workers, who had been called to a meeting by...Managing Director, Carolyn John were told Central Bank appointed a special advisor, Nigel Dingwall, former Guardian Holdings...Performance Officer to guide the Bank on the review and development of CLICO's Operational Plan...

The workers...were not pleased...angry that the bank was presenting yet another plan, and accusing the Bank of not having a clear direction...demanded to know why government quashed plans for Atrius..."

This Minister told us all about Atrius; that Clico would now become a flagship in the industry; that all the workers' jobs would be saved; that all the agents could continue to work. They are sending home every agent; they want to fire and retrench all the workers, but he tells us that the board and management of Clico is doing such a wonderful job.

He pretends not to be aware of the mismanagement of the sale of Clico's assets. Let us take the methanol holding shares, for example. He very well knows what was going on, you know. He casually tells the House:

"We now await the outcome of the Methanol Holdings arbitration. Following this, a more detailed report will be provided."

Well he does not have to report; the truth has been revealed, not by him but by the media. While he was waiting for the outcome, the arbitrators decided on Thursday last to value Clico shares in Methanol Holdings at \$7.4 billion, or \$3 billion to \$6 billion less than the Government valuation of these assets. The Government has thus lost the arbitration, and lost in excess of \$3 billion of this country's assets, which were expected to be available to reduce Clico's debt to the state. And it was all caused by them; they initiated that arbitration. They caused it; improperly dealt with the minority shareholders. What is the end result? Shares that they have told us were worth \$11 billion, have now been valued at \$7 billion—\$3 billion/\$4 billion lost to this country because of their incompetence.

Mr. Speaker, how much more time do I have?

Mr. Speaker: You have three minutes of original time.

Mr. C. Imbert: I thought so; thank you, Mr. Speaker. I think I need to deal with the Minister of Energy and Energy Affairs, before I sit.

Mr. Speaker, after the Leader of the Opposition pointed out that the energy sector was in a mess, that our oil production is now just barely 80,000 barrels a day, down from 100,000 barrels a day when they came in, that there is no prospect that oil and gas production would increase in the short-term and, essentially, that the Minister of Energy and Energy Affairs does not have a clue, the Minister of Energy and Energy Affairs came into this House and told us virtually nothing. He did not deal with the issues.

He told us that he is a batsman. That is what I had to listen to. “He coming in one down; he is a batsman coming in one down and he is on 102 not-out”, because, you know, he is so highly regarded by the international energy sector. “He tell us dat.” I had intended to read this article before, but I will read it now.

I have in my possession an article published by *Interfax*. It is one of the largest financial and energy sector news agencies in the world, with over 1,000 journalists. It contributes to Bloomberg and other highly reputable news agencies. April of 2014, yeah, a natural gas daily; one of the most respected magazines in the natural gas industry:

“Trinidad and Tobago braces for the big chill”

This is this year. This is what the international media is saying, you know; not what he is saying, the one-down batsman:

“Major oil and gas companies have lost confidence in Trinidad and Tobago, and are unlikely to increase their involvement in the country’s energy sector over the next year, a well-placed source has told *Interfax*.”

The Port-of-Spain based source, who is close to this country’s Energy Ministry...—like yuh have people in your camp that are leaking things—“singled out the Caribbean country’s Energy Minister Kevin Ramnarine for particular criticism.” [*Crosstalk*] [*Interruption*]

Mr. Speaker: You would like an extension, hon. Member?

Mr. C. Imbert: Of course.

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Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, the question is that the speaking time of the hon. Member for Diego Martin North/East be extended by 10 minutes.

Question put and agreed to.

Mr. C. Imbert: It is “alleged the official is mismanaging the sector”—the—“industry has no faith in his stewardship.” These are true facts; not Oropouche West facts:

“...poor participation in Trinidad’s...”

This is one of the most reputable natural gas publications in the world. They do not publish PP propaganda, the kind of propaganda that the Minister of Finance and the Economy publishes.

Hon. Member: It is not *The Voice*.

Mr. C. Imbert:—“...poor participation in Trinidad’s...” [*Interruption*] “Nah, leave Chaguanas West alone.

Mrs. Gopee-Scoon: Just read the thing!

Mr. C. Imbert:—“2013 deepwater bid round as evidence for his claims, as only two of the six blocks were offered attractive bids. ‘No bids at all were received on the remaining four blocks. This is, by even the most generous definitions, a major failure...

...the best the country, and investors, can now hope for is a new government”—[*Laughter*]—“because the geology...”—of Trinidad and Tobago “is not that bad.” [*Interruption*]

Yes, Natural Gas Daily by *Interfax*; international publication.

“The absence of BP from the bid round, which opened in August 2013, will concern the Trinidadian government because it has heavily courted the UK major.”—oil company. [*Crosstalk*]

“‘If BP sneezes, Trinidad and Tobago catches a cold,’ Ramnarine told the Energy Chambers AGM”—[*Interruption*] Mr. Speaker—

Mr. Speaker: Please, please.

11.45 a.m.

Mr. C. Imbert: Mr. Speaker, they will not stop. They do not like to hear this.

“in Port of Spain” in “2013. BP accounts for 68% of Trinidad’s gas production...”

There was only lukewarm interest in the offshore blocks—which are located in the East Coast Marine Area...

Two bids were tendered for block TTDA3—one from a BHP Billiton-led consortium...and the other from Repsol. Only one bid was made on block TTDA7, from the BHP...consortium.

Expectations for the” bid “round had been high. Trinidad’s previous deepwater round...was successful...

‘It’s even worse when you consider that the ministry allowed companies some participation in the nomination process for the blocks,’...

‘Companies actually earmarked blocks beforehand that they considered most prospective...’

Garvin Strong, a Mexico City-based analyst from Control Risks, told Interfax, the disappointing bid round was ‘not surprising’ given recent...deepwater bidding rounds have generally failed to ignite significant investor interest.

‘That the government failed to secure bids for four out of six blocks is symptomatic of a lack of faith in some quarters about the Trinidadian hydrocarbon sector’s long-term prospects.’

And it goes on and on to talk about Government’s rating slipping. I mean, do you think that the people outside there do not know; they do not know that this Government’s popularity is now hovering around 25 per cent, Mr. Speaker? You think they do not know? There is a perception that the Minister could be doing a better job. Questions are swirling about his lack of experience, and—
[*Interruption*]

Mr. Speaker: Order. Order, please. Please.

Mr. C. Imbert:—a 2013 speech was cited as evidence of Ramnarine’s lack of experience, where he made a speech in July 2013 entitled “The State of the

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Natural Gas Sector—2013”, and here is what he said:

“The last two years have been the most challenging time to be minister of energy since independence...’ the minister told attendees, which included policymakers, energy company executives and associations.

‘For a minister to suggest’—this is what these people are saying, you know—“that, since 1962, the years 2011 and 2012 were the most challenging speaks volumes about the short-sightedness of his approach to managing the industry.’

‘This lack of confidence in the energy minister and government has been transmitted to major companies. They’re jittery, and...they’re going to bide their time until elections in’ 2015. ‘They’re unlikely to invest with this apparent level of government ‘ineptitude.’”

So that is what the international energy sector has to say about the Minister of Energy and Energy Affairs. [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Speaker, they could say what they want, you know. They could say what they want. The fact of the matter is, six blocks were offered in the deepwater bid round, and they attracted interest only for two. [*Interruption*]

Mrs. Gopee-Scoon: Two existing blocks.

Mr. C. Imbert: Two existing blocks as the Member for Point Fortin has pointed out. Two out of six. It failed. It was a dismal failure. And, Mr. Speaker, you know what is the problem with the Government? [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Mr. C. Imbert: When you put an inexperienced person in a Ministry as important as the energy Ministry, that is what you are going to get, Mr. Speaker. That is what you are going to get. [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Speaker, you know what is the problem in Trinidad and Tobago? And I have not heard the Minister talk about this. I have not heard him talk about this, and it speaks volumes of his lack of knowledge, Mr. Speaker. We have a situation in Trinidad and Tobago where there is something in the industry called swing gas, and there is something called cushion gas. And in the few minutes remaining to me, I will explain what swing gas is and what cushion gas is. Swing gas is gas that is held in reservoirs by major oil companies that can be put into production in

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a very short space of time. Trinidad and Tobago used to have large quantities of swing gas. We no longer have any. Cushion gas, Mr. Speaker, is the gas required to maintain production levels in a reservoir. It is required to maintain the necessary pressures to allow easy production of natural gas. We are now depleted in terms of cushion gas.

The problem with this Government is they do not understand the sector. Our energy sector has been built on gas-based industries with significant reserves of both swing gas and cushion gas. So when an investor comes, like this Mitsubishi Company, and they need to consume large quantities of natural gas, all the Government had to do was to turn to the major oil producers and ask them to unlock their swing gas and their cushion gas, and produce the necessary gas; but it comes at a price. It has to be negotiated, Mr. Speaker, and this Government has not even addressed that. And we also have the problem, the Minister boasted about some Juniper platform coming on in 2016 or 2017, sometime. This Government has not negotiated new natural gas prices for the gas that is going to come out of that Juniper platform.

So, they have put the next Government in a very difficult position because we are short on gas. We no longer have reserves of cushion gas. All the swing gas has been used up because the incentives have not been provided by this Government. And now we have a situation where the new gas that he boasted about coming on stream, when they will not be in government, they have not even begun to negotiate the price of that gas. And, Mr. Speaker, they have put the major oil players in a very strong position. They have put Trinidad and Tobago in a very weak position.

So apart from collapsing the energy sector, apart from doing nothing to ensure increase in our gas production, they put the next government in jeopardy now because the major oil companies can now come to the table in a very strong position and say, “You want gas? Well you have to pay double for it” because this Government and this Minister, this inexperienced Minister, have failed to negotiate the price of gas coming out of those platforms in 2017 and 2018. It is a disgrace. I would not even boast about Mitsubishi—boast about Mitsubishi. Mr. Speaker, where is the gas for the Mitsubishi plant? Is it in the ether? It is not in the ground. It is not being produced. Boasting about an imaginary plant—and this is symptomatic about this Government.

They boast about CNG. For four years they boasted about CNG! They have done nothing. They boast about solar energy and wind energy. Nothing. They

boast about increased production. Production gone down. They boast about economic growth. It is really in decline. This is symptomatic of this Government.

All the projects they talk about are PNM projects. Whether it is highway projects, whether it is technology parks, whether it is diversification, whether it is sectors of the economy identified for special attention, all of these are PNM projects. [*Desk thumping*] They have no ideas! [*Desk thumping*] No ideas! They are fudging the figures. They are making up stories, and the only saving grace for this country—I am finishing now—is that in 2015 we go to the polls and a proper government, the People's National Movement Government, will come into office to restore some stability and to rescue our destroyed economy. I thank you, Mr. Speaker. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Speaker: The Minister of Labour and Small and Micro Enterprise Development and Member of Parliament for Pointe-a-Pierre.

The Minister of Labour and Small and Micro Enterprise Development (Hon. Errol Mc Leod): Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. This is my tenth budget contribution. [*Crosstalk*] Yep. And I wish to thank you very sincerely for an opportunity, again—[*Interruption*]

Hon. Member: Tenth and last.

Hon. E. Mc Leod:—it might well be. I do not know.

Hon. Member: God is in charge.

Hon. E. Mc Leod: God is in charge. Yes. [*Crosstalk*] Yes, I thank you for the opportunity to make this tenth budget contribution under your speakership, Mr. Speaker.

And I wish to note, as had been previously done by one of my colleagues that gone are the days of the long line-ups at our gas stations in anticipation of higher prices for transportation fuel. Gone are the days of hoarding of essential goods on which the hoarders had set out to make a killing because the budget is going to be read, and punitive measures are going to be taken against the people of Trinidad and Tobago. For the fifth consecutive year, the fifth consecutive year of astute leadership of Kamla Persad-Bissessar, [*Desk thumping*] we have another budget whose philosophical underpinning is the support for and development of our people.

Before I get into the meat of my contribution, Mr. Speaker, I must respond to some comments made by the speaker going immediately before me, and last Friday the speaker representing the constituency of La Brea. I think that their contributions failed to project anything that suggests that they have a plan, that

they are really interested in the development of Trinidad and Tobago beyond the survival of their own political organization.

Miss Hospedales: That is not true.

Hon. E. McLeod: Well I do not know if you understand what is truth and what is otherwise. [*Laughter*]

Mr. Speaker, let me first of all respond to a contribution made by the Member for Diego Martin West when he alluded to the development of the state enterprise sector in energy. He talked about bp in its earlier incarnation in Trinidad and Tobago and bp assets then acquired, as they were acquired by the Government on behalf of the people, the assets of Shell Trinidad Limited, the assets of Texaco Trinidad, with which I had been and continue to be very familiar, and how Petrotrin came about. I think this is essentially the point that was being made by the Member for Diego Martin West.

I want to suggest, Mr. Speaker, that we concentrate on our early beginnings in the ownership, and to some extent, the control of our energy sector before we run off into making highly irresponsible and uninformed comments, such as has been made by the Member for Diego Martin West.

Mr. Speaker, bp, earlier bp, had determined that there was no more oil left in the ground in southern Trinidad and that they were leaving. The Oilfields Workers' Trade Union that had rescued Trinidad and Tobago from its birth, commented that we are going to multiply the efforts of the ordinary worker in the industry to ensure that Trinidad and Tobago continues to benefit from what used to be bp's holdings. And there was much contention between that organization—the workers' organization—and the political administration of Trinidad and Tobago to the extent that it was bp that actually forced its acquisition by Trinidad and Tobago, an acquisition that was settled at a valuation to the tune of US \$44 million. But there was no faith in our ability to man and manage what we had acquired, the terms of which acquisition was that over a period of time, I think a 10-year period, Trinidad and Tobago will pay \$44 million, either in cash or in the supply of oil from the very fields that bp determined were without oil-bearing facilities.

12.00 noon

So, for all intents and purposes we acquired bp's assets for US \$44 million, but not having trust and faith in our ability to run those affairs, we went out looking

for somebody to run it for us, and we found little known Tesoro Corporation, at that time, and Tesoro Corporation acquired 49 per cent of those \$44 million worth of assets for US \$50,000. *[Interruption]* Yes, that is the truth. At that time I think we had a common Caribbean currency and the exchange rate was two to one, such as Barbados has continued to maintain. So, for all intents and purposes, we got TT \$100,000 for assets that were worth in the order of US \$22 million; 49 per cent of \$44 million.

And that must be understood, and people had to sacrifice, endless sacrifice, and the cry of the workers and the organization was that not a man must go, and that we are going to contribute to stabilizing that most destabilizing effect that was perpetrated against our interest. And we entered into negotiations with Shell, but before we go there, we established the Tesoro Corporation, Trinidad Tesoro, and when they had had their fill, we re-acquired their 49 per cent of the Trinidad Tesoro business essentially that we had, and we paid them TT \$480 million—*[Interruption]*

Hon. Member: Fifty thousand US.

Hon. E. McLeod:—for US \$50,000. That is what we did. That is what we did. And there are those sitting on that side who would know of the contributions that some of their very close associates have had in the sector *[Interruption]* and who would have done injury, and I do not want to get too much into that, because a lot can be said about how they collaborated to mismanage in their own interest, and there are persons some of whom are still alive today like, Bob Helms, who was the Texaco General Manager of Trinmar, and who would have superintended over the efforts of husbands and wives of members on that side. And if you want part of this story to be corroborated, we can talk to persons like Rod Clarke and Bob Helms. At another time I would tell you more about that. But it must go back in the record, because I had said this earlier, about two/three years earlier, that we sold out Trinidad and Tobago's interest for the multinational corporations that have operated here.

And if today, Mr. Speaker, we do not have swing gas, if today we do not have cushion gas, if today we are not meeting the production levels that we require for the Point Lisas Industrial Estate and for the plants that we have had on the drawing board for a long while now, many of them under the former administration, but they could not see the light of day, because we do not have the gas, whether proven or otherwise, it is important that we know that what is happening today is the culmination of a rate of declination in these wasting assets

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and the fact that the former administration did not invest in the upstream, so that we will have an oil production that would be more than the 80,000 barrels that we are realizing today.

You see, your investment today in oil and gas production, exploration and production is going to yield results in between five to seven years from now. I have made the point, have I not? I made the point. So, do not come here and blame this administration for our having a less than acceptable rate of production of oil and gas. You see, it was necessary for them with all of the expertise that they have, it was necessary for them to concentrate on building the coop before identifying where the eggs for the hatchery will come from; building the coop before identifying where the chickens will come from. So, they spent endless money because it was easy for them to serve themselves and their interests, building gas-to-liquid plant and not knowing where the gas would come from for that gas-to-liquid plant. That is what has happened. That is essentially what has happened, not that the refinery did not need upgrading, indeed as we speak it needs very important upgrades, because what we did was acquire assets that were old and that were rundown. Indeed, Texaco was running down before leaving here, it was running down its assets. It was damaging producing wells, as it was not upgrading important infrastructure in the Pointe-a-Pierre refinery. But we took the cart before the horse and this is the result that we have today.

Mr. Speaker, I do not know that I need to say that the *Interfax* article is from a PNM source. It was the PNM that failed to get a single block licensed in deepwater and they had a failed deepwater track record insofar as we are concerned. Now, I know that the hon. Minister of Finance and the Economy is going to deal very effectively with a number of inaccuracies, a number of half-truths and a number of blatant mistruths, untruths that have been said here. It is either that the Member for Diego Martin North/East believes that he understood what he thought the Minister had said, but I wish to state that what he heard is not what the Minister meant. It was the debt to GDP in 2013 that was 43 per cent, and it was repeated in 2014. Contributions to the Heritage and Stabilisation Fund are still to be made for 2014, and we have until September 30. That is the closing financial year. We have until September 30 to make good our contribution to the HSF.

But the Opposition Bench must tell us why they did not make any contribution to the HSF in 2009. [*Desk thumping*] They must tell us that, and they must not confuse NGC's payment of dividends to the Government for the period 2012, 2013 and 2014. You see, I happened to have served on the board of the NGC for a couple of years, and I never saw an investor, a shareholder such as the

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Government, at that time, running down the NGC, almost every month for dividends. Yes? Because they had to finance particular things that were happening in the Pointe-a-Pierre refinery. Now, the NGC has been doing very well indeed, [*Desk thumping*] and the NGC realized profits of \$13 billion over those three years that I mentioned. So, it was a case of the NGC being called upon to pay \$1.2 billion in 2012, \$1.2 billion again in 2013 and \$4.5 billion now in 2014; totalling \$6.9 billion out of a profit of \$13 billion. Thank you very much, hon. Minister, for the way you have conducted our affairs in that regard. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Speaker, the contribution which I wish to make today will involve, essentially, my sharing on some of the ways we have made a positive impact with specific focus on the labour market, promoting decent work and enhancing entrepreneurship in Trinidad and Tobago. But permit me first of all to share just a few highlights of the impact of our work in my constituency, the constituency of Pointe-a-Pierre. You would agree with me that for many years to 2010, the Pointe-a-Pierre constituency had been neglected, very seriously neglected. However, over the last four years there have been considerable physical infrastructural improvements [*Desk thumping*] in communities throughout the constituency, as we have heard about in other constituencies. And today, I knock on wood, as I am proud to state that infrastructural improvement in flood-prone areas, in Claxton Bay, Plaisance Park and Marabella, have helped to significantly reduce flooding in these areas. [*Desk thumping*] And you would recall too, that I indicated to this honourable House during the last year's budget debate, that approval was granted for the reconstruction of a very major bridge in that constituency, [*Interruption*] a bridge located at a critical site on our industrial landscape, I am pleased to report that through the Government's bridges re-construction programme, construction of the Bull Bull Bridge [*Desk thumping*] has started in January of this year and work is progressing in a very, very effective way.

12.15 p.m.

And while there are still many projects to be initiated in the constituency of Pointe-a-Pierre, over the past 45 months we have built schools, such as the Mount Pleasant Government Primary School, a state-of-the-art facility at Marabella South Secondary, and I am pleased to announce that on the first day of the school term in September 2014, students of Union Presbyterian Primary School turned up to a spanking new school. [*Desk thumping*] I want to thank you very sincerely, Minister of Education, for your commitment to education and the development of all of our young people in Trinidad and Tobago.

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We established an Information Communications Technology Centre in partnership with the National Energy Skills Centre to provide free computer literacy training to constituents 16 years and over. We constructed a new market at Marabella. We built drains and paved numerous primary and secondary roads throughout the constituency. We reconstructed a proper fish landing site and facility at Claxton Bay. We constructed retaining walls to protect homes and prevent infrastructural damage such as we were seeing as a result of flooding on an annual basis, essentially. We constructed modern pavilions at Fernandes Park, Claxton Bay, Battoo Avenue Recreation Ground in Marabella, and we upgraded Union Recreation Ground at Union Village, Claxton Bay, and the Minister of Works and Infrastructure is continuing to assist us in bringing these facilities to completion.

Mr. Speaker, the Claxton Bay Public Cemetery which once looked like the final place to which only the wicked and reviled were condemned, is today a very decent and well-appointed resting place for our honoured dead. We spent money, time and effort to bring that to a level of decency and reasonableness.

Mr. Speaker, I now turn to our Global Labour Market, but before reviewing our labour market in Trinidad and Tobago, permit me to share some brief highlights of the Global Labour Market Trends and Projections as provided by the International Labour Organisation, ILO.

In its *Global Employment Trends Report, 2014*, the ILO expresses great concern about the pace of labour market recovery in this post-crisis era and some disturbing trends if actions to accelerate the creation of decent jobs are not expedited. The report revealed that global unemployment increased by five million, from 2012 to 2013, resulting in almost 202 million unemployed persons in 2013. It has been projected that if current trends continue, global unemployment could reach as much as 215 million persons by 2018. This reflects a widening of the crisis-related global job gaps and highlights the fact that employment is not expanding fast enough to keep up with the growing labour force. It is estimated that almost one million more young persons were unemployed in 2013 than the year earlier, with almost two-fifths of the persons unemployed globally being between the ages of 15 and 24.

Additionally, the reports says, long-term unemployment, vulnerable employment, working poverty and informal employment have intensified over the past year. Mr. Speaker, what then is required to dispel the situation of “gloom and doom” in the Global Labour Market?

In June of this year, the ILO constituents met at the annual international conference in Geneva to discuss the issue of employment which is one of the strategic objectives of the decent work agenda, and they agreed to a portfolio of actions including the following:

- Development of comprehensive employment policy frameworks based on tripartite consultations, to include pro-employment, macroeconomic policies that support aggregate support demand, productive investment and sustainable enterprises;
- Development of education, policies that underpin lifelong learning and skills development to respond to the needs of the labour market;
- Intensified actions to facilitate young persons' transition from school to work and ensuring that decent work is provided;
- Strengthening of social protection systems to address the needs of the poor and the vulnerable;
- Enhancing policy coherent to promote employment-centred sustainable development and social inclusion and,
- Greater advocacy towards making full employment and decent work a central goal of the post 2015 development agendas.

I am happy to report, Mr. Speaker, that the actions that we have been taking in our small country, Trinidad and Tobago, to mitigate the effects of the global job crisis, are on par with international prescriptions if not one step ahead of the rest. We are indeed on the right track as confirmed by the statistics on our local market. The situation in our labour market in Trinidad and Tobago stands in great contrast to the global reality. We have seen our unemployment rate decline from 7.8 per cent in 2010 to 5 per cent in 2012, and standing at 3.7 per cent at the end of the third quarter of 2013, notwithstanding the difficulties that members have reported on the situation affecting the CSO, so that the lowest unemployment rate ever recorded in Trinidad and Tobago according to the Central Statistical Office is 3.7 per cent. [*Desk thumping*]

Our labour force has increased on the other hand, by almost 5.5 per cent in 2010 to 2012, and at the end of the third quarter of 2013 it reached 648,200 persons. Participation rates have slightly increased from 2011 to 2012 particularly for women in our labour market. The youth unemployment rate has been steadily declining from 2010 where it was recorded at 14 per cent to 11.4 per cent in 2012 with the rate being 7.3 per cent [*Desk thumping*] as at the end of the third quarter

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of 2013. Of course, we can do a lot better than this, but compared with others, Mr. Speaker—and others including First World—we in Trinidad and Tobago are almost second to none.

Mr. Speaker, I can unequivocally state that the quick recovery in our labour market, post the global crisis of 2008/2009, is a direct result of this government's pro-employment approach and focus on creating decent jobs and sustainable enterprises.

May I now briefly share on how the work of my Ministry has been impacting the labour and entrepreneurship landscape in our country under the following areas, not necessarily in the same order that I am reading it here now: impact on entrepreneurship; impact on labour relations; impact on governance and impact on regional and international labour affairs. Trinidad and Tobago must not remain in its own cocoon, we must be reaching out as we are reaching out to our region including South and Central America.

Mr. Speaker, I would have shared with this honourable House, on previous occasions, one of our flagship projects, the National Integrated Business Incubator System Programme which is aimed at providing medium, small and micro enterprises with the necessary training, physical infrastructure, financing, operational support, mentoring and networking to help them develop into sustainable and competitive businesses. It is now three years since this programme has been in existence and we have been able to directly impact the lives of people in Sangre Grande, in Penal/Siparia, in San Juan/Laventille, in Point Fortin, Diego Martin, Chaguanas and Couva. The IBIS Programme is structured into three phrases: the pre-incubation, the incubation and the post incubation. The pre-incubation phase provides entrepreneurial and business skills training to persons over a period of six months. The training is facilitated by experienced persons from our tertiary education institutions such as the University of the West Indies, UTT, University of the Southern Caribbean and COSTAATT which affords the recognized certification to participants.

To date, Mr. Speaker, hon. Members, we have successfully trained 141 persons of whom 61 have graduated from the incubation phase and another 40 will be ready to move into incubation in the coming weeks. Five community-based business incubators which are also referred to as Social Empowerment through Enterprise Development, (SEED) Centres, have been established in the areas of Sangre Grande, Siparia, Penal, Diego Martin, Point Fortin, San Juan/Laventille. In the next fiscal year we expect to establish SEED Centres in

Chaguanas, in Couva and in Tobago.

Miss Mc Donald: What about East Port of Spain?

Hon. E. Mc Leod: Well, we are looking at the areas that are more affected by the social and other debilitating issues before we go to certain other areas.

Miss Mc Donald: So East Port of Spain is not affected?

Hon. E. Mc Leod: We are in San Juan/Laventille.

Miss Mc Donald: No, I am talking about East Port of Spain.

Hon. E. Mc Leod: We are coming to you, “doh frighten”. I would not leave you out. It is difficult to leave you out. [Laughter] Mr. Speaker, clients who are eligible for the incubation phase are assessed by NEDCO’s business development officers to determine their financing requirements, and to date, 49 IBIS clients have been approved for financing totalling close to \$4 million, in businesses ranging from the more traditional areas, for agriculture, manufacturing and fashion, to more high tech areas such as videography, information technology and mobile application development.

The recent recruitment of a consultant on innovation is expected to assist clients in developing more innovative businesses. I believe, Mr. Speaker, that our government’s thrust towards innovation is yielding returns as Trinidad and Tobago has transitioned from an efficiency driven economy to an innovation driven one, according to the *Global Entrepreneurship Monetary Report, 2013*. We are identified as the only country from Latin America and the Caribbean to be placed into that category. This major progression is no doubt a direct result of the Government’s coordinating effort at enhancing its support to entrepreneurs providing quality and entrepreneurial education, improving the commercial, legal and physical infrastructure and training in innovation.

12.30 p.m.

During the incubation period, clients also received business development coaching, mentoring and networking support and we view the IBIS model as a high-impact one which is home grown and can be replicated in other countries of the Caribbean region. We are moving full speed ahead to establish commercial business incubators under the IBIS Star Programme which will foster the development of high-value, high-growth businesses. We intend to commence the first two of this type of incubator, in collaboration with the Arthur Lok Jack

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Graduate School of Business and CARIRI, with the objective of supporting, at least three commercial incubators in total in 2014/2015. The third one, we hope, will be a fashion incubator.

Our IBIS programme is complemented by the FairShare Programme, which seeks to facilitate increased entrepreneurial activity and a leveller playing field by providing public procurement opportunities to qualified MSEs and cooperatives. Our initial ceiling was \$1 million, that is, those MSEs that qualify were able to access the procurement of at least \$1 million worth of goods and services to Government Ministries and agencies and so on, thereby allowing people to grow in their businesses. But as you would have heard in the budget presentation, our initial ceiling which was \$1 million has been enhanced by the proposal of the Minister of Finance and the Economy last Monday, which proposal is that this figure be increased to \$1.5 million. This is testament to the Government's continued support for the micro and small enterprise sector as we seek to expand opportunities for their development.

Additionally, the FairShare Programme has begun providing training to MSEs in order to improve their business management skills and overall quality of goods and services. So important we find this programme to be, and so much effort I have been concentrating on this programme, that a number of my erstwhile friends and comrades refer to me as the Minister of small business, the Minister who has abandoned labour. That is what they say. And the Member for La Brea, last Friday, said something to the effect that we had promised a minimum wage of \$20 and that this Minister has been taking leaders of the labour movement to court because of an assumed violation of the law—my words.

Mr. Speaker, I think that we need to be more responsible, as Members of this Parliament, as representatives of constituencies in Trinidad and Tobago, in that we must educate the people as to the rules and procedures that govern all that we do, all that we are expected to do. I wish to have this House know that the minimum wage is not just pulled from a hat by the Minister of Finance and the Economy, or the Minister of Labour and Small and Micro Enterprise Development, my having responsibility for this particular area of our operations.

The minimum wage is considered by a committee appointed according to the rules, according to the law, and the minimum wage recommendation—if there is a recommendation—is brought to the attention of the Minister of Labour and Small and Micro Enterprise Development, and he may accept or reject, and he will take what will then become his recommendation to the Cabinet and a decision is taken.

I received in March of this year, the report of the minimum wage committee and a \$15 per hour was recommended, and when one considered the information informing the study of the Minimum Wages Board, we accepted their recommendation as that—

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Minister, your time has expired. Would you be interested in an extension of 10 minutes?

Hon. E. Mc Leod: Yes, Sir.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, the question is that the speaking time of the hon. Minister of Labour and Small and Micro Enterprise Development be extended by 10 minutes.

Question put and agreed to.

You may continue, hon. Minister. [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. E. Mc Leod: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Thank you very much, colleagues. What I have to say on this is so extensive that I think I will serialize it and do a distribution around the House at a later time, but I need to say that the minimum wage must take into consideration a number of factors, but it must be high enough to meet as much as one might be able to do that—high enough to meet the general needs of the minimum wage earner, the unrepresented, but at the same time, it must not be so high as to adversely affect the unemployment levels in the country.

Now, it is true that some employers have been paying more than \$12.50 per hour, but it is also true that there are employers who have been violating the law and the regulations and have been paying people less than even the \$9 per hour from which we have come. So the Labour Inspection Unit of the Ministry has been going from business to business investigating this and they have recovered more than \$3 million in wages that ordinary workers have been owed for the past three years. [*Desk thumping*] Not only that, Mr. Speaker, the Member for La Brea seemed to have forgotten that the minimum wage came into being in 1998, succeeding the sectoral minimum that had been established. It started in 1998 at \$7 an hour and then it went to \$8 an hour, and there were promises, since 2007, to increase it by \$1, and that promise was fulfilled when it came to \$9 an hour. Subsequent to that, there were promises that had not been fulfilled at all, and I wanted the Member for La Brea to know of that. You want to answer?

Mr. Jeffrey: No. I want to ask a question.

Hon. E. Mc Leod: Eh?

Mr. Jeffrey: You want me to raise a question?

Hon. E. McLeod: Man, file a question in the way that it ought to be filed.
[Laughter]

Mr. Speaker, on the other point, I took an oath to uphold the Constitution and the law, and where I have come from, dictated to me that good discipline is an important requirement to success. And if after having instructed our lawyers to go to the court and remove an injunction that was placed on three unions: Communication Workers Union; Public Services Association; Transport and Industrial Workers Union, in 2008/2009, as we sought to accommodate foreigners coming for important international conferences here, I ordered that we remove those injunctions. [Desk thumping] If after having done that, somebody determines that he will hold any state enterprise, any ministry, any area of work, unfairly, under duress and—how do you say it again, it is ransom?—for ransom, as a means of having one's way in the collective bargaining process, and that seems to be unreasonable, particularly where you are playing with the health, the security and the safety of workers in this country, this Minister of Labour and Small and Micro Enterprise Development is prepared to act in defence of the country in those regards. [Desk thumping] Mr. Speaker, I challenge anybody, indeed, anybody to question the integrity of this Minister of Labour and Small and Micro Enterprise Development.

Mr. Speaker, from 2012 to date, applications have been received from 1,329 qualifying micro and small enterprises and cooperatives. Eight hundred and fifty-one have already been fully certified for participation in the FairShare Programme.

NEDCO, which I inherited as a mechanism to assist small people to develop businesses and to get into entrepreneurship and so on, was nothing but an ordinary slush fund where individuals obtained financing simply through referrals from Ministers and not based on the viability of their business proposals. This approach, coupled with numerous management and human resource challenges, resulted in many of the so-called loans not being serviced and the loan delinquency rate then was as high as 80 per cent.

12.45 p.m.

Mr. Speaker, I am happy today to report that NEDCO now operates under a new transformative strategic direction that is premised on sustainability of clients, financial efficiency, and value-driven management, and from 2010 to date,

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NEDCO has disbursed approximately 1,700 loans totalling over \$60 million, and our collection rate has drastically improved and that company is doing well.

Mr. Speaker, very quickly, I want to address what has become the grief, it seems, of those who have withdrawn from participation at the level of selected boards and are now talking about betrayal and so on, and they would like to see their labour agenda effected. Now, the labour agenda, Mr. Speaker—
[*Interruption*]

Mr. Speaker: You have one more minute, hon. Member.

Hon. E. McLeod: Yes—such as I am familiar with, is being pursued. We have dealt with maternity protection; we have dealt with minimum wage; we have dealt with the Masters and Servants Ordinance; we are before the CPC at this time with the Workmen’s Compensation Act; we are before a consultant who is dealing with a general overview of the Industrial Relations Act, the Retrenchment and Severance Benefits Act, and a number of pieces of legislation, Mr. Speaker, which we want to deal with in this final year of this Parliament, and then to, perhaps, move to a more general employment rights and standards Act that will cover all of these issues in good order.

Mr. Speaker, I want to express my very deep appreciation for the opportunity that has been given and I believe that Trinidad and Tobago will continue to be in good hands as we seek to bring relief to the many workers and people who have been disadvantaged over the years, and who would have seen the People’s Partnership in 2010 coming as a rescue to the people of Trinidad and Tobago. Thank you very much. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, I think it is a good time for us to pause and have lunch. This sitting is now suspended until 2.00 p.m.

12.48 p.m.: *Sitting suspended.*

2.00 p.m.: *Sitting resumed.*

Mr. Jack Warner (*Chaguanas West*): Thank you, Mr. Speaker. You know, last week Monday when the Government Members were coming in single file in the Chamber, I asked the Member for Diego Martin North/East, “Is so foolish I used to look?” [*Laughter*] And he told me, “No, you used to look more foolish because you were in front”. [*Laughter*] So sometimes I believe that this is a good vantage point to sit. In fact, when I saw the Minister of Finance and the Economy delivering his presentation, I saw speakers thumping the desk after each point, and

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each speaker saying, “What wonderful budget it is”, I remember how I used to rehearse this thing with them also [*Laughter*] just before each budget speech, and I say, Lord, how lucky I am.

Because, Mr. Speaker, today I am very sad, indeed, a sad man, because notwithstanding what the Minister of Finance and the Economy has said, today this country, after four and a half years, is worse off than before. [*Desk thumping*] We spent some \$240 billion and this budget of \$64.4 billion would carry us over \$300 billion, and as such therefore, one would say that this country should be a paradise. It should be an ideal country for any government: 1.3 million people, arable land, over 2,000 square miles, but, Mr. Speaker, for many people, this is a paradise lost, and the paradise was lost over the last four years and I will tell you I had a part to play in that, too, “yuh know”, so do not think that I am trying to absolve myself. I will tell you when my part was played and when I withdrew, but I will come to that.

Mr. Speaker, Minister after Minister, on the other side, tell us how good the economy is, what the country is supposed to be doing, and I ask myself: do they live in this country? Do they walk the streets of this country? Do they go to the market? Do they make their own groceries? Are they even banking their money in this country? Are they talking to their constituents? Or, in fact, are they talking to each other only? Something has to be wrong because there is a definite disconnect between the people and the Government.

Today, we have challenges in several areas: in energy, in the economy, in poverty, in corruption—which I will deal with before I conclude and, Mr. Speaker, by the way, I will go the full time, please, thank you very much—in crime, in foreign direct investment, in our international reputation, loss of planned future investments and lots more. But, Mr. Speaker, “you ent hear the Minister of Finance and the Economy talk about any ah these things”. So therefore, what began as a dream in 2010 in which all of us were supposed to rise, I was in that dream too. I played a part in putting them in that dream because we were told we will rise, we will rise to new levels of prosperity. I am saying that dream has been destroyed by this administration.

A friend of mine from India heard the budget—I will call his name, Dr. K. Singh—and he wrote me on Monday afternoon. In a nutshell, he said to me that the budget is a budget of public relations to curry favour and buy votes—quote, unquote—and what we are creating is a huge welfare state. But more than that, it is built on shifting data because listening to Minister after Minister, one is not

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quite sure what to believe. It is difficult to take the Minister of Finance and the Economy at face value because what he has done, and what so many Ministers of Finance do. What he has done is to manipulate the figures to give the impression that the country is in a favourable state of affairs.

Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Finance and the Economy began his presentation and I quote him, he said:

“Mr. Speaker, as we have systematically overcome the several challenges which had confronted us, we are progressing with confidence and optimism to a renewed mandate in 2015...”

I said to myself, dreamer. Mr. Speaker, I will tell you why I said the Minister is in error because this budget is premised heavily on the prospects for oil and gas and the monetization of these prospects. But, as we speak, revenue for this country is mainly derived from gas. As such, if we are to preserve our revenue, we have to make sure that our petrochemical sector is working well.

A lot of confidence has been reposed in the Minister of Energy and Energy Affairs, Sen. the Hon. Kevin Ramnarine, and he reports this Government—and, in fact, a lot in this country hinges on that Minister and his Ministry. But, Mr. Speaker, do you know that under that Minister, this number two batsman, as he calls himself, [*Crosstalk*] rundown batsman, under him, the downstream petrochemical companies at Point Lisas have been slowly suffocated, not for one year, not for two years, for three years; for 36 months.

Last Friday when the Minister was here, he addressed the House. He said everything that was wrong in the energy sector was as a result of what the People’s Partnership inherited from the PNM. That may be true. Okay, fine. But it makes no sense for the Government to be continually hurling blame at the PNM for issues which they were voted in to correct. [*Desk thumping*]

Up to this morning, I am being told by the Minister of Labour and Small and Micro Enterprise Development that the Opposition must tell us why they did not make any contribution to the Heritage and Stabilisation Fund in 2009. They did not have the money to put; that is all. You could not put what you do not have. Mr. Speaker, 2009 was at the peak of the recession, and they are asking the PNM why they did not put money then. In fact, we were lucky to even survive 2009. But, in any case, they were elected to correct the wrongs of the PNM and, boy, I tell you, for once, Tweedledum is worse than Tweedledee. [*Laughter*]

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Mr. Speaker, Point Lisas, today, faces a big crisis and the Minister of Energy and Energy Affairs was told so three years ago. I have in my possession two letters written to the Minister by the Point Lisas Energy Association of CEOs, you call them PLEA. The first letter dated October 03, 2011 sent to hon. Kevin Ramnarine, and that letter highlights five major issues. It complains to the Minister about the fundamental problem of gas curtailment or gas shortages imposed on the companies by the NGC; the NGC that the Minister, this morning, said is working so well, very well indeed, he said. In that letter, the PLEA, the companies in Point Lisas, said, I quote:

“Honourable Minister, our ammonia and methanol producers continue to suffer major losses as a direct result of these gas supply curtailments. The consequences of our country's economy, particularly in attractive commodity markets, are very substantial, and require urgent remedial action.”

2.10 p.m.

Mr. Speaker, the companies in Point Lisas then took their calculation and they calculated for the Minister, the approximate losses incurred, if the matter is not resolved quickly. Between January 2011 and September 2011, the companies showed that the Government had lost several taxes. In fact, they said the NGC lost \$239 million; the Government, in corporation taxes, \$75 million and they said that a grand total of \$314 million was lost in that nine-month period, roughly \$35 million a month, \$1 million more than the LifeSport give Daniel. Mr. Speaker, that was bad.

But the companies, in 2011, went further to say, I quote:

“In addition to these losses, the failure to resolve this matter is having a negative impact on planned future investments. Our investors are insisting that this matter of gas supply reliability be satisfactorily addressed, before any commitment is made regarding additional or new investments.”

It is difficult. Difficult! That is not all. The letter continues, Mr. Speaker. It says:

“This situation is now so critical that all stakeholders in our country's energy sector are impacted.”

And they went on and they gave them six recommendations, six: 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6. Any responsible Minister who, in the energy sector would have looked at the cries

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of these CEOs at Point Lisas and addressed what they were saying. This was, I would say again, October 03, 2011.

And then the Minister comes here to their rehearsed applause of the desk. He quotes on energy:

“Investment has been expanding:”

He says on page 34, that is the Minister of Finance and the Economy by the way:

“There is going to be an unprecedented period of activity in the energy sector...”

Mr. Speaker, 2011. Nothing was done for three years. So August 25—I know you like to read thing, you could hold that one. The media have it by now—2014—*[Interruption]*

Mr. Imbert: He got this three years ago?

Mr. J. Warner: Three years ago, and three weeks ago they sent this letter. Mr. Speaker, What does this letter say? August 25, 2014, this letter says:

“...Gas...Curtailments—Short, Medium and Long-Term Action

We the undersigned members of PLEA”—Point Lisas Energy Association—“continue to be severely affected by frequent curtailments in the supply of natural gas to our various plants.

Honourable Minister,...we have tried to collaborate with the other stakeholders...”—but in vain—“We have brought ideas to the table, as may be seen from our letter of October 3, 2011...”

Mr. Speaker, the letter continues:

“Sadly, to date little progress has been made. Indeed, despite these efforts, and notwithstanding numerous assurances to the contrary, the gas curtailments continue unabated and have been worse than forecasted and appear to have no end in sight.”

Mr. Speaker, they gave a table of the money lost to date, and the money lost to date by the Government was US \$926.3 million. “Look it dey, look it dey. Wha ah say?”

Mr. Imbert: “Yuh say US dollars.”

Mr. J. Warner: Million, US \$926.3 million.

Mr. Imbert: TT \$6 billion?

Mr. J. Warner: That is \$6 billion. The sum of \$6 billion was lost. Look it is here! In fact—they like to say this is a PNM letter. Let me tell you who signed the letter.

Mr. Imbert: They like to say that.

Mr. J. Warner: It is a PNM letter. Because everything is a PNM thing, you know. Who signed the letter, Mr. Speaker? Who are the people at Point Lisas who signed October 2011 and now August 2014? Ian E. Welch, Chairman - PLEA and Managing Director of PCS Nitrogen; Jerome Dookie, CEO, Caribbean Nitrogen Company Limited; Dennis Patrick, Methanol Holdings (Trinidad) Limited; Robert Mantellini President, Point Lisas Nitrogen (Trinidad) Limited; Robert Bellisle, ArcelorMittal Point Lisas Limited; Charles Percy, Methanex Trinidad Limited; Jay Henderson, Nu-Iron Trinidad & Tobago Limited and Richard de La Bastide, President, Yara Trinidad Limited. These are the men and they are crying for help, Mr. Speaker. They are crying for help. You could hold that. Crying for help.

Mr. Speaker—*[Interruption]*

Mr. Imbert: “So all ah dis going on?”

Mr. J. Warner: Yes. I thought this morning you would have talked about that.

Mr. Imbert: I left it.

Mr. J. Warner: For me? As always.

Mr. Speaker, I want to say again, the Government lost US \$926.3 million, which translates to \$5.93 billion. When you add that to the deficit, you will see how bad things are indeed.

Mr. Speaker, of course, any Prime Minister would have fired that Minister of Energy and Energy Affairs a long time ago, or he must resign. But, of course, that and God face you will not see. So I am not even worried. All I am saying and asking: Can we have confidence in this Minister of Energy and Energy Affairs?

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Can we trust his competence, Mr. Speaker? What is his claim to fame? You cannot say his claim to fame is how he conducted the affairs of Petrotrin. You cannot say that, because he is guilty of poor management. In fact, up to today, he is the first and only Minister of Energy and Energy Affairs that this country had a total blackout, except when he put on the light for the Prime Minister to get her picture, and so on. He is the first Minister of Energy and Energy Affairs to have so many issues that are detrimental to our environment, and he comes here to assure this House that we are in good hands. We are in good hands.

You see, the limited time I have, I want to go on to the public relations expert sometimes called the Minister of Finance and the Economy. Because the Minister of Finance and the Economy, Mr. Speaker, played games with figures. He says we are doing well, but according to the 2014/2015 global competitive index, we rank as follows—we who are doing well rank as follows—in the Caribbean: Barbados, 55, the lower you are the better you are. Barbados 55; Jamaica, 86; Trinidad and Tobago 89. But we are doing well. We are doing well, very well. Mr. Speaker, in 2008, this country was 73. In six years, we have dropped to 89, and we are doing well, very well. Of course a lot of people think we are actually doing well because we are close to Jamaica and they have deficit spending, and if we have that too then we are doing well.

Mr. Speaker, unemployment: despite the figures given—because the figures are hocus pocus—poor data from the CSO who, through no fault of their own, they are deficient. Do you know how they get figures, Mr. Speaker? They look to see, of course, what the retrenchment figures are in different firms and then they get their figures. That is how they get their figures. The CSO does not have the figures up to date, or strength.

Mr. Speaker, the public sector debt 2010, was \$50.15 billion. Today it is \$78.135 billion. They could say what they want about the PNM and I Jack Warner, “I run my mouth on the PNM like hell, like crazy. I too cuss de PNM.” I did that. But you know something, Mr. Speaker? They could show something for it. The Government cannot. [*Desk thumping*] And I will tell you where, and if they can I will tell you where.

Mr. Speaker, this morning earlier I heard the Member for Diego Martin North/East talk about the Heritage and Stabilisation Fund. He is totally correct. But they said they put in money now in September because what they are doing

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now, is waiting for—September 30 to put money. They took the interest on the money and used that to show, as if they put money in the fund. They have put no money, Mr. Speaker. What I am very concerned about is the proposal by the Minister of Finance and the Economy to change the legislation to indemnify the Members of the Board of Governors of the fund. When this fund was started, it started deliberately saying that these governors of the fund must have no interface with anybody else. Therefore, I ask the question: Why did the Minister want to weaken the structure of the fund to give directors blanket indemnity? What has happened to change this? What?

The Minister comes here and gives a budget and says nothing about foreign exchange and the pitfalls and the problems which were faced by this country. The first time I heard about foreign exchange was by the Member for Diego Martin North/East. You would never believe that this Minister had his career first in banking.

Mr. Speaker, we talk about the Constituency Development Fund. Let me tell this House this is an idea that came from Volney.

Miss Mc Donald: Or, now we know.

Mr. J. Warner: But you have much more to know. I have to watch the time, though. And Mr. Volney—[*Interruption*]

Hon. Member: Herbert?

Mr. J. Warner: Yes, Herbert Volney. He gave an idea, but poor soul, he did not stay long enough to tell them how it should be implemented. So the idea was there but not the implementation. So we ask the question: How would the funds be disbursed? In a lump sum, in tranches? What oversight measures are there in place to prevent corruption?—which I am coming to just now. What mechanism is in place to prevent the duplication of projects by the MPs? All I am saying, Mr. Speaker, is that the Minister of Finance and the Economy needs to talk to Mr. Volney urgently and quickly if this idea of his is to bear fruit.

In fact, Mr. Speaker, I have one question to ask the Minister of Finance and the Economy, which only he can answer in his winding up, and that is: Is it true that the Ministry of Finance and the Economy has decided to advance 30 per cent payment to all the contractors who now have contracts, as mobilization money? Give them contracts left, right and centre and all this has to be done before the Procurement Bill is passed, and when the Bill is passed, and the election is held

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next year, if the Government is returned, then heaven help us. If not, whoever succeeds them, that Government to catch. Is it true? That is the talk outside there. Tell us if that is true because I will tell you something, Mr. Speaker, this is the last speech I am making on this side on the budget. The next time it will be on that side. [*Laughter and desk thumping*] I know many of them on that side would not be here, but that is for another day.

Mr. Speaker, let us go talk about crime. I would not spend much time on crime because I am watching my time like a hawk. I said very early, as a former Minister of National Security, that I would have nothing to say about any Minister who succeeded me, for one year. After I left, Mr. George came and he came—I left the Government on April 22, 2013—Sen. George assumed office until September 06, 2013. I said nothing. After him, he spent four months, we had the present Minister Captain Gary Griffith and last week—[*Interruption*]

Dr. Browne: Captain?

Mr. J. Warner: Yes, I put Captain. Last week he completed his first year in office. Mr. Speaker, I have had the good fortune to exchange a few ideas with the present Minister of National Security but I am yet to see the results of those discussions. But every day, I hear and read warlike statements: unleash the dogs of war, cockroaches are going to be squashed and, I want to say here and now, that kind of language is doing nothing for the Minister nor for the country.

2.25 p.m.

Mr. Speaker, more than that, I am prepared to give the Minister of National Security a further three-month grace period before I go full speed outside. Having said so, however, Mr. Speaker, I want to say I am unhappy about the spate of police killings. In Jackson, Missouri, big, big “crime and thing” in Jackson, Missouri, only police, eh, no army. I am coming to that just now; police, and, Mr. Speaker, the fact is that police went there to restore law and order.

I am worried about the police killings. I am concerned about the cries of police brutality. In fact, one of the most heinous ones I had a week ago, I sent it to the Minister and the Commissioner of Police, and the Minister told me he is dealing with it; very, very bad. I am concerned about the militarisation of our beloved country, the wanton waste of armoured vehicles; there was none in Jackson. Jackson had none. I am concerned about the 5,000 body bags that were bought last year, and the 7,000 that were ordered for this year, I am concerned.

Hon. Member: Body bags?

Mr. J. Warner: Body bags, body bags, b-o-d-y.

Hon. Member: You serious?

Mr. J. Warner: You serious? “Yuh hear?” [*Interruption*] I am concerned, very concerned. I am concerned even today when I read that the Defence Force reserves have been called out until January. What is happening to this country of ours? What is happening? And yet the crime stats of the police service in July, are frightening. Of course, the August figures have not been posted yet.

Let me give you one example. Let us take January to July. In the case of robberies, reported in 2013, January to July, reported 1,541, detected 270, detection rate 17.52 per cent; 2014, reported 1,411 robberies, detected 194; even when robberies were less, detection rate was less, 13.75 per cent, Mr. Speaker. And then, of course, you have to ask the question about whether people now have just given up and they are not reporting anymore, that is a fact too.

I would like to talk to the Minister of National Security also about the work permit issue, that he has in his Ministry and which I was on the threshold of fixing. Mr. Speaker, the Work Permit Committee—I would not say everything, I have promised to write him, I am saying this, the Committee needs to be revamped. They have become archaic and obsolete in the way they do things. Even when I was there, I told them so and I bypassed them as well, because of the way that they operated, right. Jobs sometimes are not created, but they are frustrated, Mr. Speaker, and they fail to understand that every job that is created helps the economy. What they should have there is a three-tier system which I will propose to have and, therefore, you have, of course, a structure that tells you entrepreneurs, investors and, of course, established and local, foreign companies.

You should have a system for automatic approval of short work permits, and all this I will send to him, because I have evidence that because of the Work Permit Committee, investments are leaving the country. Let me give you two examples. An Indian investor was twice denied work permits here, no reason given. In Chaguanas, my constituency, a restaurant serving North Indian cuisine was forced to close because of the refusal to grant him two permits for specialist chefs, it closed, and 15 workers, on the breadline.

In Rio Claro and Erin, Chinese restaurants, they too might be forced to close, because they cannot get work permits for two Chinese, and the list goes on and

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on. Mr. Speaker, I promised because of the time constraint I said, to give all this to the Minister. I am giving him three more months, and I have a vehicle where I could talk, or write. I will use both.

I come now to the Ministry of Works and Infrastructure. Mr. Speaker, I do not intend to spend too much time on the Ministry of Works and Infrastructure here because in the Finance Committee, I will have a field day. But I want to say that the Ministry of Works and Infrastructure has become one of the most corrupt Ministries we have had in this country. [*Desk thumping*] Mr. Speaker, let me tell you what I mean by that. [*Crosstalk*]

When I was the Minister of Works and Infrastructure, I began a system of fixing roads throughout the country. From Naparima, my first road to fix—in fact, Naparima, if I was still there, Member for Naparima, you would have gotten your road from Naparima to the bypass and save 45 minutes if I was still there. A road you know, already there, through the cane field just to pave. So I fixed Naparima. I fixed School Hill. I fixed Tulsa Trace. You name it, I fixed it, because I felt that the country—that that part of the country did not have a proportionate amount of development and it was wrong. So I worked hard to bring them up. Mr. Speaker, while I did that, I also did work in Toco, in Matelot, in Arima. In fact, if you recall, the aggregate—[*Interruption*]

Hon. Member: Where in Toco?

Mr. J. Warner: “You doh even know where Toco is.” [*Laughter*] Mr. Speaker, the aggregate next to the highway, mounds of aggregate, was high, very high, that, of course, I moved and finished the highway and so on. I fixed roads throughout. In fact, the Member for Diego Martin North/East was correct, because, in fact, in Maraval we fixed the road there also. And I made sure I had some infrastructural works being done on the Diego Martin Highway, which they had started.

So, Mr. Speaker, I am saying I worked all about. What, Mr. Speaker, has irked me, is the fact that we have a very high disproportionate amount of development taking place in the country, to the country’s detriment. So, Mr. Speaker, I want to say again, I have no quarrel with development. I built roads, the link in Piarco, in Caroni East constituency, the Member even told me, he said listen to me, Member, “you treat me nice”, that year I got \$16 million in works and so on. What happen today?

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First of all, Mr. Speaker, I want to say to you today, that at the end of the day, I have a problem where our patrimony is not equally divided. [*Desk thumping*] So you build a Campus in Debe, but you build a prison in Piarco. You are building a hospital, Debe, \$1 billion, hospital in Penal for \$1 billion, \$1 billion in Penal for hospital, but you build a prison in Maloney. You build—I began the Golconda Highway to Point Fortin, I began that through Mr. Dookeran, the Member for Tunapuna, \$7.5 billion, developed Petit Morne and so on. The Motor Vehicle Authority in Penal, all this was done, but when you do this in Penal, you put a jail in Arima, and worse of all, the biggest jail of all you build in Santa Rosa.

In 1807, the late Bernard Dulal-Whiteway came to me and offered me to buy that property for \$16 million. Mr. Speaker, I told him \$12 million. We could not agree. He said \$15 million. I said \$13 million. [*Interruption*]

Hon. Member: 1807, that has to be the wrong date?

Mr. J. Warner: I said 2007. [*Crosstalk*]

Hon. Member: No, you said 1807. [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. J. Warner: Okay, I will correct it, 2007. I will come to you just now, my apologies, 2007. He is dead now. Mr. Speaker, I said to him \$13 million. He said \$15 million. I said no deal, 2007. Mr. Speaker, that same property that was going at \$15 million then, was bought by the Government for \$230 million. That is not all.

Dr. Rowley: For a jail?

Mr. J. Warner: For a jail. Mr. Speaker, they spent in repairs, \$58 million; on the roof to fix the roof, another \$12 million, and the wall opposite for Santa Rosa, \$7.5 million. And out of that, they were paying about a million dollars per month rent for two years. Add it, Mr. Speaker. It is close to \$400 million for a country where the biggest landowner is the Government, and where you could have gone to Caroni and build a jail—I will not say it.

Dr. Rowley: Air conditioned jail.

Mr. J. Warner: Air conditioned jail, with TV and so on, because that will come in handy some years to come. [*Desk thumping*] Mr. Speaker, they could do that, but no. So I said to them, this cannot make sense. Here it is you have a campus, Debe, hospital—Mr. Speaker, the Couva Hospital that was to be built in Chaguanas, on the Connector Road, for \$120 million. I was the Minister of Works and Infrastructure at the time, was to build Point Fortin and Couva. I went to

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Point Fortin, I called the MP, we had breakfast and so on. We discussed with the Mayor what was happening, and I said, okay, that and Chaguanas will be built together, \$120 million, Mr. Speaker. “Ah get up one day in de Cabinet” and the whole thing move from Chaguanas to Couva at \$1 billion. I have real problems. I am coming to that just now, you know. I have real problems, because the fact is, I have reason to be worried.

Mr. Speaker, the flyover by the Divali Nagar is in my constituency. They do not have to invite me to turn the sod or to even open it. I do not mind, that is okay, Mr. Speaker. That walkover is my constituency, but I cannot sit here and say it is more important than Sea Lots. I cannot sit here and say it is more important than Oropune. [*Desk thumping*] I cannot do that, because this is a country for all of us, for all of us! [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Speaker, you know, I had planned to talk about ghost contracts. Yes, I planned to talk about a fella called Patch who is, of course, a retired—now, in URP, but is still drawing a salary, and about his son, a Pundit called Sat who has been given three CEPEP contracts which they took away from a relative of mine to give him, and they gave all of them food cards; every single man got a food card. I would talk about that.

I was going to talk about that. Mr. Speaker, I am going to talk about the Director of Highways, but because of the time constraint, not this afternoon. I will come again. I was going to talk also too about the Curepe interchange, where NIDCO in seven days had to have three board meetings, Mr. Speaker; where the Minister called NIDCO to a meeting and suddenly he got a “vaps”. They told him well, listen, you cannot talk to NIDCO, you know, because you would show that you compromised yourself. So what he did? He called them one by one by one, and told them, where that should go and for whom, but I am waiting, Mr. Speaker, I have the facts, and I have a newspaper.

Dr. Moonilal: Standing Order (48)6.

Mr. Speaker: Yeah, I sustain that. I do not think that you should be imputing improper motive. [*Interruption*] No, no, no, this is not a debate. When you are imputing improper motives to a Member of this honourable House, you are travelling on dangerous grounds. So I ask you to withdraw, and you can continue, please. [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. J. Warner: I withdraw. I do not agree, but I withdraw. I withdraw, okay, I withdraw. I have another forum, Mr. Speaker. I withdraw. Mr. Speaker, I withdraw.

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Let me go to the baby grant, but the fact of the baby grant, another no-brainer as far as I am concerned. I listened to the Member for Arima talking last week, and work being done and done. And I said, but where is this man talking about? Where is he coming from? I said the East-West Corridor between Morvant and Arima, what work has been done there? And then I realised that possibly when the Prime Minister said to the Leader of the Opposition, the baby grant is for PNM constituencies. She said so, Mr. Speaker. I said, oh, oh, that is what is for the corridor, the baby grant.

I want to tell the corridor, if by chance they get the grant take it, take it, but do not let it use them. I remember the Prime Minister on February 01, 2011 at an awards ceremony for the inauguration of the Board of Directors of Vision on Mission, she said that she would give \$5,000 to each ex-inmate. Mr. Speaker, 2011, “dey eh get it yet”. So if the people in the Corridor want to believe—*[Interruption]* yes, yes, “allyuh does forget” eh—that they will get the \$500 wait, Mr. Speaker. And in any case, if they give it to the baby, “who getting it”, the father or the mother? “Who getting it?” And then again, would the grant affect whatever maintenance they have to receive in the court if they have to? How is it being paid?

2.40 p.m.

Worse yet, Mr. Speaker, I want to say, to administer that grant will cost more than twice the grant itself. What “brainer” is that? But again, okay, it is an idea and hoping that the Corridor falls for it. And then tell the Member for Diego Martin West, it is for your PNM constituencies. How shameful! All these are ideas, and even as ideas, land for the landless, not one person “tell” me today on which piece of land they built a house. Land for the landless sounds nice.

Mr. Speaker, he talked about baby grant. In fact, let me leave that for the time being. I will come back to that. All I am saying is that it is a no-brainer and I cannot—*[Inaudible]*

I come to EMBD. I heard the Minister of Finance and the Economy say that EMBD will now see about state lands being distributed and I began to hold my head and bawl. EMBD will see about state lands being distributed. I want to say again I hold “meh” head and bawl. I want to say again: I have evidence of corruption in the EMBD that will make the airport look like a tea party. I have it. Sometimes I get worried. You know why I get worried, Mr. Speaker? Because I know that the Government is the moral compass of this country and if the Government sets a certain kind of behaviour, the rest of the country will follow. If

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the country believes that the Government is corrupt, they believe it is open season, and that is happening at the EMBD.

Let me tell you something, Mr. Speaker. EMBD has bid rigging of the worst kind. EMBD has contracts to friends and family of the worst kind. EMBD has not done an audit 2011, 2012, 2013. How do they account for moneys given to them? And they are getting money year after year? No audit, 2011; no audit 2012; no audit 2013.

Mr. Speaker, as I talk to you here now, there are two persons there whose documents are forged and I will bring the facts, not here, in the open out there and who wants to sue me, sue me.

Mr. Imbert: False papers.

Mr. J. Warner: False papers and that is the body, under the Minister of Housing and Urban Development, you are giving to see about state lands. Sometimes I ask myself: this Minister of Housing and Urban Development must be the luckiest one in the world. He is seeing about UDeCOTT. He is seeing about state lands. He is seeing about housing. He is seeing about Invaders' Bay. He is seeing about Colour Me Orange. He is seeing about, what again?

Hon. Member: Properties.

Mr. J. Warner: Properties. I am telling you—[*Interruption*]

Dr. Rowley: Anywhere “dey have” money.

Mr. J. Warner: That is what I mean. Wherever there is money—plenty, plenty money—[*Interruption*]

Dr. Rowley: “Moneylal”.

Mr. J. Warner: I am not going there. [*Laughter*] Wherever there is money, plenty, plenty money, you see it heading one way. I observed, you know, when I was there and the Member for Tunapuna used to travel away, only one person would act in the Ministry of Finance and the Economy—the Minister of Housing and Urban Development.

Hon. Member: What? “Doh make joke”.

Mr. J. Warner: Check and see for yourself.

Hon. Member: What?

Mr. J. Warner: I am talking about when he was the Minister of Finance and

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the Economy. When he was the Minister of Foreign Affairs. Okay, I take it back, all right. Foreign Affairs, one person would act. Ask yourself why. I will tell you before I finish.

I go to Tobago quickly and I would say that Tobago has seen the light, and Tobago would not be fooled but, like all of us, they will bide their time.

Agriculture: The Minister of Finance and the Economy did not say much about agriculture because there is nothing much to report.

Hon. Member: Caroni GREEN.

Mr. J. Warner: Caroni GREEN ain't even green; but I want to say, for the record, that since 2011 the ADB has not given an audit. How are you giving them funds?

I tell the Minister today, go to the branch in Sangre Grande and do an audit of the loans in that branch and see for yourself what is happening. I say again—*[Interruption]* “What yuh say?” At the end of the day, I have nothing to say because I have time. We will have a Finance Committee and I know I will sit down there and get answers.

I go quickly to the dream we have.

Hon. Member: You forgot foreign affairs.

Mr. J. Warner: Leave foreign affairs. I will not do foreign affairs. I will not do foreign affairs. Before the dream—

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, the question is that the speaking time of the hon. Member for Chaguanas West be extended by 10 minutes.

Question put and agreed to.

Mr. J. Warner: Five I will spend on corruption and five on a dream.

Mr. Speaker. On May 14, 2011, the leader of NJAC said, I quote:

“In my whole 40, or 50, or 60 years, I have never heard so much corruption in my land as I have heard in this country over the last few days.”

Almost one year after election, that was said by the leader of NJAC.

Of course, today he is very quiet, I do not know why, but that is another story. And the Prime Minister was very offended and so, too, was I. Because they can say what they want about FIFA, Concacaf—I am coming to that just now

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anyhow—I have no worry about that, you know because I can sleep very soundly at nights. After four years, Concacaf does not bother me or FIFA, so let them here bother me.

I was listening to a programme on the radio last week and a foreigner, a Nigerian, tried to demonize Jack Warner and the announcer is saying all kinds of things about Jack Warner. And I am saying, you know, nobody could leave here to go to Nigeria to demonize a Nigerian. I was here and a lady from Jamaica cussing the Prime Minister, and I objected to that. I spoke to the Member for Toco/Sangre Grande because, I will tell you something, I will stay here, criticize, cuss and rave and rant, but no foreigner coming to talk any one of them bad in my presence and I am not taking part in that also in their absence. Not me!

But that fact apart, Mr. Speaker, when I heard this from Daaga, I said to myself something has to be wrong and then I said let me look around and see. I saw for myself some months after. I asked the Prime Minister for an audience at her Diplomatic Centre. She and I alone there. I took to her incontrovertible evidence of corruption where, of course, a Minister was taking 10 per cent. She told me that it was a shock to her and that she would deal with. She did not. The 10 per cent moved to 15 per cent. I said this was enough. I then said: listen, let me call a meeting of some Ministers whom I can trust.

Dr. Moonilal: Mr. Speaker, 48(6). [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, be very careful because the Prime Minister is a Member of the Parliament. You are making statements that could impute and could also raise the conduct of the Prime Minister. I would ask you to be very careful because you would be in breach of the Standing Orders.

If you want to raise any matter about any Member's conduct, character, you come with a substantive Motion and that will be filed, approved once it qualifies, and we go forward. But for this debate, do not impute improper motives or raise the conduct of any Member.

Mr. J. Warner: Mr. Speaker, for your guidance, I want to say again, if that was the intention given, I never intended to say anything improper about the Prime Minister. I say again that the Government is the moral compass of the country and the Government sets the behaviour for us to follow.

It was against that background, I called a meeting of six Ministers—six of them. I said, of course, of the six I called, only four came. I said: listen, before the Prime Minister believes somebody is plotting against her, go and tell her why we

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are meeting. I said: look, let us meet to help her because, I said to them, she does not understand what is happening.

Mr. Speaker, the meeting could not take place because two Members did not come—and by the way, Member for Mayaro, after I finish talk here and you want to elaborate further, you can do so because you have not spoken yet.

When that happened, I said go and tell her because I do not want to hear any “kuchur”. To make a long story short, two Members refused to come; one who was a Senator, and I said, listen, we cannot do it with these four people. Let us forget it.

Mr. Speaker, I say this only to tell you that corruption is something that is eating the heart of this country. [*Desk thumping*] And I make the point that, at the end of the day, people can say all about me what they want. I have offended this country by putting this Government in power and I have said sorry about that. Who do not want to take it that is their business. I said I am sorry. I also made the point that at the end of the day I will have to undo what I did and I will do that. [*Desk thumping*]

I also said, Mr. Speaker, that at the end of the day this dream which we had has been shattered. At the end of the day, the question, therefore, is: What does the ILP offer? The ILP, either by itself or in concert with others, will give a new era to this country; an era where E means equality, R means respect, and A means accountability. I do not see how a man could run a budget if the people do not account for the money given to them for the year before. You have to account how it is spent or how it is not spent and, therefore, the ILP, as far as I am concerned—and the four minutes I have, we will have to do some things here to help the poor man, to lift him up; to make him rise.

For example, we are considering bringing back the Rent Assessment Board with appeals and so on because people now are being cheated by landlords and, therefore, we have to go back and see how we can help them. We in the ILP will make house loans, not building houses for them, but giving them the money to build it for themselves. It will be cheaper; it will be better, with different colours and so on, but the fact is, if they all build their own homes and so on, more people will be employed and not the big firms, the mega firms, that you will read about in the *Sunshine* sometime soon. [*Desk thumping*]

In terms of the education, we shall have to revise the syllabus at primary and secondary level; but, more importantly, we will have to make the religious boards

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repair their own schools. We have to give the money to the boards to repair their own schools. I know the Minister of Education is trying, but every year, year after year, 14, 15, 20 schools cannot be open. Give the money to denominational boards, let them repair their own schools and that will help, and let the Government repair the government schools.

I also believe that there should be a referendum on the Senate and its composition. The Senate members—we have to review how the Senate is composed—[*Interruption*] but you must agree—and that, of course, will help.

We have also said that police officers must declare their assets annually. I have given all of this, by the way, to other Ministers, you know, and I said let them declare their assets, because you have to find how they get so filthy rich so quickly.

Agriculture, I will do that in Finance Committee.

The Betting Levy Board, Mr. Speaker, I think that you have to find a way to tax them more appropriately; tax them on their profits and find a mechanism that does that.

All in all, I believe that this dream, which we had in 2010, it may be shattered today, but it can be recreated under a new dispensation. I end by saying that my speech here, I want to repeat, is the last one I will make here. If I do not make it on that side, I will be somewhere else. But the fact is, I know, that come 2015, it will never be the same. I thank you. [*Desk thumping*]

The Minister of Works and Infrastructure (Hon. Dr. Surujrattan Rambachan): Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I had no intention of replying to the comments of the Member for Chaguanas West nor the Member for Diego Martin North/East, but circumstances have forced me into a position where there has to be some kind of response.

Before doing that, I want to congratulate Sen. Howai, the Minister of Finance and the Economy for his budget presentation. I want to say something this afternoon. The hon. Minister of Finance and the Economy was attacked in a personal capacity by the Member for Diego Martin North/East; but I want memories to go back a little bit to the year when four banks failed in Trinidad and Tobago and it was Sen. Howai who harnessed the energies and resources of those banks and grew the First Citizens Bank with the team there at First Citizens, to one of the most powerful and successful banks in Trinidad. [*Desk thumping*] And

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it is the character of that man and the professionalism of that man, a man who turned around four failed banks and made a successful institution, that the Member for Diego Martin North/East comes here so shamelessly to attack this afternoon. Mr. Speaker, that is very, very unfortunate.

2.55 p.m.

Mr. Speaker, the Member for Chaguanas West has a very long history dealing in fairy tales and incantations, exaggerations, deceit and—I use, guardedly, and if I use wrong language, correct me—lies.

Mr. Speaker: No, no.

Hon. Dr. S. Rambachan: I withdraw, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: That is wrong, just withdraw it. Use more elegant language.

Hon. Dr. S. Rambachan: Mr. Speaker, virtually everything somehow is convoluted, twisted and appears to be false. [*Desk thumping*] You would recall it was the Member for Chaguanas West who held up a document waving it in Chaguanas West, during the by-election which he won, defaming a young councillor by the name of Mr. Faaq Mohammed, stating publicly that he had proof that the councillor, Faaq Mohammed, took a bribe. I cannot remember if it is for \$2 million or \$1.5 million or what, but whatever. Mr. Speaker, you know, the result of that. Mr. Faaq Mohammed went on to sue him in court, and I think an award of \$200,000 has been awarded. There are many other lawsuits which have been filed against the Member for Chaguanas West with respect to what he has said. I wonder—with all those lawsuits being filed, with him losing the fight where he said: “I have the proof; I have the proof”—whether you can trust such a man at all.

You know, if you go on the Internet and you pull up the name Jack Warner, and you ask what is he doing for the people of Chaguanas West, you will see something far different in terms of who is the real Jack Warner. It is hurtful to see a fellow Member of Parliament, what is written about him in the international media and what transmits to the world. I wanted to raise this because he also raised issues here this afternoon about EMBD, but I wonder, you know, if he claims to be as he is, this master journalist, why could he not go and seek the truth by asking the management of the company for accurate information so that the truth could be published? Why does he not really come and file a question in the Parliament so that the truth can be revealed? [*Desk thumping*]

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This Government has a record of answering 95 per cent of all the questions that have been filed. You see, they accuse this Government of lack of openness and a lack of transparency, but there is no Government as open and transparent as this Government.

There are so many other things I can respond to in terms of him, but I would like, since he spoke about integrity in public life and what have you, maybe the Member for Chaguanas West can clear the air today as to whether, in fact, he was one of those whom the Integrity Commission has asked to file certain documents and whether he has filed those documents; whether he has filed his tax returns for companies.

Mr. Speaker, he ought to confirm whether in fact it was his firm that was fined \$1 million to date by FIFA for tickets. All of these things I could raise, but that is for another day, not tonight. [*Desk thumping*] The other matter that came up here—[*Interruption*]

Mr. Speaker: Yeah, I think that—I did warn the Member for Chaguanas West that you cannot impute improper motives or you cannot raise the conduct of a Member. You can bring a substantive Motion. So I would ask you to withdraw those remarks and, at the appropriate time, you can file a substantive Motion, please.

Hon. Dr. S. Rambachan: Sure, Mr. Speaker. Thank you for your guidance. The Member for Diego Martin North/East brought a document to Parliament, the *Review of the Economy 2013*, and he quoted from a particular page in the document which was in relation to the GDP at constant prices taken in the year 2000; gross domestic product. What he failed to do was to also take the document for 2014, and compare both documents and you will see on a running year-to-year, you will see at the top here [*Book in hand*] a little “p” or “r”, the “p” means “provisional” and the “r” means “revised”. We all know that when you are computing figures and the year is not finished and you are producing this document, you project. So you have provisional figures, and then when you get all the figures, the figures are revised and you have the actual figures. So what he was doing, he was being—I do not want to use the words that I want to use “nah”—but he was being a little bit crafty.

Mr. Imbert: Mr. Speaker, on a point of order.

Hon. Member: What is your point of order?

Mr. Imbert: 44(8).

Mr. Speaker: At the end of his contribution. You can continue. Continue hon. Member.

Hon. Dr. S. Rambachan: Mr. Speaker, it is all here. You will see when the real figures are put in, it differs from the provisional figures, and this is what you see between the two. So he cannot use one to say that somebody is cooking the books, he must talk about what is the reality when all the figures have been counted. I just do not want to go beyond that, but I thought he would be very adept at writing a chapter in a statistics book *How to Lie with Statistics*. [*Desk thumping*] You know that there is statistics and there are lies. [*Desk thumping*] It would be very interesting how to interpret statistics to your favour.

Earlier on in the debate, we heard from the Leader of the Opposition and others on the other side, and they levelled all kinds of labels, names and criticisms about this budget: the budget of shame; the missing years; the welfare budget; “gimme, gimme” budget; too big transfers and subsidies; CEPEP and URP, a waste of resources.

Let me begin with the missing years’ theory or the missing years’ propaganda. The description of the budget as the missing years—Mr. Speaker, I am going to claim my 10 minutes—is really an attempt to suggest that nothing has happened since the People’s Partnership Government came into office. Nothing could be further from the truth.

They say we are following all the projects of the PNM. If a Government is in office today, and you have made contracts with people, are you going to just break those contracts? But when you want to sell the country lemons like the OPVs, we have a right to go and break those contracts and get back \$1.4 billion for the country. [*Desk thumping*]

In the four years, three months and 22 days to date that we have been in office, a lot has happened in what he calls the missing years. My colleague, the Member for Oropouche West, has started already this morning. Eighty-three schools were built under the Ministry of Education. [*Desk thumping*] The Minister of Health will tell you about the Teaching Hospital with 216 additional beds: 108 for children, 108 for adults. [*Desk thumping*] The Ministry of Tertiary Education and Skills Training will tell you about the El Dorado Nursing Academy which is up and running. The Ministry of Health would tell you about the Oncology Centre that they could not build that has now risen from the ground.

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The Minister of Health would tell you about the Children's Hospital being constructed. That is a PNM project? The Ministry of Tertiary Education and Skills Training will tell you that when you go down Debe now, you are seeing the university and they are going to take in their first students early next year. The Ministry of Trade and Industry will tell you that it only takes three days now to register a company, reduced from 43 days plus.

The Ministry of Finance and the Economy will tell you what we have done to alleviate the hardships of those who were struck down by the Clico virus and the HCU virus. The Ministry of Finance and the Economy will tell you how well we have managed the financial affairs of this country, that the credit ratings of Trinidad and Tobago have been sustained and remained very high. More than that, we took this country from negative growth to positive growth, and I am quoting here the IMF. I am quoting the IMF. This is not like—what we speak on this side are facts.

There was a Member of Parliament who on May 16, 2011—and, in fact, it was the Member for Diego Martin North/East, and this is from *Hansard* and he said as follows:

“Matters said in this Parliament are not evidence; they are not sworn testimony. When someone gets up in here, they do not take an oath that everything they say will be the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth.”

That came from the Member for Diego Martin North/East, and they want to get up here and have people believe them. You cannot trust them with what they are saying here, Mr. Speaker. If anybody is to be mistrusted it is the dozen on the other side. They are the ones to be mistrusted. In what the Leader of the Opposition calls—[*Interruption*]

Miss Cox: Mr. Speaker, Standing Order 48(4), please, insulting language.

Mr. Speaker: I did not get—he talked about not being able to be trusted, and that is something we have been talking about throughout this debate; this side cannot be trusted. So I do not think anything is wrong with that. Overruled, continue, please.

Hon. Dr. S. Rambachan: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On that side these days they are burying the hatchet, but the only problem is one man who is involved in burying the hatchet says that the hand of the hatchet is still above the ground, so

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he would be able to pull it out at the right time. I do not want to throw any more picong on that side, I would just go on to what I have to say.

In these missing years, the Opposition Leader did not tell you that maternity benefits have been increased, that contractors' debts were dealt with, that VAT refunds were attended to, and they are still asking, what happened since we came into office. So many new projects that this Government initiated and you are still talking about that. The sod is to be turned very soon for the Arima Hospital and the Point Fortin Hospital.

This is the worst reply I have witnessed in the four years I have been here in terms of the reply by the Opposition. They have all fallen flat. They have failed to address the issues of the country. They have provided no alternatives that would make them an alternative Government. They have done nothing like that. The country is disappointed in the quality of leadership of the Opposition and in the Opposition itself.

Mrs. Mc Intosh: Which country?

Hon. Dr. S. Rambachan: Trinidad and Tobago and its citizens. They have left people—after their contributions—in this country in absolute fear, the fear that property tax is going to return. They have left people in fear. I believe it was the Member for Laventille, I cannot remember now, but one of the Members said that they were going to repeal—I think it is in another place—the Constitution (Amdt.) Bill if they return to office.

Dr. Browne: Of course.

Hon. Dr. S. Rambachan: Mr. Speaker, the people are saying that they have signalled that there are many other things that they are going to repeal in the country, and now students are fearful that they repeal GATE and the students will be forced to pay full fees in the country. They will review it, and they will cut it. We expanded it, but they will cut it. So, would they cut back on GATE? Would they cut back on the school feeding programme, would they cut back on it? Would they cut back on the new pension and disability allowances that we have just granted to people? They have left the poor people and vulnerable people in this country fearful that that is what they are going to do, because they have signalled that they are going to bring back the property tax and the revenue authority in the country. [*Desk thumping*] That is what you have done and the people know you, and the people are seeing through you in terms of what you

intend to do to bring further hardship on the people of Trinidad and Tobago, you cannot trust them.

In the same way, Mr. Speaker, look at what they are doing. They are attacking the \$500 for newborn babies. Imagine that, Mr. Speaker! What do they have against little children? Do you remember that they were the ones who were saying not to give children computers? You remember one of their Members was talking about “duncy” heads. Who are the ones—who were the annual scrooges who were criticizing the Prime Minister for distributing toys to children and making children happy at Christmas time? You see what I mean! This is why I tell you the people are now fearful that they are going to cut the school feeding programme; they are going to cut the GATE Programme; they are going to cut back the pensions and disability grant increases that people have gotten now.

What do they care about the poor and the vulnerable? What do they care about the poor and vulnerable? When they get up in the morning and they have their cornflakes and they have their cheese and they have their butter and they have their wholewheat bread: what are the poor people eating in this country? They have to depend on that school feeding breakfast for their child to get nutrition.

Mrs. Mc Intosh: We gave them that.

Hon. Dr. S. Rambachan: Mr. Speaker, they are attacking babies whose families’ income is under \$3,000 and getting the grant. There is enough research—I looked up on the Internet in the last two days to show the connection between malnourishment and the physical growth of a child as well as the development of brain potential. Mr. Speaker, malnutrition! If we intend to help babies and help mothers bring up their children so they can have an equal opportunity to grow as any other child, Mr. Speaker, congratulations to the Prime Minister. [*Desk thumping*]

3.10 p.m.

I do not know what you have against poor people in this country. I do not know what you have against them; what you have against poor mothers in the country. Listen, the mothers may have done what and they brought the child into the world, but the child is here now and we are taking some responsibility for ensuring that that child can be fed, and that child will have milk and that child will have nourishment, and nothing is wrong with that on the face of the earth.

Mr. Speaker, you know, I want to remind the national population, as the Member for San Fernando East says, “The national community”, I want to remind

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them that the faces that you see in Parliament on the Benches of the Opposition are not the faces who make decisions on that side. Remember, who are the ones that now form the new PNM executive? They are the same ones who sat in a Cabinet and ignored rural hard-working people. They are the same ones who left the children of Biche to suffer for many years. The same ones who fixed their areas and forgot about the rest of the country. The same ones who objected to decentralization. The same ones who have been attacking the Debe campus of UWI. The same ones as I said who called children “duncy heads” and did not give computers.

Mr. Speaker, these are not the decision-makers, the decision-makers are sitting somewhere else and they are just waiting and, I warn the country, that if that group of people who now form that executive, the ones who are calling the shots, everything that we have done that has benefited the poor and vulnerable—and today, in terms of our budget that would benefit the middle class—will be taken away by this government, and you will see a society growing where only one group of people in the upper classes are going to be the ones that benefit under the PNM. That is what is going to happen.

Mr. Speaker, you cannot trust them. They were voted out, you know, on the matter of property taxes, and they have now come back and stated that they are going to bring it back. Can you trust them, Mr. Speaker? Can you trust them? They spent \$542 million—I believe that is the amount, maybe the Member for Diego Martin North/East could give me the real figure—on the rapid rail feasibility. You know what, Mr. Speaker, we are still paying for it. We are still paying for it, Mr. Speaker, I will tell you. On page 392 of the *Draft Estimates, Details of Estimates of Recurrent Expenditure*, under the heading Transfers to State Enterprises—let us start with this one—Term Loan Facility, 4 New Fast Ferries, we are paying \$40.8 million this year; last year we paid \$75.5 million.

Now we come to NIDCO, Repayment of Trinidad Rapid Rail Transit System: in 2013 we paid \$101 million; 2014, \$97.3 million, and in 2015 we are paying \$58.7 million still. Mr. Speaker, you know what you could have done with \$58.7 million this year? You know what you could have done, Mr. Speaker? If you built starter houses for people and each \$1 million were to build one house for \$100,000, means you could have built 580 houses for 580 poor families in Trinidad and Tobago, and that would give them a two-bedroom starter house. Or we may have been able to go into Morvant/Laventille, and some of those constituencies, and deal with some of the poverty in there and fix those houses in there. But the role of the PNM has always been to keep people in a state of

political dependency and never free them economically—never do that; making them always believe that better days are coming, but under the PNM better days never came—never, never came.

Mr. Speaker, if you were to take one area and deal with it where this Government has made significant interventions which have improved the lives of citizens—I would just like to take an example of traffic, traffic management. I believe it was the Member for San Fernando East, and I am subject to correction, who said you could never fix the Tarouba Link Road to San Fernando—that you will never be able to fix it, that the geology is such that it could never be fixed. Mr. Speaker, today it is fixed, and today we have added a roundabout so that we have eased up the traffic situation, and I am going to ease it up further with another piece of engineering that we are going to do there.

Mr. Speaker, for years people suffered to get into Couva—for years. With intelligent engineering and designs we developed the Preysal flyover, the interchange by the Preysal flyover, so there is no traffic there now, and right now we are repairing the Rivulet Road going right into Point Lisas. They talk about intelligent engineering and thinking about the people, by the end of October the two bridges would be finished in Valencia where the bypass [*Desk thumping*] is being built, and the traffic situation on the Valencia Junction will be eased, and it will be further eased because there are two bridges on the Valencia side that are also being built right now.

Mr. Speaker, the bypass road to Piarco bypassing St. Helena Village, the paving of the M1 Ring Road from Usine Ste. Madeline, completion of Grand Bazaar interchange; no matter who started it, we completed it and did it within budget. [*Desk thumping*] The Diego Martin highway, no cost overrun. I can go on and on and list project after project that has been done which has enhanced the flow of traffic in the country. Yes, we still have challenges, and I will be the first to admit we have a challenge every morning from south to north but we are doing something about that too. We are examining right now, using the shoulder of the road in order to allow cars with three-plus people to come up on that shoulder of the road so we will try and ease the traffic. We are doing that as with other interventions that we are trying.

So they talk about the missing years propaganda, what missing years? The only thing missing in those years is the PNM you know, [*Desk thumping and laughter*] that is all that is missing. I want to tell you something, Mr. Speaker, the people did not miss them either; the people glad they are not there. [*Desk thumping*] The people glad they are not there, Mr. Speaker. The people had

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enough pressure on their backs under the PNM, “dey cyah take no more.” They must go and ask the old lady down in Charles Street, Gasparillo, off Charles Street, where she has lived for 70 years and for the first time she got water in her pipes—[*Desk thumping*—70 years. They must go and ask the people of Brasso Venado, where for the first time ever, where there is a school with 46 children; first time ever they get running water. No, but those people do not matter because they are rural, they are poor. Right? Those people “eh” matter. That is why it “eh” matter to you all whether the children get the \$500 in order to buy some baby food.

So, Mr. Speaker, when they talk about the missing years, what missing years are they are talking about? What missing years? So much has happened under these missing years, because you see we have brought this country to a point where the unemployment rate is now 3.7 per cent and has been sustained below 5 per cent, which is like full employment, then we have kept inflation down; we have done all of that and grew the economy, something that they wished would never have happened, but, Mr. Speaker, we know how to manage a country. We know how to manage a country, and every single person you see on this side is committed to managing, not for their self-interest but for the [*Desk thumping*] interest of the people of Trinidad and Tobago.

You know, Mr. Speaker, what is more important, we have done all this, we have not fired people, in fact we have employed people. We have employed people, Mr. Speaker. We have not cut GATE, in fact we have increased GATE, and you know what, there has not been any wage cuts. There are no wage cuts, Mr. Speaker. In fact, the Minister of Labour and Small and Micro Enterprise Development did not have a chance to say today how many agreements were settled—84 agreements settled. [*Desk thumping*] Mr. Speaker, you forget the days when they used to offer 0-0-1 on the side of the PNM—0-0-1, and they kept this country in industrial turmoil, Mr. Speaker? You remember that? And then Mr. Errol Mc Leod, our Minister of Labour and Small and Micro Enterprise Development and Member for Pointe-a-Pierre came in and began his journey of solving these problems. In four years, 84 agreements settled—84. [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. Member: What the minimum wage was?

Hon. Dr. S. Rambachan: Mr. Speaker, I will come to minimum wage you know. I am coming to minimum wage—\$12.50 an hour, from \$9 to \$12.50, \$3.50 rise, and now to \$15 an hour, which means that a person can now get \$120 a day. Mr. Speaker, I want to tell you something, for them that \$15 may not matter you

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know, that \$3-and-whatever may not matter, because when they go and they sit down in a restaurant on Ariapita Avenue and they can spend, among four of them, an average of \$400 on an evening to have a meal without drinks—\$1,600—they would not understand what it means for a man to get that \$15 from \$12.50. They would not understand that, Mr. Speaker, because you see they do not walk their constituencies. They do not walk to see how people are living and how important it is to people that we are doing it, and this is why there is celebration in this country today among the low-wage earners because they are saying that this Government cares for them [*Desk thumping*] and this Government has done something for them.

Mr. Speaker, but look at where they kept the minimum, and you know what is interesting, you all never had a concept of minimum wage. Minimum wage started with the UNC in 1995 or thereabout—that is when it started. So when you talk about caring, come on to this side and we will teach you a few lessons in caring. We have done all this and you know what is more interesting? The Minister of Public Administration and the Member for San Fernando West will tell you that we have given more scholarships every year. Every year we have increased the number of national scholarships. How many we gave last year?

Mrs. Seepersad-Bachan: We have increased with more.

Hon. Dr. S. Rambachan: Over 400.

Dr. Gopeesingh: Four hundred and twenty-two.

Hon. Dr. S. Rambachan: Four hundred and twenty-two scholarships last year. [*Interruption*]

Dr. Gopeesingh: Fifteen hundred in four years.

Hon. Dr. S. Rambachan: Fifteen hundred in four years. [*Interruption*]

Hon. Member: Where are the names—

Hon. Dr. S. Rambachan: And let me tell you, this is the problem with Port of Spain North/St. Ann's West, always have something to say about discrimination, and always bordering on the matter of race. [*Crosstalk*] [*Interruption*]

Mrs. Mc Intosh: Race? Mr. Speaker.

Hon. Dr. S. Rambachan: Listen, [*Crosstalk*] we do not determine the scholarships, the scholarships are determined—[*Interruption*] All right, I withdraw that, Mr. Speaker.

Mrs. Mc Intosh: I good. Good. Good.

Hon. Dr. S. Rambachan: Jump up. Jump up. Jump up. [*Crosstalk*]

Mrs. Mc Intosh: “And say yuh sorry.”

Hon. Dr. S. Rambachan: But we did not do it like how a former Member did it.

Miss Cox: Mr. Speaker, 48(6), please.

Mr. Speaker: Yeah, well he has withdrawn the statement.

Miss Cox: No, we did not hear it clearly.

Mr. Speaker: Yeah, he withdrew it. He withdrew it. Continue, hon. Minister.

Hon. Dr. S. Rambachan: Mr. Speaker, scholarships are given on the basis of merit, [*Desk thumping*] and when the results come, the papers are marked— [*Interruption*]

Hon. Member: CXC.

Hon. Dr. S. Rambachan:—CXC—and sent here, and on the basis of that, Mr. Speaker, scholarships are given. Not like how scholarships were given under a previous administration you know, not so. Eighty-six million dollars, in fact, in scholarships was given in that way—that was nepotism; that was favouritism.

Mr. Speaker, I remember it was the Member for Port of Spain North/St. Ann’s West who had the most criticism to make about the computers for children in school. The most criticisms—most criticisms, had to say how the children will misuse the computers and the computers would be stolen, and all kinds of things to deny the children computers. Well let me tell you something, Mr. Speaker, a computer in a home today is not used by one child, a computer is used by an average of two to three children in a home, and the adults. [*Interruption*]

Hon. Member: Even the parents as well.

Hon. Dr. S. Rambachan: The parents. So when we are giving 95,000 computers, you are looking more like 200,000 persons benefiting from the use of those computers.

Mr. Speaker, I saw a very interesting thing in my constituency, in the Tabaquite area. I went to this house and this little boy had his computer, he had just gotten it, he just entered school—and by the way, Mr. Speaker, when computers had been given out this year, look at that achievement, from zero computers, Forms 1, 2, 3, 4 and 5 [*Desk thumping*] would have computers in the schools. That is vision, plus action, equals change, and that is the leadership we

have under the hon. Mrs. Kamla Persad-Bissessar [*Desk thumping*] as a Prime Minister.

So, Mr. Speaker, this little boy, he did not have electric lights in his house, so he did not have electricity but the neighbour gave him a connection so that he could use the computer in the house. I told this story before and I will tell it again because it is worth saying, because, you see, you still have neighbourly relations and you still have support that families give to each other in communities, and if you have not experienced that family support and neighbourly support, then come, I will take you to places where that still exists in this country and where old values are still being practised in the country.

3.25 p.m.

Mr. Speaker, they are still asking what has happened in the years; they call them the “missing years”. Show me a Government which has had a bold legislative agenda as this Government. Show me a government which has been courageous enough to bring before this Parliament game-changing legislation, whether it was in the manner of how aldermen were going to be chosen at local government elections, or as we have done now with respect to the Constitution (Amdt.) Bill, that empowers the people of this country.

You see, when they objected to the Constitution (Amdt.) Bill and voted against it, what they did not realize is that they were voting against the empowerment of people. They are out of touch. The paradigm has shifted; people want shared governance. People want to carve out their destiny. People want a say. People want control over the future in which they arrive; they want to shape it, and we are giving them the opportunity to do this, while they are denying it by voting against that.

Mr. Peters: Or they want to put a “crapaud” with a balisier tie.

Hon. Dr. S. Rambachan: Mr. Speaker, I once said “crapaud politics finish, eh”. Mr. Speaker, the change is there. The change is here, and people are beginning to feel the change.

So the next criticism they make of the budget: it is a budget of shame. Shame? Should we be ashamed of raising old age pension from \$3,000 to \$3,500? Should we be ashamed of that? So that the grandmother who has to take care of three little children whose mother passed away, and whose father has cancer, that \$500 she needs to ensure that those children are properly fed and clothed, should we be ashamed of that?

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Should we be ashamed of raising the disability grants by \$300? Should we be ashamed of raising the pensions for retired public servants? Should we be ashamed of that? Should we be ashamed of helping the middle class by revising mortgage loans, that if their joint income is \$10,000 or less, they can now get a 2 per cent loan to buy a house for \$850,000? Should we be ashamed of that? Should we be ashamed that if their income is above \$10,000 and they want to buy a house for \$1.2 million, they would pay 5 per cent?

I would be proud of that. I hold my head proud, as part of this Government, to do that. [*Desk thumping*] That is what you are going to vote against in this budget, and when you vote against that, you are voting against the middle class, you are voting against the poor in this country and you are showing what a lack of compassion you have for people. You know what is more important? You have not come up with one alternative to help the middle class in this country, while we have been coming up with alternatives to help and empower the middle class in Trinidad and Tobago in one of the most critical areas, which is, in fact, shelter and housing.

Mr. Speaker, the shame is not on our faces; the shame is on the faces of my colleagues on the Opposition Benches. [*Crosstalk*] I would really like to ask a question: What have the Members on the other side done to empower their constituents? What have they done to lift the quality of life of their constituents?

The former mayor of Port of Spain used to complain about how many outhouses there are still in Woodbrook and how many outhouses and poor housing conditions there are in the areas they represent. What did you all do for the 40-odd years you were in office to improve the quality of life? Hold up your heads, do not bend your heads. Hold up your heads and tell me what you did. Tell me what you did. [*Laughter and crosstalk*] All you can do is laugh at what I am saying; but remember when you laugh there, you are laughing at your constituents—the plight of your constituents.

Miss Cox: Mr. Speaker, 48(4), please.

Hon. Dr. S. Rambachan: You are laughing at the plight of your constituents. [*Laughter and crosstalk*]

Miss Cox: Massa day done, you know.

Mr. Speaker: I think that is just—

Miss Cox: But what it is, is insulting language. [*Crosstalk*]

Hon. Members: Noooo! [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Speaker: You want me to rule? [*Crosstalk*] Listen, listen; that is what democracy is about, sharp differences. But you know what, that is the price we pay for democracy. [*Laughter*] Continue.

Hon. Dr. S. Rambachan: Mr. Speaker, thank you. But I am serious about what I am saying. If I can stand here and talk about the plight of their people, their constituents, and they choose to laugh at that, rather than say, “What can we do to improve it?”, I hope the constituents know that they are laughing at their plight, and that they have no intention really of doing anything to improve the plight of those people—no intention.

So the shame is not on our faces, because we have been doing, we have been delivering. We have been delivering. It is no joke when we say: they talk, we deliver. Every time the shame splatters on their faces, they try something new. Look over the years at what they do: anytime they cannot deal with the pressure, anytime they cannot deal with the reality, anytime they cannot look at the mirror and see the reflection of what is reflecting back at them, they try something.

So what did they try? They come with a vote of no confidence in the Prime Minister, one of the longest debates that was ever told here, and they failed. They come with a vote of no confidence in the Attorney General, long debate, they failed. And worst of all, the then emailgate fabrication.

The courts of California, the US courts, dismissed these emails as falsification, and they still have chosen to ignore the courts. You know, when people do that, does it not signal to you what you expect from them if they were ever to return to office as government?

I often say this and I really mean and I believe it: there are two kinds of laws: there is man’s law and there is God’s law. You might escape man’s law, because man is man, and man is a human being subject to error and subject to prejudice and what have you. You may, therefore, escape in the courts of law of human beings, but you will never escape God’s law.

One of the greatest sins, and every religion speaks of it, is to bear false witness against another person. When you bear false witness against another person, you will bear the results of that in the court of God. Your karma will

“ketch” up with you one day.

Mrs. Mc Intosh: Be careful.

Hon. Dr. S. Rambachan: Mind you get a heart attack, Member for Port of Spain North. You are getting hot under the collar.

Mr. Speaker, should we be ashamed of the fact that under this Government business confidence has begun to soar, and investments have risen? Should we be ashamed of the fact that almost \$3 billion in investment has been received within the last year, and before that I believe it was \$2.1 billion? You know, something struck me last night when I was thinking about this contribution today. No government, no administration in the history of Trinidad and Tobago has received as many high-level international delegations and leaders of the world, as this Government has received. You realize that? None! Whether it was the Vice-President of the United States, the Governor General of Canada, the delegation that came to represent the Queen, the President of China, the Prime Minister of Japan, the President of Panama, the President of Nigeria, no government has received as many high-powered delegations to this country as we have. Do you know why? Because they see something in this Government that is different from the past administrations.

They see leadership in Prime Minister Kamla Persad-Bissessar; they see confidence; they see trustworthiness; they see integrity, and they see a Government of the people, for the people and by the people. [*Desk thumping*] That is what they see.

You know, we have done well. One of the things I have never said about myself, when I was Minister of Foreign Affairs and when, under the distinguished leadership and guidance and mentorship of Mrs. Kamla Persad-Bissessar we began to carve back the image of Trinidad and Tobago in the international community, and which the Member for Tunapuna is now so successfully continuing and doing. It was the Prime Minister of this country who went onto the margins of the United Nations and successfully piloted a motion there for women to be more participative in the electoral processes and in politics, supported by the President of Brazil, by Mrs. Hilary Clinton, by Costa Rica, by the Prime Minister of Australia and so on.

Mr. Speaker, the Small Arms Disarmament Movement and what happened, all of this under this Government. Internationally, we took the image of this Government back up. We are doing so well that while the Prime Minister was

Chair in Office of the Commonwealth, she made real strides in terms of the position of girls, in particular, in the 53-nation Commonwealth. At that time we also got the position supported by the UK, supported by Canada and supported by Australia, to become the Chairman of the Commonwealth Ministerial Action group, and I led a delegation of that Chairman to the Maldives to intercede in a coup that had taken place in the Maldives.

Mr. Speaker, because of what we were doing in the South Americas and in Latin America, really making Trinidad and Tobago the gateway to Latin America, Chile gave me the highest award that they could give to a non-national for their country. [*Desk thumping*] But I have never said these things, but it shows you where we were heading and where we continue to head. I publicly thank the Prime Minister for the confidence she showed in me during that time I was Foreign Minister, because the Prime Minister is the number one diplomat in this country and she is respected internationally.

Mr. Indarsingh: What did the Member for Point Fortin get?

Hon. Dr. S. Rambachan: She has helped to revive the international image of Trinidad and Tobago. This is why when they criticize today hon. Kevin Ramnarine, they also forgot to refer to other documents. On February 10, 2014, where BHP Billiton indicated its intention to commit up to \$1 billion to exploration in Trinidad and Tobago's deepwater acreage, including \$500 million for the first phase of exploration, and a further \$500 million for additional optional phases, and so on. They forgot to talk about bp Trinidad and what bp had to say about investments in Trinidad and Tobago.

When the Member for Diego Martin North/East talked about bid rounds:

“The results of the bid round...”—that we did—“still supersede the results of the 2006 bid round under the previous PNM administration, when eight blocks were offered and only one bid was received from Statoil, which was subsequently withdrawn...”

So he comes today to knock down Minister Ramnarine when, in fact, his whole history shows that one bid they got and that was withdrawn in 2006. As I tell you “karma does ketch up with you”.

Mr. Imbert: Total failure, just like all of you.

Hon. Dr. S. Rambachan: One can go on and on, but you are knocking down Mr. Ramnarine but yet you would not quote some of the things that have been said about Mr. Ramnarine, the Ministry of Energy and Energy Affairs, internationally. *Digital Guardian:*

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“Ghana-born, South Africa-based Jonah lavished praise on T&T’s Energy and Energy Affairs Minister Kevin Ramnarine at the reception...”—at the Prime Restaurant in Port of Spain—“telling guests that in his 50-plus years in the extractive industries, he found Ramnarine to be ‘the best minister of natural resources’ with whom he had the pleasure to work anywhere in the world. Regarded as one of the richest men in Africa, Jonah made his fortune in mining, oil and gas, and equity trading, according to the US’ Business Week magazine.”

Mr. Speaker, should we be ashamed, therefore, that we have chosen to raise the penalties on traffic offences, to save lives? Should we be ashamed that—
[*Interruption*]

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, the question is that the speaking time of the hon. Minister of Works and Infrastructure be extended by 10 minutes.

Question put and agreed to.

3.40 p.m.

Hon. Dr. S. Rambachan: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Should we be ashamed that it is this Government that has agreed to \$1 million for families of police officers killed in the line of duty? February 21, 2013 in the *Express*:

“Following the death of police constable Anil Persad in May 2011, the Prime Minister Kamla Persad-Bissessar said Government planned to increase compensation packages offered to bereaved families of law enforcement officers who are killed in the line of duty.”

February 21, 2013, September 2014, done. [*Desk thumping*] Done. Done. To quote the Prime Minister then:

“‘Money of course cannot bring back a life but, at the moment the package is very, very small for...the protective services. It is something we are giving consideration to’, she had”—then—“said.”

Mr. Speaker, the PNM should be ashamed of the extent to which they left the infrastructure of the country to deteriorate, to the extent that it has done. At another place and another time, I will speak about the infrastructure of this country. I will tell you, even as I speak here, 21 tenders are now being evaluated for landslips across this country, and because of the extent of the deterioration, some of those landslips have been estimated to be close to \$20 million. As we

speak, 13 bridges are being evaluated right now—13 bridges. And let me tell the people of Calcutta, Balmain, that their bridge will be opened by next week. [*Desk thumping*] It will be opened by next week.

When all else has failed in terms of their criticisms about this budget, when they have failed to pick holes in the budget, they have now chosen to launch an attack on CEPEP and URP.

Mr. Speaker, I asked someone out of curiosity recently in my own Ministry, how much money a day does a CEPEP worker get? And you know what his answer was? Well \$200 a day. I wonder how many people in the Opposition know what a CEPEP worker gets a day. I wonder if anyone in the private sector knows how much money a CEPEP worker gets? [*Crosstalk*] How much they get? Member for Diego Martin North/East, how much do they get?

Hon. Member: He “doh” know.

Hon. Dr. S. Rambachan: You do not know. A CEPEP worker gets \$86, I believe, and some cents a day for six hours work; \$86. And \$594 million has been put in the budget. The budget is \$64 billion, \$594 million is less than one per cent of the budget. And you want to take away that from them. Drive down the highway from Grand Bazaar to Golconda and see how the highway is looking because the Ministry of Works and Infrastructure has contracted CEPEP to do it. They are edging the roads. [*Desk thumping*] It is well kept. Look at the plants that have been planted on that highway. Now you are driving they have begun to bloom and blossom, and you want to take away that? Mr. Speaker, I would like to see what will happen to the environment of this country if CEPEP workers stopped working tomorrow and you took away their jobs. I want to see that.

Mr. Speaker, the private sector is attacking the CEPEP workers saying that because of CEPEP they cannot get people to work. Well, the private sector should begin to evaluate and to see whether they are offering very good packages to people, whether they are going to secondary schools and showing people if they come to work with them they will have a career path. Mr. Speaker, I am not attacking the private sector, you know. What I am saying is that they have got to look at their recruitment and development practices of people so that people could get attracted to come and work there.

Mr. Speaker, you know, they talk about URP and they have criticized URP. I was showing to the Member for Diego Martin North/East the number of projects done in his area and he could not believe it. And he came today and he has said he has confirmed that the projects have taken place.

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Mr. Speaker, when I was at the Ministry of Local Government and URP was under me, I started a programme of transformation of URP, and that year we did 37.4 kilometres of box drains under URP. [*Desk thumping*] I have some news for you, news that will excite you. Because this nonsense about the URP being unproductive and so on, I will debunk it with what I am about to say. Box drains built averaging 600 by 600 or what you would call two feet by two feet, 72.536 kilometres of box drains was built in the last 11 months under URP. Seventy two kilometres plus 37 is 100 kilometres built in two years under the URP. [*Desk thumping*] This year 603 small contractors have been involved in close to 1,000 jobs under the URP programme, Mr. Speaker. [*Desk thumping*] That means that 3,800-plus persons have gotten jobs with those small contractors.

Mr. Speaker, nine jogging tracks have been built, 7.6 kilometres of pavement was built, 10.7 kilometres of slipper drains was built. And we are constructing also retaining walls. So far we have constructed to 67 retaining walls, the length of it is 2.591 kilometres. That is URP. And you want to say that those people are not working under the small contractors? What has happened is that, on the other side, they are still in the old paradigm; the old paradigm, thinking that this is some “10-days” thing. Yes. We have the women’s programme. Yes, we have other people, but we are moving people to the small contracting sector, and we are giving the small contracting sector an opportunity also to develop.

Dr. Gopeesingh: Six hundred plus contractors.

Hon. Dr. S. Rambachan: Yes, 603 so far.

So, Mr. Speaker, as I conclude this afternoon, there are a couple of things I want to do. I want to thank the hon. Prime Minister and my ministerial colleagues, on behalf of the constituents of Tabaquite, for what they have done for my constituency, and I am sure for others; Minister Nizam Baksh for lighting up nine playgrounds in my constituency; [*Desk thumping*] Minister Dr. Tim Gopeesingh for the Riversdale Presbyterian School, and now for the very first time where the children have gone to school all these years, over 70 years in a church, the Flanagin RC Primary School; the Minister of National Security for the Brasso Police Station, and I thank Dr. Moonilal and UDeCOTT; the Minister of Energy and Energy Affairs and NGC for Charles Street, south Gasparillo pavilion; the Minister of Health for his assistance in having the Brothers Road, the Tabaquite, and now soon to follow Flanagin Health Centres opening for longer hours, and also on weekends and holidays—[*Desk thumping*] Mr. Speaker, I think few people know that we have gone and opened these health centres for longer hours now and that they can go there in the evenings—the Minister of Health for his

assistance in having brain surgery done on a university student, having it done in Puerto Rico, and for several of my constituents who have gotten heart surgery at Mount Hope at Government's expense, for those whom he helped get artificial titanium legs, and for cancer treatment whom he has helped, and who now get treatment in south Trinidad at Southern Medical.

Mr. Speaker, I thank the Minister of Local Government for the hundreds who have benefited from self-help grants in my constituency, and on behalf of the people of Gordon Village in Gran Couva, for the activity centre that is now being constructed there; the hon. Prime Minister and the Ministry of the People and Social Development for the social welfare programme. I am not ashamed to say that there are people in my constituency whose families died and they could not bury them. And it is because of the grant, the funeral grant by the Ministry of the People and Social Development that they were able to bury their loved ones in dignity; the book grants for impoverished families.

I want to thank some members of the public. In the constituency of Couva North, in the constituency of Couva South and in my constituency, we have opened what you call empowerment centres and Pastor Winston Mansingh of the Open Bible Church in Poonah is running life-enhancing programmes for students and adults there; Inspector Subash Ramkhelawan for his initiative in launching and sustaining the police youth club in Whiteland with other police youth clubs in Gran Couva and Flanagan Town; Mr. Reynold Sewdass for his contribution to sporting activities in the constituency—cricket; Sandra Pompey for football; Ramesh Marahaj for table tennis, and Simone Pantor who has an exile rugby club, where nine of those players are on the national team, and 127 children attend those rugby coaching sessions; Pastor La Motte for managing the recently built homework centre in upper Corosal. I mentioned all these names, and there are a lot more, because I need to make the point, that to succeed as a Government we are partnering with the people, Mr. Speaker. We do not run a government—we are partnering with people.

Mr. Speaker, I would have liked to talk about the matter of the subsidies. I brought a whole document that will show where the subsidies really go and the transfers really go, but we probably have to do it another time. I thank you for this opportunity to speak, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: Yes. The hon. Member for Diego Martin North/East.

Mr. C. Imbert: Thank you for this opportunity to clarify and refute the misquotation of the Member for Tabaquite. Mr. Speaker, in my address I was very

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clear to point out that the figures in the *Review of the Economy for 2014*, and the figures in the *Review of the Economy for 2013*, for the same years of income bear no relationship to each other. Without any explanation I made the point that when you look at the 2014 review and the 2013 review produced by the same Minister, the GDP for 2011 and 2012, are completely different. And that is why I said the Minister fudged the figures. The Member in an attempt to refute what I said, pretended that I have not compared the 2014 and 2013 review; typical. And before I take my seat, when I spoke about words spoken in this Parliament not being sworn testimony, I was speaking about the Member for Tabaquite. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: Before I call on the hon. Member for Port of Spain North/St. Ann's West, may I remind hon. Members, in accordance with Standing Orders 53(1)(j), and I quote:

“A Member present in the House during the debate—

shall not use any electronic device in such a manner that in the opinion of the Speaker disturbs the proceedings of the House;”

I read this for Members' edification because I have observed a stream of disturbance with Members not being able to master their electronic devices. I say no more at this time. The hon. Member for Port of Spain North/St. Ann's West.

Mrs. Patricia Mc Intosh (*Port of Spain North/St. Ann's West*): I thank you, Mr. Speaker for the opportunity to make a contribution to the Appropriation (Financial Year 2015) Bill, 2014.

Mr. Speaker, I really thought—I was worried—I thought the Member for Tabaquite would have convulsed in a fit of apoplexy. [*Laughter*]

Hon. Member: A heart attack.

Mrs. P. Mc Intosh: But I shall deal with him as I go along.

Christmas came prematurely in September when the hon. Minister of Finance and the Economy presented his budget for fiscal 2015. He brought a Christmas tree ablaze with lights and bubbles and bells and whistles underneath which there were hampers and gifts for all. Mr. Speaker, this budget was nothing more than an election budget—we have said it here all of the time—based on the favourable price of oil and gas on the world market. The question we have to ask is: Are these very generous measures sustainable in the medium to long-term, and what do they mean in terms of long-term economic development for Trinidad and

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Tobago? What happens, I beg to ask, if the price of oil and gas drops? The oil and gas predictions on the global market do not augur well for the future. And I should like to refer to a few articles I have collected here over the period.

The first article is from the Trinidad *Guardian* dated July 10, and it is entitled, “IMF warns T&T vulnerable if energy prices fall. Tighten your policies”. I wonder if that is what we doing?

Mr. Speaker, I refer to another article in a newspaper that might not be known to those here, it is *The Citizen* of Tanzania, where I spent some time, and I would like to refer to an article dated August 20, very recent:

“Crude prices continue to tumble

Crude prices continued southwards after the International Energy Agency (IEA) said it sees lesser oil demand over the next 18 months, pushing Brent for spot delivery to its lowest in just over a year, and breaking a significant support barrier.”

Mr. Speaker, I have yet another article, this time from Reuters, and it says—it is dated August 21, 2014, and it is entitled, “Still awash with cash, world economies take a turn for the worse.” And I am just reading snippets, Mr. Speaker, excerpts. The first paragraph:

“China’s economy is slowing. The euro zone’s is a flat line. Japan’s sank in the second quarter. Britain has wage deflation. The U.S. economy is ticking over at best.”

3.55. p.m.

But, Mr. Speaker, my research brought me to a very interesting article on Norway dated May 08, 2014 entitled, “Insight - End of oil boom threatens Norway’s welfare model”, and I read:

“Norway’s energy boom is tailing off...exposing an economy unprepared for life after oil and threatening the long-term viability of the world’s most generous welfare model.

High spending within the sector has pushed up wages and other costs to unsustainable levels, not just for the oil and gas industry but for all sectors, and that is now acting as a drag on further energy investment.”

Norway has been for the last decade almost a single-track economy. Are there similarities here, Mr. Speaker? Are you seeing them?

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“Norway had the foresight to put aside a massive \$860 billion”—Norwegian dollars for a—“rainy-day cash pile...”—like our Heritage and Stabilisation Fund—“It also has huge budget surpluses, a top-notch AAA credit rating and low unemployment, so tangible decline is not imminent.

But costs have soared, non-oil exporters are struggling, and the generous welfare model, which depends on a steady flow of oil tax revenue may not be preparing Norwegians for tougher times.”

Mr. Speaker, when I heard all of the goodies—they are all here, I would not worry to read them out, we know them—the Christmas gifts and the hampers, I thought of Norway. The signs do not portend well for the future. They are not good. And it would appear that this UNC Government is not heeding what is happening on the global market, neither is it heeding the advice of the external agencies like the IMF, so the question of sustainability must arise. What happens when the revenues from oil and gas decrease?

Mr. Speaker, will the Government have to renege on some or all of these goodies in the budget? Will it have to rescind or dismantle projects that the Member for Tabaquite was just talking about, like CEPEP and URP, even the OJT Programme, all of which, by the way, mask the unemployment rate? This UNC Government is boasting that the unemployment rate is as low as 3.7 per cent, but this figure takes into consideration persons employed under these programmes, URP, CEPEP and OJT, even the school safety officers are temporary employees who do not have permanent employment, who cannot even get a loan in a bank, a mortgage, not even a hire purchase. They eke out an existence day by day, week by week, but they have been included in the unemployment rate.

This Government has a penchant for manipulating and juggling figures as we have all said on this side, and I call it for want of a better terminology, I have been thinking, but the only thing I could think of, they play semantics with numbers, they play number semantics. That is how I call it. [*Interruption*] I have too many constituents who have no jobs, no income, to believe that that figure is really 3.7 per cent. Like Norway, we are a single-track economy despite efforts to diversify. We depend largely on oil and gas for our revenue, but can we not learn a lesson from the experience of Norway? Does this UNC Government not learn from what is happening on the international scene? Because just like Norway we are fast becoming a welfare state, and if nothing else tells us so, this give-away budget certainly does.

Mr. Speaker, about six weeks ago, a dear friend of mine directed me to a website where I was able to view a video. The video was dated July 17; it was on Fox 5, New York, and, Mr. Speaker, it is a five-minute documentary promoting Trinidad and Tobago as a preferred place for investment designed to woo foreigners as well as locals living abroad to invest in Trinidad and Tobago. This video was obviously commissioned by the present Government to boost foreign direct investment in the country, and I noted with great interest and wry amusement that the video contained several scenes of the capital and the skyline and the twin towers and the financial complex, and the still unoccupied Government Campus, and NAPA and SAPA and the Point Lisas Industrial Estate and HDC housing developments; all of which were constructed under the People's National Movement. [*Desk thumping*] And all of which, Mr. Speaker, have been maligned so much by this present UNC-dominated Government; up to this morning, as recently as this morning with my dear darling friend, the Member for Oropouche West, all of it, every day, maligned all of these buildings.

Mr. Speaker, they have been the source, these initiatives of the PNM have been the source of criticism, disparaging remarks and snide comments by Members on the other side since I have come to this House in 2010. I noted that the Government was certainly not ashamed to show off all the big buildings of which they are so critical. The video even highlighted the water taxis and other infrastructure implemented under the PNM, who they claimed did nothing for the country. Imagine, the Member for Couva North in her contribution saying that the PNM had vision, but could not translate that vision into reality. But this UNC Government did not hesitate to present those very real and tangible structures, that reality could not be more real to the world, to promote Trinidad and Tobago and to elicit interest in our country as a rapidly developing, rapidly evolving country in which to invest. They were not ashamed to do that.

Mr. Speaker, contributions were made by the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Minister of Energy and Energy Industry, the Minister of Labour and Small and Micro Enterprise Development, the Minister of Local Government and, of course, by the Minister of Finance and the Economy, who painted a very robust picture of Trinidad and Tobago's economy, in the very same manner as he did in this honourable House when he presented his budget last Monday.

Having said all of that, Mr. Speaker, I have no quarrel with the Ministers promoting our country in a positive light. That is necessary, because our country has experienced very negative—what should I say?

Hon. Member: Whatever.

Mrs. P. Mc Intosh:—media coverage internationally. So, I have no problem with them trying to do their damage control. They are doing their job. The fact is, none of the rhetoric contained in the Minister's budget presentation, nor in the video promoting Trinidad and Tobago, reflects the stark reality of life in Trinidad and Tobago, the flipside of the coin.

Mr. Speaker, as a representative of the people, I have my job to do and I know they will appreciate that. So, it behoves me this afternoon to undertake that unpleasant task of showing the other side of the coin.

Mr. Speaker, the hon. Minister speaks of wooing foreign investors, but the unsettling and worrisome crime rate, I think it has now reached 298, and for the same period last year it was 274, almost 24 more murders, and this worrisome crime rate continues to be a bane to potential investors and poses a daily threat to the lives of every single citizen in this country.

Mr. Speaker, the acting police commissioner, the Prime Minister, the Minister of National Security, are still insisting time and again that serious crime is on the decrease. I do not understand! What is more serious than murder? And we are having an increase in murders. Even the hon. Minister of Gender, Youth and Child Development, stated at a seminar he attended, that crime against women, rapes and incest and violence against women is on the increase. What could be worse than that? What is serious crime then? What did you mean by this? Even the *Express* editorial of August 19, 2014, queried those statements on serious crime being on the decrease.

Mr. Speaker, they are talking about how—the hon. Member for Tabaquite, in his apoplectic moment, [*Laughter*] he said that Trinidad and Tobago has a wonderful image all over the world. The US-based VICE News produced a 23-minute documentary called Corruption, Cocaine and Murder in Trinidad. The documentary was uploaded on YouTube and went viral. The video recounted that in January this year 332 kilos of cocaine which originated in Trinidad and Tobago was seized in Virginia USA. The video gathered more than 24,000 viewers and more than 260 comments in the first eight hours. This is the unfortunate image of Trinidad and Tobago around the globe. That apart, Mr. Speaker—[*Interruption*] and they are proud—there are other instances involving cocaine finds. What about September 2011 when \$34 million of marijuana was found in a container of chickens consigned to a central businessman? I do not know who it is. In

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December 2013, cocaine was taken out of a gentleman's stomach at a private hospital in St. Augustine and he was so bad they had to send him to Mount Hope, and nothing is heard about that, and there have been numerous drug busts at the port in Point Lisas, and it seems that all these drug offences and busts have long been relegated to the abyss of oblivion. Mr. Speaker, this is the stark reality of life in Trinidad and Tobago.

Mr. Speaker, look at the corruption index, nobody spoke about our corruption index. This country is now ranked 83, up by three points from 80 in 2012, with a corresponding drop in the score from 39 to 38. The Corruption Perception Index, and I am reading from the Transparency International news, serves as a reminder that the abuse of power, secret dealing and bribery continue to ravage societies around the world, but we are right there. We are right there up on top with all those who are guilty of such a crime. Mr. Speaker, I would like to refer to an *Express* article written by Irene Medina, dated December 4, 2013:

“T&T still ranking high on corruption index

Concerns over the granting of Government contracts and licences are among the main reasons why Trinidad and Tobago continues to rank high in Transparency International's (TI) Corruption Perception Index 2013.”

Mr. Speaker, imagine we have surpassed Jamaica in corruption, and while countries like Barbados and Dominica and Bahamas and St. Lucia and St. Vincent, they are very nice and low on that index, but we are ranking very high. It is shameful. I wonder if they are proud of all of this. You see, all their rhetoric does not reflect the reality. It does not reflect the reality.

Having dispensed with those gory details which give me no pleasure, because it is affecting the good image of our country, I should now like to turn my attention to the institution of education which received the largest share of the national pie, \$10.126 billion of the national budget of \$64.64 billion, with the Ministry of Education being allocated \$5.2 billion and the Ministry of Tertiary Education and Skills Training being allocated somewhere around just under \$5 billion.

Mr. Speaker, I want to begin with the school repair programme, and I want to tell the Minister he did try. And I want to start to ask him—do not get vex with me from the start, because you know, Mr. Speaker, although you know we have the banter across and so, and the little words going and all of that, they get very vex with me and tell me insulting things, you know. I have to say one of the

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things is they call me a racist. Me? And I object to that and I am not going to have it. [*Interruption*] I am not going to have it. [*Desk thumping*] I shall not accept it.

Mr. Speaker, \$60 million was allocated to school repairs in 2014. Since this Government came into office they spent \$574 million from 2010 to present, but unfortunately, the schools are still in a state of disrepair, many schools, and the Minister knows that. The Ministry, when they started off, before the holidays or somewhere early during the holidays, the Ministry of Education in conjunction with TTUTA and the NPTA got together and agreed upon a list of schools to be repaired under the vacation repair programme. I have been reliably informed that 310 schools were shortlisted for repair. They could not repair all, there were many schools and many in a state of disrepair, but 310 were shortlisted.

4.10 p.m.

But then, unknown to TTUTA, behind TTUTA's back, the shortlist was further shortlisted to 243 schools. I see in the newspaper where the Minister is boasting, a very heroic exercise, he repaired 328 schools. Well, I do not know, the figures—they pull figures out of a basket, morning, noon, and night, so, I do not know. Anyway, this reduction was done without the consultation of TTUTA, and they cannot tell TTUTA what were the criteria used to shortlist the shortlist. While the Minister is boasting about the success of the vacation repair programme and the timely reopening of schools, there were still many schools that reopened late, or schools that reopened and had to close again due to infrastructural and health issues.

Mr. Speaker, I should like to—I know there were eight schools, eight too many. I would like to highlight the Tranquillity Government Primary School, because this school is in my constituency, and the plight of this school was highlighted in the media, the electronic and print media, since last September. And they have serious electrical problems that pose a threat to all those on the compound. Water has collected in the electrical outlets because of serious leaks in the roof. There are plumbing issues, there are air-conditioning issues. There is no provision for the differently-abled because there are differently-abled students attending the school and there is a teacher who is differently-abled.

And when I saw the plight of the school on the television, we viewed the differently-abled persons, students and the teacher, crawling up and dragging themselves up the steps. There is no elevator, but not even a passageway to take wheelchairs. There is nothing to accommodate them, and this Minister and this Government is saying that they care about the differently-abled, and they are

catering to them, and they are giving them some increased grant or something like that in their Christmas-tree budget.

Mr. Speaker, work started on the Tranquillity Government School two weeks before the reopening of the school—two weeks, and work is still continuing at great inconvenience to the students and teachers, causing a disruption in the delivery of the curriculum. Can you imagine that you have repairs going on while school is in progress? You have Morvant/Laventille, there is a collapsed structure. They have Arima Central, overcrowding. Forty-seven students in classes designed to accommodate 30 students. Principals complaining that there are some classrooms that only have stand-up room. You have Pleasantville Secondary in a state of disrepair. You have East Mucurapo Secondary which the Ministry promised to upgrade the electrical instillation and to repair the covered passageways especially those in front of the cafeteria that are leaking.

There is no water tank, and anytime the principal tries to get approval to spend the budget allocation that is given to the school to purchase water tanks, he is refused. This is preposterous. I cannot imagine why he would be refused. But the Ministry officials appeared four days before school opened to tell the principal that no moneys were allocated for repairs to the school, so therefore nothing could be done. I understand a lot of—St. Francois Girls had requested a lot of repairs to be done to their infrastructure and nothing was, absolutely nothing was done, nothing materialized. And we may yet see other schools, Mr. Speaker, closing during the course of the academic year, because plasters have been placed on very big sores in many instances and many schools are still in a state of disrepair. But I must say, I have to commend the principals and teachers who have been very cooperative with the Ministry of Education, trying their best to keep their schools open under very trying and unsatisfactory circumstances.

Mr. Speaker, but I am concerned about schools that have been waiting to be reopened since 2010. And I cite four schools: St. Joseph Secondary, Five Rivers Secondary, Mount Hope Secondary, Baratavia North Secondary. Mr. Speaker, these schools were constructed under the People's National Movement. They were completed in 2010 or nearing completion—very little to be done. Every year mention is made of them, and even if they were not completed, four years now, every year mention is made of them in this book in which I have no confidence, the *Public Sector Investment Programme*. I have no confidence in this book, because when I look at page 85 they mention the same schools and they call—and this school they say, Five Rivers school they said:

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“In fiscal 2014 reconstruction works...at the following...schools”—including—“Five Rivers”—were completed.

And when I look on page 175 they say, schools would be finished, work will continue and they will finish in 2015 and they call Five Rivers again, apart from other schools. It is a cut and paste document and every year they promised to fix the schools and nothing has been done. To date they cannot be commissioned, almost four years since they were built under the PNM. They were left to languish, Mr. Speaker, they were left to languish for the very same reason that the Government Campus was left to languish. Why? Because they were all initiatives of the People’s National Movement. This UNC Government is willing to put its political agenda before the interest and welfare of the people.

What a disservice to the poor people, the children of poor people on the East-West Corridor—they talked about poor and they talked about poor children—whose children would have benefited from the opportunity of attending a modern, safe, upgraded facility within their respective communities. I understand Pleasantville Secondary in San Fernando East constituency is in the same condition, a whole wing cannot be occupied and nothing was done to repair it. Look at where these schools are. Look at the people who attend these schools, and this Government says it will win the East-West Corridor and San Fernando East. Not a person in the East-West Corridor or San Fernando East will vote for this wicked UNC Government, [*Desk thumping*] depriving their children of the educational opportunities prepared for them by the People’s National Movement—not a person, not a vote for them. I guarantee that.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to turn now to the question of laptops. Every year when I speak in the budget debate, I speak about the laptops. But, Mr. Speaker, before I broach the topic of laptops, I have to be exceedingly careful to pre-empt my discussion by stating that the People’s National Movement has been the proponent of the infusion of technology as an integral part of the curriculum in schools. The PNM’s goal was just not to give a child a laptop for the sake of giving a laptop. It was not a campaign promise. There was no campaign promise about it. The PNM’s goal was to ensure the use of technology in pedagogy, for learning and teaching; that was their goal.

Mr. Speaker, it is the PNM that initiated the integration of technology in schools under the Secondary Education Modernization Programme in 2005, under the then Minister of Education, Mrs. Hazel Manning. It is the PNM that first installed the laptop carts and laptops in schools. I was at St. Francois Girls when

the laptop carts were brought into the schools for the children to use. We did not give each child a laptop for the sake of that. We were infusing technology into the curriculum.

It is under the PNM that the first computer labs were installed. It is the PNM that established the IT Unit on Sackville Street, way back in 2005. It is under the PNM that an IT master plan for education was established. I sat on that committee with then Permanent Secretary Kathleen Thomas. It is under the PNM Government that educators were sent to Singapore and Japan to observe the infusion of information and communication technology in the curriculum. I was one of those educators who visited Singapore and Japan. I have to make these points, because this UNC-dominated Government likes to rewrite history and say that the PNM did nothing, that they did everything. And I have to make these points because they like to make idiotic statements, like the PNM does not want poor people children to have laptops.

Dr. Gopeesingh: 48(4), 48(4).

Mrs. P. Mc Intosh: Unfortunate statements.

Mr. Speaker: She has withdrawn.

Mrs. P. Mc Intosh: Yeah. Yeah. [*Laughter*] Unfortunate statements like “the PNM does not want poor people children to have laptops”, how unfortunate that statement is. And those statements are nothing but for political gain. That is what this Government is about. They would have supplied 95,000 laptops to students—to date, from when they came into office—at a cost of—[*Interruption*] I do not know—the cost before this recent set of laptops was \$253 million. He has to add on the cost now for this recent set. But while the hon. Minister and the Prime Minister boasted about the fulfilment of their one laptop per child campaign promise, I am advised and reliably so, that many students, especially, as they progress to the higher Forms, Form 1, Form 2, Form 3, et cetera, were unable to use the technology for various reasons, one of them being the state of disrepair of many of these laptops. They are boasting that the children now have them. Form 1 will have them, Form 2, Form 3, Form 4 Form 5—go to any Form 5 in any school and tell me how many laptops you can see.

I had advised, Mr. Speaker, the hon. Minister in my previous contributions that many of the IT technicians were not qualified to effect the necessary repairs. I was part of an interview panel that selected many of them, but the better qualified ones opted for better paying jobs, they never came. And in any case, the technicians, and there are a few of them, sometimes schools share one, they

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cannot handle the quantum of repairs. I know the Ministry of Education had an arrangement with Memory Bank to repair because they realized what was going on. But apparently that was not good enough. So many laptops were left discarded, parked up in corners. Last time I delivered my budget contribution I brought photographs—the hon. Minister—of laptops parked up in corners of labs and so on. [*Laughter*] What I said?

Mrs. Gopee-Scoon: Minister of laptops.

Mrs. P. Mc Intosh: Well then, he is the Minister of laptops. I brought photographs, but the hon. Minister scoffed at me. He said, “I mock them up”. He sent his IT director a time rushing into a school—I know, I would not call the name—to try to do damage control. Whenever I would make such a claim, the hon. Minister would say, I was speaking untruths. How dare I criticise a major campaign promise, even if those criticisms were meant to be constructive and intended to assist in enhancing the implementation of the technology in the curriculum so that our students could benefit. Even if I meant well, how dare I criticise their campaign.

Mr. Speaker, I see now he is eating his words, because he is now seeking in this—I now see that he is seeking to have \$10 million spent this year to repair computers. He knows that they are in a state of disrepair. And he abused me for it. And I now see he is seeking a warranty extension for the laptops from one year to three years. [*Interruption*] Yes, they called me racist and the other one called me racist too just because I am trying to help. From one year the warranty, from one year he is trying to get it, and they are now going to repair the laptops. When I said it he told me all sorts of things and he did not talk to me for a long while. I was surprised when he started to speak to me again. [*Laughter*] When he called out to me, I said, “Me!”

Dr. Gopeesingh: You know I love you.

Mrs. P. Mc Intosh: He loves me. I love you too.

Anyhow, Mr. Speaker, the status of the technical infrastructure to facilitate the infusion of technology in the curriculum remains the same as 2010 when I first spoke in this honourable House. There is absolutely no improvement—no improvement in the Internet connectivity. For four years the Minister has been saying and promising he is going to increase the connectivity in secondary schools to 50 megabytes and in primary schools 25 megabytes. Nothing has happened. I have my teachers and principals who report to me, you know.

Mr. Speaker, training—[*Interruption*]

Mr. Peters: Still?

Mrs. P. Mc Intosh: I was there too long. Teacher training and technical infrastructure have been so poorly implemented that very little is happening, particularly, in government schools in respect of the use of the technology for pedagogical purposes, that is for teacher and learning, Mr. Speaker. And those students who might have a laptop, whether they borrow a laptop, whether they are fortunate that their laptops are working, most of them cannot get the Internet connectivity in schools, they go to NALIS, they go to Internet Cafes and the people at NALIS tell me that many of them go on sites, lawless places where no rules apply, and they do what they have to do. And this is what this UNC Government is very proud of.

And, Mr. Speaker, I can tell you something: this UNC Government will demit office in 2015 boasting and patting their backs that they fulfilled a campaign promise of giving out 95,000 laptops to children, one laptop per child. Yes, they have given them. How many are working?

4.25 p.m.

That is all they are doing, fulfilling a campaign promise. But despite those 95,000 laptops given out, despite the excess—it must be about \$300 million and something spent on this initiative—this UNC Government will never be able to boast that they succeeded in successfully integrating ICT in the curriculum as an integral part of smart pedagogical practices, [*Desk thumping*] in particular, or in the education process, in general. And I am going to the education process now.

Mr. Speaker, schools had been promised a computerized database system, but this has never materialized because no one at the ICT unit in the Ministry of Education is capable of designing and implementing such a system. The Minister fired the director of IT—I told him he was no good—who was a political appointee in the first place. He held some post in the Minister's constituency executive. Yes. But he did not know what he was doing. He cannot deny that. I know the man, but he did not know what he was doing. He was seeking the assistance of somebody else. He now has two officers in the IT unit who are doing the work, but they are none the wiser. They are limited in their competencies. But there is an expert who has installed computerized database systems in several schools, but this UNC-dominated Government has refused to utilize his competencies because they have branded him a PNM. That is what they do. From

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the time you are a PNM, get out, “doh care what yuh competency”. I could speak personally to that, eh. [*Crosstalk*] Wait.

Currently, such a system is being used at approximately 35 schools throughout the country of Trinidad and Tobago and they were installed by this expert, and I am going to call the schools. Go and ask them: Asja Boys’ and Girls’, San Fernando; Lakshmi Girls’ and Vishnu Boys’ Hindu Schools; all the St. Joseph Convents—Port of Spain, San Fernando, St. Joseph; Holy Name Convent; St. Benedict’s College; Bishop’s Anstey Girls’ High School; Trinity College; Holy Faith Convents, Couva and Penal; Naparima Boys’ College, to name a few. I could give you the whole list.

Call your good friend. I am telling the hon. Minister he should call his good friend, Dr. Michael Dowlath, a lovely gentleman, an excellent educator par excellence, the Principal of Naparima Boys’, and ask him about the efficiency and the effectiveness of the system. Do not take my word for it.

Mr. Speaker, the denominational schools that implemented the computerized database system did not require to do so—the approval from the Ministry of Education. Those board schools enjoy a certain autonomy in respect to how they expend their funding. Government schools have to beg the Ministry for approval to spend their funding. The few government schools like St. Francois Girls’ College that have managed to install a computerized database system—which was in my time—have been able to do so through their own fundraising efforts that are time-consuming, and negatively affect the delivery of the curriculum because teachers have to get involved in raising funds and they bite into the pockets of poor parents.

Mr. Speaker, the sad part is that presently a vast number of government secondary schools—and I want the Minister to hear this—are applying for approvals from the Ministry to use their own budget allocation that was given to them by the Ministry. They are not asking the Ministry for any more money; their own budget allocation to implement that said system, but to no avail. I will call some of them: Success Laventille; Tunapuna Sec.; Cunupia Sec; Malabar Sec; Five Rivers Sec; Barataria Sec. And when the principals ask for an explanation why their proposals for approval have been denied, one officer in the IT unit told a principal: “Because I say so.” That is the disrespect for principals. And another principal asked: “Could you please put it in writing?” The reply was: “We do not respond to principals in writing.” Mr. Speaker, the disrespect, the disdain and disregard that they have for principals. Mr. Speaker, they lucky they do not have to deal with me. They lucky they to do not have to deal with me.

Mr. Speaker, this is what is happening with the integration of ICT in schools, and I would like the Minister to address this. So the poor, little government schools are being made to suffer, being kept back because of the arrogance, gross incompetence and inefficiency of some ministry officials.

I have to refer to this proposal, and I want you to listen to it, Mr. Speaker. This is from the Mayaro Secondary School that proposed—“ah doh want to read too much”—his rationale and his assessment was, and I quote:

“Based on the discussions with school representatives, it has been decided that the school should embark upon building its own Campus-Wide Wireless Local Area network...This is a direct attempt to facilitate the day to day administrative functions and curriculum needs of the school. This decision has been taken in an attempt to maximize the use of the resources...”

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, you know, under Standing Order, I think it is 12(2), we suspend at 4.30. However, because of the budget debate and how we have been breaking for lunch, I do not want to do it at this time, and for the rest of this period, that is the budget debate, I would like, with your leave, to allow the Member to complete her 45 minutes original speaking time, as well as the extension of 10 minutes, and we will take our suspension for tea at 4.46. Do I have the agreement of the House?

Assent indicated.

Hon. Member, you may continue, please.

Mrs. P. Mc Intosh: Mr. Speaker, how much time do I have again?

Mr. Speaker: In terms of original speaking time, you go until 4.36, and then you have an extension of 10 more minutes, thereafter.

Mrs. P. Mc Intosh: Mr. Speaker, I am getting compensatory time for when you spoke? [*Laughter*] No?

Hon. Member: On the next occasion.

Mr. Speaker: You will get compensatory—

Mrs. P. Mc Intosh: No, no, no, no, no that is unfair.

Mr. Speaker, let me read from this proposal from the Mayaro School:

“Based on the discussions with school representatives, it has been decided that the school should embark upon building its own Campus-Wide Wireless Local Area network...This is a direct attempt to facilitate the day to day

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administrative functions and curriculum needs of the school. This decision has been taken in an attempt to maximize the use of the resources (Laptops, projectors, printers and other hardware and software) that have been provided by the Ministry of Education for both staff and student use. This initiative, in addition to providing network and internet connectivity throughout the school's compound, would also positively impact the delivery of the curriculum with the use of technology and greatly improve the efficiency of the administrative functions."

Mr. Speaker, I cannot read any more, but a principal is giving a rationale, a logical explanation of why it would help and he is being denied. Yes, he gave it to me. And if the Minister is serious about infusing ICT into the education process, then why is this happening? Mr. Speaker, a computerized database system would allow administrators to record, to compute and to track and monitor student progress, and to track and monitor school progress in terms of individual subject areas. It would facilitate whole school progress reports, in terms of performance and attendance, so that timely interventions could be made to halt decline and to ensure progress. Such a system would also facilitate the storage of data and the generation of students' reports and transcripts, a process that is efficient and saves valuable time.

An official of the IT unit asked the principal: "Why do you want a database to generate reports and transcripts? What happen to the report books they used to use in my day? They not good enough for you?" That is the retrograde approach of some officers at the Ministry of Education. Hon. Minister—Mr. Speaker, through you—it might not be you. "Ah know yuh trying, but yuh have some staff there, yuh have tuh get rid of more of dem." Get rid of them! Bring my people. They will work "fer yuh". They want "tuh work fer yuh".

Dr. Gopeesingh: I want you to work for me.

Mrs. P. Mc Intosh: "Ah will tell yuh." And while schools—[*Crosstalk*] "Ah lookin unhappy? Ah lookin unhappy?" You know what I have to do?"

And while schools are being denied the opportunity to improve and modernize their operations, the Minister is upbraiding principals. I saw him in "de paper" upbraiding a principal and calling for an audit on school's operations. What the Minister—if he takes my advice—should be doing instead, is assessing the extent to which the inefficient and incompetent bureaucracy of his Ministry is frustrating the efforts of principals to transform their schools into effective and efficient teaching and learning institutions.

Furthermore, he is talking about funding the principals, when they audit and the funding they receive, but it is pitifully inadequate. The Minister says his Ministry is giving \$1 million and \$2 million to schools. Which schools? A few schools. Because many principals that I spoke with said that all they are getting is a little over \$700,000, and those moneys have to be used for educational needs.

Mr. Speaker, even if they are getting \$1 million, I know what it is. One million dollars is nothing. When I used to get \$1 million, I used to cry for education needs, such as: minor equipment; supplies for various departments; science labs; home ec, IA; office supplies; stationery supplies—ink for printers, a whole host of things; paper. And you know, when you ask parents to help you out, the poor parents “vex”, and the Ministry is coming down on principals. The money is not enough.

Instead of reprimanding principals, the hon. Minister should be making every effort to ensure that they have all the necessary tools and funding to transform their schools into effective and efficient learning institutions. The Minister should support them; I am telling him again. Last year I told him that also—supporting and encouraging them, not berating them.

I came across an article in the *Sunday Guardian* of May 18, 2014, that Hillary Clinton heaped praises on Trinidad and Tobago for advancements in Early Childhood Care and Education. Mr. Speaker, I could not help but think that all the rhetoric contained in that article does not reflect the reality of our education system under this Government. I cannot blame Mrs. Clinton because she does not reside in Trinidad and Tobago. She is totally unaware of the reality and she could only speak from the standpoint of the information which she has been given. So that when she praises the hon. Minister—

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, the question is that the speaking time of the hon. Member for Port of Spain North/St. Ann's West be extended by 10 minutes.

Question put and agreed to.

You may continue, hon. Member.

Mrs. P. Mc Intosh: Having been robbed of five minutes.

Mr. Speaker, when Hillary Clinton praises the hon. Minister for the Early Childhood and Care Education initiative, little does she know that to date there are many UTT, Early Childhood Care and Education graduates who have been struggling over the past years to obtain placements in these ECCE centres. Those

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who have managed to obtain placements have had to resign from the service, forfeit their longevity of service and their pensions and whatever benefits, in order to take up a contract position with the Ministry of Education as an ECCE teacher.

I wonder what Hillary Clinton would think about this unreasonable option offered to teachers who, after spending four years acquiring the competencies to teach in our ECCE centres, are instead forced to remain in the primary school system teaching Standards 1 to 5 unless they wish to resign their permanent positions and give up all their benefits to take up an ECCE position.

Mr. Speaker, I have to leave out—I have so much to say on education, but I have to leave it out because I was robbed of some time.

The Government is boasting that they have increased—[*Interruption*]

Hon. Member: Who rob you?

Miss Cox: Ten minutes.

Mrs. P. Mc Intosh: Nobody, Mr. Speaker. Nobody robbed me.

Mr. Speaker, Government is boasting that they have increased [*Crosstalk*] “People just talking” during my time, Mr. Speaker.

Government is boasting that they have increased enrolment in GATE from 42 per cent in 2010 to 67 per cent in 2014. But they are playing the number semantics, I call it. They are playing smart with the figures, juggling them again. What they have done is included the enrolment of the tech/voc institutes, instituted under PNM, the John Donaldson and the San Fernando Technical Institute and even the youth camps, which they have incorporated under the umbrella of the GATE programme, and so they have arrived at this incredulous figure of 67 per cent enrolment, which is a 25 per cent increase over four years. Who will believe that?

Mr. Speaker, you know, 60 per cent enrolment in tertiary level is a hallmark of First World status, but there are other criteria. There are other benchmarks. There are other indicators for a country being awarded that label of First World status: you have economic stability; poverty eradication; cost of living; social programmes; human resources development, et cetera. We do not deserve to be called a First World country. How could we be called a First World country? This Government has run this country down, transformed this country into a banana republic.

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Let us look at our moral and social indices. Look at the havoc that the drug trade is reeking among the young people in our country. Look at the crime rate which I alluded to when I began. Look at the corruption index which I referred to. Look at this Government's lack of accountability and transparency in its dealings that have been the headlines of many a newspaper article. Look at the allegations of financial impropriety. Look at the LifeSport Programme that went from \$6 million to \$300 million. Look at this Government's questionable procurement practices with lucrative contracts to UNC supporters, like SIS. Look at the FCB share purchase fiasco. Look at the situation of the 5.5 Invader's Bay tenders fiasco.

4.40 p.m.

Look at this Government's undemocratic and unconstitutional approach to governance—and speaking after I read all of those newspaper articles—that it used its majority to railroad legislation through this honourable House in spite and despite of the will of the people. Some—not me, Mr. Speaker, I did not call it, I read in the papers, they call it Gestapo politics. Look at the inequitable distribution of the State's resources to address the needs of the people; the level of neglect of the PNM constituencies. Look at the nepotism, political “patronism”, cronyism; placing political appointees in positions for which they are unqualified and unsuited. This has led to the degradation of many of our state enterprises, especially Petrotrin.

Mr. Speaker, they could talk all they want; they could do all they want to do; they could pat themselves on the back all that they wish to pat themselves; they could claim all they wish to claim; they could spend as much money as they want purchasing laptops for students, but unless this UNC Government effectively and efficiently addresses the ills that have threatened to rip apart the moral and social fabric of our society, unless they place national development before political agenda and self-serving interest; unless this UNC Government builds up all our communities, empowers all our people to the provision of sound education, sustainable opportunities for employment, adequate housing accommodation, meaningful and sustainable social programmes; unless they begin to develop the characters of our children at a very tender age, to inculcate within them sound values and morals, and develop our human resource potential to enable our people to become strong citizens, capable of making a meaningful contribution to our society, the neglect and inequalities will persist, and many of our citizens will

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continue to harbour feelings of betrayal by this Government, and the corruption, crime and murders will continue, and the moral and social fabric of our society will remain tenuous, and our beloved Trinidad and Tobago will still remain a nation in crisis, a nation without a soul, a failed State.

Mr. Speaker, as I end, I must recall Matthew, chapter 16, verse 26:

“...what doth it profit a man, if he gain the whole world and suffer the loss of his own soul”

Thank you, Mr. Speaker. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Speaker: When we return, we will recognize the Member for Caroni East and the Minister of Education but I must say something before we take our suspension. When the Member for Port of Spain North/St. Ann’s West was on her legs, she made reference on a few occasions to statements made against her by Members of this honourable House. When that statement was made about discrimination and race, the Member did withdraw those remarks, and therefore, I would not want the hon. Member to leave here believing that anyone in this House is categorizing her in any kind of negative way.

May I say that there is no place in debates in this House for allegations of racism against other Members. That constitutes an imputation of improper motives or a personal reflection against another Member. Such an allegation is a lazy debating method and Members ought to concentrate on developing intelligent arguments about the subjects before this honourable House. This Speaker will not permit allegations of racism to be addressed to other Members in this House. There is no room or space or place for such allegations in this august Chamber.

I, therefore, appeal to hon. Members to refrain from such allegations against other Members in this honourable House which is an unhealthy personalization of issues and debate. So, Members are asked to be guided accordingly.

Hon. Members, it is a good time for us to take the tea break. This sitting is now suspended until 5.15 p.m.

4.45 p.m.: *Sitting suspended.*

5.15 p.m.: *Sitting resumed.*

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Minister of Education and Member of Parliament for Caroni East.

The Minister of Education (Hon. Dr. Tim Gopeesingh): Mr. Speaker, I rise with a deep sense of pride and honour to be part of this dedicated, smart and hard-working, motivated and energized team of Government Ministers, my colleagues, led by our distinguished, transformative and visionary leader and Prime Minister, Mrs. Kamla Persad-Bissessar, someone who continues to lead her team to rebuild our society, restoring trust with greater transparency and accountability in Government, and ensuring that all our oil and gas wealth, and a now diversified economy, are truly used for the development of our nation and our people.

Mr. Speaker, I want to just go back to the response of the Member of Parliament for Diego Martin West, the Opposition Leader. From my perspective, in my 12 years being part of the annual budget debate—five years in the Upper House and seven years here—I believe that I have witnessed one of the weakest responses from any Leader of the Opposition. I believe it lacked clarity, it lacked a purpose, it lacked a vision, and loaded with inaccuracies. Even the Member found difficulty in understanding and reading his own script, and there were some inaudible stutterings along the way. I believe it was a confused contribution. It was lacking inspiration and caring, uninspiring, and I would have expected the Leader of the Opposition who is aspiring to better things would have made a more significant response.

Permit me, Mr. Speaker, to congratulate our Minister of Finance and the Economy who has in this, his second budget presentation, shown conclusively the economic transformation and solid achievements of our Government, and positioning Trinidad and Tobago now and in the future with greater fiscal discipline and expansion, fulfilling our promises, shaping our future, economic inclusiveness in an innovation-driven growth economy with greater equity, more meaningful participation and a rising tide of prosperity for all.

Our Government and our Ministers continue to redesign and re-engineer our systems of governance, our system of delivery and service to the people as you have heard from a number of our colleagues, this evening by the Member of Parliament for Tabaquite. All of this despite the economic turmoil still being experienced in other parts of the world and even right here in our neighbouring Caribbean: in Jamaica, in Barbados, in Grenada. Stability and growth of our economy, positioned for a sustainable development, we have been emphasizing, as we move to fiscal prudence and discipline. Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Finance and the Economy has done a remarkable job in steering Trinidad and Tobago over the last two years following from his predecessor, the now Minister

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of Foreign Affairs.

The Member for Diego Martin North/East spoke about we have not done anything to increase the GDP, and he was commenting on negative aspects of the GDP. It is in black and white. The IMF projects a 3.4 per cent growth in 2014 and a 4.0 per cent in 2015. So it debunks all the statements being made by the Member for Diego Martin North/East this morning. Even Moody's, the rating agency, says they predict 2.9 per cent for 2014 and 3.2 per cent in 2015. So, at an average, it is about 3.1 per cent in 2014 and about 3.5 per cent in 2015. And they are saying—the other side is trying to say that there is no economic growth in this country. Mr. Speaker, the truth, the facts speak for themselves.

When we took over in 2010, there was economic decline and the whole economy was contracting. Unemployment now averages 3.6 per cent, the lowest in the history of Trinidad and Tobago, [*Desk thumping*] coming down from 7.8 per cent in 2010; inflation, 5.1 per cent in 2013 and is projected to be 3.5 per cent for the first half of 2014. It is the first time in 21 years, food price inflation remained in single digits for six consecutive months.

Our gross official reserves and this is noteworthy. There has been a lot of talk about our putting money into the Heritage and Stabilisation Fund: we have not put any money into the fund and we did not put any money in a particular year. The facts speak for themselves. We moved the gross official reserves from US \$9.7 billion in 2010 to \$2.2 billion by June 2014; US \$0.5 billion which is TT \$3.2 billion. This Heritage and Stabilisation Fund, in 2010, was US \$3.17 billion. Now, it is US \$5.6 billion.

So where has this money gone from 2010 to 2014? It is the People's Partnership Government that has put in approximately US \$2.5 billion into the Heritage and Stabilisation Fund. So together, with the gross official reserves of \$10.2 billion and the Heritage and Stabilisation Fund of \$5.6 billion, totalling US \$15.68 billion, we have now, in gross official reserves, TT \$101 billion in reserves for Trinidad and Tobago. That is a remarkable feat by any government; [*Desk thumping*] \$101 billion, more than 12 months of import cover.

Foreign direct investment has been approximately US two point something billion for the last three years. We have a stable exchange rate. Our interest rates are low. And so, nearly TT \$20 billion added in our reserves and \$31 billion paid in debts to Clico, HCU, wage settlements, for contractors and VAT refunds. The Minister of Finance and the Economy has steered Trinidad and Tobago on a

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steady course, and has moved Trinidad and Tobago out of any financial difficulty with strong financial discipline and fiscal acuity. He ought to be sincerely congratulated. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Speaker, let me respond to the Member for Diego Martin West a little more. Some of his statements are: we are “irresponsible”; we are “reckless”; it is “dangerous fiscal management”—the—“country has ever seen”. What I just described? What I just described: the success of the Minister of Finance and the Economy. Do we see any area of fiscal indiscipline? Do you see our fiscal management to be dangerous? So when the Member for Diego Martin West makes these irresponsible type of statements, he ought to take it back because the facts are there for everyone to see and for everyone to appreciate. So these are statements made in vacuo just for the sake of trying to be negative and to try to win points, but we do not agree with him at all when he makes those types of statements.

I want to go to the question of PNM track record of surpluses from 2003 to 2008. I want to quote from the *Hansard* in terms of what he said and I read the Leader of the Opposition’s response:

“With that embarrassing fact as its legacy, the Government is now looking for PNM company by attempting to mislead the population so as not to be held accountable for its own fiscal irresponsibility.”

5.25 p.m.

What I said just a while ago, was there any evidence of fiscal irresponsibility? Absolutely none.

“We will have none of it. The truth must be told to our children, notwithstanding the best efforts of the Prime Minister and the Minister of Finance and the Economy.”

And I go on.

“Contrary to what they are now trying to peddle to the population, except for 2009, the year of the global collapse which led to a recession, which affected us here,”—this is the important point—“the previous PNM Government had been consistently running budget surpluses as follows:

2004, \$1.5 billion in surplus;

2005, \$5 billion;

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2006, \$7.713 billion;

2007, \$2.298 billion surplus;

2008, \$12.13 billion in surplus;

2009, as I mentioned before, the year of the collapse and the recession, we went into deficit of \$6.68 billion.”

Mr. Speaker, absolutely wrong, inaccurate, false, misleading and I will show you why now.

This is a copy of the Auditor General’s Report. This is an official document of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago, the Auditor General’s Report. Dr. Rowley speaks about surpluses from 2004. Mr. Speaker, I have the Auditor General’s Report of April 26, 2007: the deficit, the balance of the exchequer account at the end of financial years 2002 to 2006. In 2002, the deficit was \$0.424 billion. Here it is, Mr. Speaker. The deficit in 2003, \$0.537 billion; in 2004, \$2.230 billion; in 2005, \$3.046 billion deficit; in 2006, \$4.707 billion deficit. Mr. Speaker, this is the graph showing the deficit going all along from 2002 to 2007, and here it is what the Member of Parliament for Diego Martin West has been talking about. He said surplus in 2004, \$5 billion surplus in 2005; \$7.7 billion in 2006; 2008, \$12.13 billion in surplus. Mr. Speaker, where is the surplus? This is the Auditor General’s Report. How can the Member of Parliament for Diego Martin West, the Leader of the Opposition, come to mislead the House in his budget response?

Miss Roopnarine: Irresponsible.

Hon. Dr. T. Gopeesingh: Grossly irresponsible, trying to hoodwink the population. I have a copy after the statement and this is the budget deficit. I would give—anybody could go on to the Auditor General’s Report to see that, Mr. Speaker, and I have the Auditor General’s Report as well, on April 28, 2011.

In 2006, the deficit \$1.681 billion; 2007 deficit, \$1.072 billion. Only in 2008 they had a surplus of \$95 million. In 2009, a deficit of \$5.165 billion and 2010, \$2.441 billion. Mr. Speaker, the graphs all over showing that over these years, between 2002 to 2010, there were major deficits by the People’s National Movement Government, want to criticize our Prime Minister and our Government to say that they had surpluses and it is the total untruth. These are the Auditor General’s Report of—and it is re-emphasized on April 25, 2012.

So, I want to debunk that and to indicate—and hear what he went on to say:

“The Prime Minister’s statement on this matter and the numerous instances of

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the Minister of Finance and the Economy not coming clean on this budget confirms that we cannot trust anything this Government tells us. [*Desk thumping*] What they do not attempt to hide by omission, they misrepresent by naked untruths.”

Mr. Speaker, who was misrepresenting? Who was speaking more naked untruths? The Leader of the Opposition came to this Parliament in his budget— [*Interruption*]

Miss Cox: “I thought we doing the Standing Orders.”

Hon. Dr. T. Gopeesingh: Mr. Speaker. Right, Mr. Speaker. The next thing I want to go on to is the question of the vision of the Leader of the Opposition and the PNM. And it seems as though they were living in cloud nine and they were in deep slumber, because if the Leader of the Opposition can come now and say that the PNM now commits to an immediate major shift in focus to the primary school system.

“It is our view that many of the well-known major shortcomings which reveal themselves in the secondary school system have their origins in the primary school system. It therefore follows that if we are to get maximum returns for the continuous large capital outlays which are expended in the secondary and post secondary”—levels, yet—“the time has come for major targeted intervention at the primary foundation level of the school overall structure... We also know that in many communities the social stresses of the homes and the streets flow into the primary school classrooms, oftentimes branding young innocence as failures even before they get their first chance.”

Mr. Speaker, when we came into office in 2010, we searched the shelves of every aspect of the Ministry of Education to see what task force reports, what recommendations were made and what previous administrations wanted to implement. And by December 2010, in the first 20 days, we had a number of quick wins. We set up a business development report and from that business development report, we moved to our strategic goals and a strategic plan 2011—2015 and our strategic plan of 2011—2015, we patterned that plan, based on what we promised to the people in education.

“Human Development, Inclusivity, Diversity, Wellness & Competitiveness”.

And hear what it speaks, our manifesto:

“Building the Foundation for an Intelligent Nation and a Creative Economy

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Early Childhood, Primary and Secondary Education”

In our manifesto 2010; the Member for Diego Martin West come in 2015 and now talking about primary education.

“...our young people are literate, numerate and possess critical thinking skills...curriculum reform to address the needs of 21st century development and the labour market needs of the society.”

Mr. Speaker we have had curriculum reform of the ECCE. We have had curriculum reform of the primary school education, and we are moving swiftly to reform the secondary school curriculum at the moment, and I will speak a little more about it.

“At the pre-school level, self-confident, creative, enterprising children must be the goal.”

That is the ECCE.

“The primary school must ensure that our children are literate, numerate, and aware of e-learning and internet-based opportunities...critical thinkers...creativity...entrepreneurial outlook...focus on all learners not just the academically gifted.

We will, therefore, embark on curriculum reform to address the needs of 21st century development and to build a foundation for responsible citizenship and the optimisation of multiple talents, including talent in the arts and sports.”

Mr. Speaker, these we promised in 2010, and we have delivered. Within two years we delivered the primary school curriculum reform and the ECCE reform.

“At the secondary level...more participatory education strategy that is problem-based...problem solvers and solution providers...”

- We will rework curricula for the early childhood care and education and the primary school to prepare the ground for seamless transition between the two.”

Mr. Speaker, we have delivered early childhood education curriculum, primary school curriculum.

“The focus will be on building self-confidence, the development of social skills, strengthening attention...promoting creativity at the early childhood level to build the foundation for 21st century literacy, critical thinking, creativity and entrepreneurship through general knowledge at primary level.

- We will reform the curriculum at secondary level...”

This is what we are doing, Mr. Speaker:

- “• We will incorporate learning diversity...civic responsibility into the curriculum”.

Mr. Speaker, in our primary school curriculum reform, while Singapore was talking about bringing in morals and values and ethics into their education system, I met with the Minister down there. He went to a meeting with principals and after two days on the headlines in Singapore: morals, values and ethics will be in the school curriculum now. We had already started it.

In 2011, we had massive consultations throughout Trinidad and Tobago and the people said they wanted physical education and visual and performing arts to be in the curriculum and we went about to introduce morals, values, ethics, citizenry development, character development, agriscience, science, health and family life education and these are now parts that are being tested.

So when the Member for Diego Martin West is speaking about now going into primary school curriculum, we are way past that four and a half years ago. We have implemented that four and a half years ago, and we are on our way in our journey. Trinidad and Tobago is recognized worldwide as one of the leading countries in education. We are leaders in the world in education. We are leaders in ICT. We have a seamless education programme, and I will speak about that a little more in a while, from early childhood to primary to secondary to post-secondary to university. We have universal primary education and universal secondary education, universal tertiary education up to the undergraduate level. The post-graduate level, 50 per cent of it is paid for the Masters and the PhD and those who win scholarships for the Bachelor’s degree, they get full scholarships. And now we are bringing on universal early childhood education.

Mr. Speaker:

“The connected classroom

Focus on Literacy Development

Community partners in education

Facilitating Persons Living with Disabilities and Special Needs

Improving the Administration of Education

Facilitating Access to Education

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Quality in Teaching and Learning
Addressing Known Weaknesses”

Mr. Speaker, all of this here is what we promised the population in 2010. We are about 85 per cent delivered and we are moving to deliver 100 per cent. [*Desk thumping*] What we promised, we have it.

We identified 16 prioritized areas and our prioritized areas are listed and we have been delivering on them, and they are as follows: Educational Services: laptop initiative, universal early childhood education, literacy and numeracy, expansion of CVQ at the secondary level; Students/Children Understanding: pilot testing and neurodiagnostic of Children; Exam, Testing and Assessment: change of date of the S.E.A. which gave tremendous improvements for the students, continuous assessment component; Value Outcomes Performance Measures: improving academic performance—I would speak about it—improving infrastructure in schools; Teacher Training and Development; curriculum reform; human resource management full computerization; organizational restructuring and institutional strengthening; a communications strategy; career guidance and parenting. These are booklets—these are paper bookmarkers. All our principals have it. All our supervisors have it. All our Ministry of Education officials have it, and we have been working steadfastly on these 16 prioritized areas.

So, when the Leader of the Opposition speaks and gives false information about track record, surpluses and irresponsible and reckless government, and so on, and we are proceeding to fail spectacularly and regularly, that is a myth and a fallacy. It is a propagation of false and untruths, Mr. Speaker, deliberate and mischievous, and we would have none of that.

Mr. Speaker, I now move into the full depth of education. Nelson Mandela said every educated person is not rich, but almost every educated person has a job and a way out of poverty. So education is a fundamental solution to poverty.

“Education is the most powerful weapon which you can use to change the world.”

5.40 p.m.

“The philosophy of the schoolroom in one generation will be the philosophy of government in the next.”

These are the words that, obviously, resonate with our distinguished Prime Minister when she was Minister of Education between 1997 and 2001 when she

helped to set the records and the manifesto of what we need in education, and where she has directed the Ministers of Finance to put the largest slice of the expenditure on an annual basis, to education—close to 16 to 17 per cent of the annual expenditure put in education. [*Desk thumping*] Close to 6 per cent of the GDP, higher than the amounts spent by developed countries of the world which put 12 to 14 per cent of the annual expenditure in some of the developed countries and less than 5 per cent of the GDP. Our Prime Minister has ensured that education for human development, capital development, must be there for sustainable development.

Abraham Lincoln said the foundation of every State is the education of its youth. The Member for Oropouche West spoke this morning about the strength of the education that we are giving to our youth population, not only from my aspect at the Ministry of Education, but Minister Karim of Tertiary Education and Skills Training.

Education is simply the soul of a society as it passes from one generation to another. John F. Kennedy said, let us think of education as the means of developing our greatest abilities, because in each of us there is a private hope and dream which, fulfilled, can be translated into benefit for everyone and greater strength for our nation. The former United Nations Secretary General, Kofi Annan, said:

“Knowledge is power. Information is liberating. Education is the premise of progress, in every society, in every family.”

Mr. Speaker, the words of our distinguished Prime Minister, no child must be left behind and every child must be given a fair share. The watch words that we work with in the Ministry of Education: equity for every child, accessibility and quality education. Three watchwords. The work that we have been doing has been so well-recognized internationally that, at a world global education forum in Mumbai, where you had a number of ministers of education, we were awarded as one of the seven countries around the world to have received an honour for our work in education in Mumbai. [*Desk thumping*]

When we were in London, 102 ministers of education looked to see what were some of the areas in education that we should be dealing with; they came up with two things: student-centred development and ICT in education. If we leave out ICT in education, we would be left behind. Trinidad and Tobago, despite what you are hearing from the Member for Port of Spain North/St. Ann’s West, is leading and

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is in the forefront of ICT in education, [*Desk thumping*] not only in the Caribbean but in the world.

Mr. Speaker, let me just touch on that, now: 95,000 laptops would be given by September. [*Desk thumping*] Five thousand have been given to teachers, principals and supervisors and we can get to them in half a minute. We can communicate with our principals and supervisors now. We have given 5,000 to teachers and we have trained thousands of teachers at different levels of ICT—an infusion of ICT with the curriculum. We have 126 secondary schools with computer labs, some ranging from one to six computer labs and some computer labs have up to 60 computers, and all are working.

There might be some areas where there are some deficiencies, but wherever there are deficiencies, we have been correcting them. Three hundred-plus of our primary schools have computer labs and we are moving to get the other 150 with computer labs before our first term in office in 2015.

Audiovisual rooms: Most of our schools have audiovisual rooms with multimedia projectors. We have given 500 smart television sets, projectors and radios to all our schools in Trinidad and Tobago so that they could use the multimedia aspect of education. We are putting interactive whiteboards in some of our schools and the icing is on now. We are one of the few countries in the world that has 21st Century smart classrooms.

Twenty of our schools—10 primary and 10 secondary—do now have 21st Century smart classrooms. There are only 600 schools throughout the world that we are aware of, because Samsung is the pioneer in it and Samsung has indicated that we are pioneers in this education process where a teacher can stay with the tablet, have 20 students, 30 students, with tablets and interact with them through an interactive whiteboard and they can see what the students are doing in their class, take the students off if they are doing wrong things and bring them back on. That is where we have reached in ICT in education in our country. We have over 150 technicians servicing these schools, primary and secondary schools, and we have close to 300 ICT teachers in our schools and we are going to employ another 94 based on an assessment that we did.

While we are doing this in Trinidad and Tobago, the United States is still fighting up. I just want to quote from a White House release on February 04 last year, where President Obama has been looking for “...connectivity and educational technology into classrooms, and into the hands of teachers trained on its advantages.” He asked for support from some of the companies around the

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world and Apple, AT&T, Microsoft, Sprint, Verizon, gave President Obama about \$100 million each. He collected about \$2 billion to put laptops into students' hands.

In the United States ConnectED is about more than wire and wireless, it is about getting tablets and laptops into the students' hands, loading them with high-quality educational software and content and ensuring students continue this learning at home through wireless connectivity and he was hoping to start this in 2014. We started this in 2010. We are ahead of the United States as far as ICT in classrooms is concerned.

We hosted a symposium here with the Organization of American States and IDB and we had countries from across the Caribbean and Latin America who came to see what we were doing. We had a two-day workshop on the virtual education and we were an example to the rest of the Caribbean and Latin America. Now Trinidad and Tobago is being considered by the OAS and the IDB to be the headquarters of the virtual-education type of classroom. So, we can sell the technology and the type of learning and pedagogical skills through the infusion of ICT in the curriculum to the rest of the Caribbean and Latin American countries.

So, Mr. Speaker, we, of course, realize that there are some laptop computers that are not working. It is inevitable; they would be four and five years old now. Some of the screens and some of the boards are not working. This is why the Minister of Finance and the Economy has put in \$10 million so that we can repair these laptops. Remember when we purchased these laptops we purchased them at a one-year warranty. We looked at the cost factor. If we had to go with a three-year warranty it would have cost an extraordinary amount.

Mr. Speaker, the first set of laptops we bought cost \$4,000 per unit with everything: the battery pack, the bags and everything, 15 Microsoft applications, et cetera. Today, four years later, the cost that the Central Tenders Board has just approved, some time ago, is \$2,259 for the laptops now. So, we have moved down from \$4,000 for one to \$2,250 for one now. [*Desk thumping*] There can be no question as far as the accountability, transparency and the probity in the procurement of these laptops. It stands solid and open for anyone to see. So, we have brought down the cost of these.

There is a tender that was before Central Tenders Board recently for Wi-Fi connectivity. The Member for Port of Spain North/St. Ann's West alluded to it. Wi-Fi connectivity for all schools and Internet connectivity. Now, you do not go

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ahead bombarding the population and trying to get anything without a solid procurement. This is a lot of money that it will cost the country so we are careful of how we do our tendering. It was before the Central Tenders Board; the Minister of Science and Technology will tell you that, So, that is on the way and we, hopefully, will be able to have broadband connectivity to all schools. By doing that, the Member for Tabaquite alluded to the fact that when you have that 95,000 laptops, multiply that by four in a household, it is approximately 380,000 people will be exposed to computer literacy and ICT literacy.

Mr. Speaker, that is one-third of our population. So, when we bring on the broadband connectivity, and the Wi-Fi, neighbourhoods around the school would be able to get some Wi-Fi assistance from the same type of system that the school will have. So, we will be including the wider population into the whole process of Wi-Fi. [*Interruption*] It will be free of charge, the Minister of Science and Technology is saying.

So, Mr. Speaker, let us go to curriculum. As I said, we have done the rework of the ECCE curriculum; numeracy and literacy. We have done the primary school curriculum. The last curriculum reform in primary schools was done in 1997 under the Panday-led administration. I was part of that team that was working on that curriculum in 1997 with Mr. Morgan Job, Bhoewar Tawar and a few of us. Since 1997 no work had been done on the primary school curriculum reform and in 2010, 2011 we succeeded. There is a new curriculum rewrite, it is there for everyone and the students are benefiting tremendously now with the continuous assessment component.

So, we are showing now that the students must be educated in the context of what is education for our children. There was no value outcome ever written anywhere as far as what is education for our children. We decided that we would put a vision and a mission statement. Unquestionably, education must be the realization of the fullest potential of a child. The child must grow up to be socially and culturally integrated into society. The child must be brought to be mature and happy and the child must be physically fit and well nutritioned.

So, it gives the opportunity for a multidisciplinary approach to education in schools. This is why we have brought in the physical education and the visual and the performing arts, citizenry development, character development, agricultural science in primary schools.

Let me just now move to special needs. That is part of our promise to the population in the manifesto. We have special needs students: autism, dyslexia, attention deficit hyperactivity disorder, visual disturbance, auditory disturbance, Down's syndrome, cerebral palsy, neuromuscular diseases, et cetera; emotional, behavioural, psychological abnormalities of students.

We now have 25 schools in Trinidad and Tobago providing education for special needs students—14 government and 11 private—and 3,000-plus students, who have different disabilities are benefiting from this education. The Government, the Ministry of Education is paying for these students.

We now have a seamless education system from an inclusive education model, special needs students are accepted into the normal school. We are not excluding them, we are bringing them in and at the moment we have at least 200 students with AIDS, working with them in the mainstream of the education process. This is why recently you saw the photograph of one of our brilliant students getting passes in eight subjects who was seriously visually disturbed, but we have provided the Braille and we have provided the teacher aide for the students. So, there are a few hundred students in the system now who are benefiting from that.

Mr. Speaker, as a result of our dedicated effort and special needs students, Cabinet passed a note for 732 special needs education professionals to be on board. So we employed guidance counsellors, guidance officers, schools social workers, clinical, behavioural and educational psychologists. They are all now in our schools. Approximately close to 700 of them are there now; educational and behavioural and clinical psychologists, school social workers, we have a guidance officer and a guidance counsellor for each secondary school now and some schools have two and they take about two or three of the primary schools to work with as well. We are now calling on all the CBOs and NGOs and private sector institutions to collaborate and work with us at the Ministry of Education in partnership to bring about more education for our special needs students all over Trinidad and Tobago.

Hon. Member: They talk and we deliver.

Hon. Dr. T. Gopeesingh: Yes.

I have been mandated to build more special needs schools and this is what we are about to commence pretty shortly. We have been collaborating with the

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Ministry of Health and thanks to my colleague, the Minister of Health, for auditory and visual testing of our students in the primary schools and managing and treating these students who have audio difficulty and visual difficulty with spectacles, hearing aids and in some cases, middle ear surgery.

Dr. Khan: Cochlear implants.

Hon. Dr. T. Gopeesingh: Cochlear implants. That is it. Thank you, Minister. So this is part of the work that we are doing as far as special needs.

5.55 p.m.

Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister had mandated me as Minister of Education to bring about Universal Early Childhood Education. I have the honour and privilege to say today, that we are close, very close to achieving this goal of Universal Early Childhood Education. We have built 53 new Early Childhood Education Centres, 54 more will be built, that would provide 7,000 student places. At the moment, we are providing 10,000 places for students, ages three and four; that is 17,000.

We have just partnered with 182 private ECCE Centres which we have found to be satisfactory. In fact, we visited all 735 so-called registered ECCE Centres, kindergartens and nurseries. Our ECCE team went out, they found 555 of these to be suitable: infrastructure, teacher to student ratio, use of the curriculum, everything. Out of these 555, which will be providing education for about 20,000 students, multiply just by 40—182 of these have already partnered with us at the Ministry of Education. We are paying for close to 5,500 students, ages three to four in Early Childhood Education Centres beginning this September here, Mr. Speaker. While I speak, I believe the cheques are being written for these schools which have taken in these students. [*Desk thumping*] So we are providing 10,000 places already and 5,500 with these partners; that is 15,500.

We are going to be building the schools for 7,500, that is 23,000; 240 others, which are found to be satisfactory, are already providing places for 10,000 students, and these students are in the schools, but their parents are paying. Mr. Speaker, 170 other ECCE Centres which are catering for about 4,000 students, they are not as strong and suitable as we would like them to be. We are working with them to bring them on board and, Mr. Speaker, this will take care of our 37,000 students, ages three and four, who will now receive a formal education in ECCE, now formally housed, being taught by qualified teachers in ECCE, either the

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Certificate in Education or the Bachelors in Education in ECCE, and we are marching on with these students.

We all know—I have spoken about it, 30 per cent of the child’s brain development is at birth. Fifty percent of the child’s brain development by one and a half years old, and by six years, 90 per cent of a child’s brain is developed. And if we miss this, Mr. Speaker, if we miss these first five or six years, we will be missing one of the greatest opportunities for the development of our children. I applaud the hon. Prime Minister for her decision.

Both Minister Khan and myself who are medical personnel, we are not neuroscientists or neurophysiologists or anything, but we understand medicine, and the development of these children by that simple process of giving \$500 to parents who cannot afford it, [*Desk thumping*] will go a long way to nurture the brainpower and the development and the physical development of our children. There is no question that this is unparalleled, this is warmly welcomed and this should never be questioned in our society for providing help to the unfortunate mothers who would not necessarily and ordinarily be able to help their children. The Prime Minister ought to be strongly applauded for this initiative that we took. [*Desk thumping*]

The Early Childhood Education, I attended an IDB Conference in Washington, where the Member of Parliament for Port of Spain North/St. Ann’s West spoke about Mrs. Clinton’s statement on Trinidad and Tobago. And she did praise our seamless education system at that meeting of the IDB organized for Latin America and Caribbean leaders in education, and so:

“The recent advancements in this country’s education sector, including the push towards achieving Universal Early Childhood Care and Education by 2015, has come in for high praise by former US Secretary of State, Hillary Rodham Clinton.

This, as Mrs. Clinton addressed an audience of global educators at the second edition of the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB) and ALAS Foundation awards in Washington, DC on May 6, 2014, which recognise innovation and excellence in social welfare programs...”

Similar to what the Prime Minister is putting in:

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“...designed to help children under the age of six in Latin America and the Caribbean.”

This is what Mrs. Clinton has been speaking about. I attended the seminar. The seminar was:

“Transforming the Future Starts in Childhood: Innovation and Development in Early Education...”

This is what the Prime Minister is doing with the \$500 grant—

“...which was also held on May 6, 2014 at the IDB Headquarters and which saw policy-makers, educators, neuroscientists, academics, philanthropists and business leaders from across the globe join together to share various techniques employed by their respective organisations, to further the global cause of achieving better and holistic Universal Early Childhood Care and Education for the world’s children.”

Mrs. Clinton had set up a foundation for her family foundation, and her motto is, “Too Small to Fail”, that is the emphasis that is moving around the world.

Mr. Speaker: The speaking time of the hon. Member has expired. Would you like to have it extended?

Hon. Dr. T. Gopeesingh: Certainly.

Mr. Speaker: The question is that the speaking time of the hon. Minister of Education, be extended by 10 minutes.

Question put and agreed to.

Hon. Dr. T. Gopeesingh: [*Desk thumping*] Thank you colleagues, and thank you Mr. Speaker. Literacy and numeracy: to improve that, we have moved up 35 points by the PIRLS Study, the Programme for International Reading and Literary Studies. We now have 100 literacy coaches in our schools. We are partnered with USCO to improve literacy programmes. Eighty teachers have been trained with a Masters in reading and have been deployed in our schools, and in 2011, the PIRLS Study showed that we had improved our level of reading in Standard 3 by about 16 points.

Mr. Speaker, academic performance: we saw and witnessed this year the best performance ever in the history of Trinidad and Tobago—[*Desk thumping*] Never

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in the history, in all three examinations, the SEA, CSEC and CAPE, and do not let anybody try to make us feel that we are not working in education. [*Interruption*] While they talk, we are delivering— [*Desk thumping*—and I am giving—[*Desk thumping*]

In the SEA, two out of every three students got more than 60 per cent, three out of four students got more than 50 per cent. When we came into office, 14 per cent of the students were getting less than 30 per cent. We have brought this down to 5.8 per cent. Four marks now are separating the first 3,000 students in the SEA. Our children are brilliant, Mr. Speaker.

CSEC: we moved math performance from 42 to 57 per cent. More students are obtaining greater than five subjects. More students are pursuing CAPE. We are now doing 24 subjects at CAPE, and we have added another five subjects. We are doing 32 subjects at CSEC. We have given 420 scholarships last year, over 1,500 in four years, and one out of every eight students in CAPE gets a scholarship, Mr. Speaker. That is the performance of the People's Partnership Government, led by the hon. Prime Minister.

We have moved 100 under-performing primary schools to performing, and another 100 performing schools to excelling, Mr. Speaker. [*Desk thumping*] Forty schools in the first 200 for the SEA there, 42 schools got places, now 81 schools are in the first 200. The CAPE scholarships moved from 22 schools to 41 schools. Every school now is expanding their horizon in education and getting better and better performance.

The vexing problem about infrastructure, Mr. Speaker, 80 per cent of our schools are more than 50 years of age, and this Government inherited a massive decay in infrastructure, where previous administrations sat and idled away and did absolutely nothing for the infrastructure. They built 22 ECCE Centres and five primary schools in nine years, and they must have repaired only about 200 or 300 schools during that nine-year period.

I have here this book, [*Member displays a huge book*] which I believe I have shown already. From June 2010 to August 2014, Mr. Speaker—[*Interruption*] we have done 4,431 projects, [*Desk thumping*] at the cost of \$692 million. And we have the listing of all the areas where we have spent the money for the schools. We have spent money throughout Trinidad and Tobago in all the schools. I cannot find it now, but perhaps at another time I will speak about it.

Mr. Speaker, thank you for giving me the permission to just show this. [*Member displays a board with a huge picture of Trinidad and Tobago*] This is

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the GPS of Trinidad and Tobago which shows all the new schools that we have built in Trinidad and Tobago, throughout the length and breadth of Trinidad and Tobago: ECCE Centres, primary schools and secondary schools. We have built 53 Early Childhood Education Centres, 23 primary schools, seven secondary schools, and we have 61 schools under construction. [*Desk thumping*] So, they are spread in all the constituencies.

Mr. Speaker, and if they continue to spread the myth and the fallacy: Maloney ECCE, Arouca/Maloney; Maraval ECCE, Diego Martin North/East; Harmony Hall ECCE, San Fernando East; Aranguez ECCE in St. Joseph; Morvant ECCE in Laventille East; St. Ann's ECCE in St. Ann's East same Port of Spain North; Mount Hope ECCE in St. Joseph; Maloney Gardens, Arouca/Maloney; Corinth Hills ECCE, San Fernando East; Salazar Trace and Southern Gardens, Point Fortin.

Hon. Member: What? "And wat dey complaining about?"

Hon. Dr. T. Gopeesingh: "And wat dey complaining about?" Primary schools, Mr. Speaker: Palo Seco Government Primary School in La Brea, [*Interruption*] St Barbara's Spiritual Shouter Baptist Primary School in Arouca/Maloney, Rose Hill Roman Catholic Primary School in Port of Spain, Egypt Village Government Primary School in Point Fortin, [*Interruption*] Union Presbyterian School in Pointe-a-Pierre.

We have in Carenage now being built in Diego Martin West. We are building in Paramin. The Member for Diego Martin North/East never built a school in his constituency for 25 years, [*Laughter*] [*Desk thumping*] and we are now building it for him, it is almost completed. [*Crosstalk*] We built Febeau Primary School in Laventille, Mr. Speaker, and that is the spread of the schools construction.

As far as the repairs and maintenance: Arouca/Maloney, \$13 million spent on school repairs; Chaguanas West, \$22 million; Diego Martin Central, \$12 million; Diego Martin North/East, \$5 million; Diego Martin West, \$7 million; La Brea, \$17 million; Point Fortin, \$18 million; Port of Spain North/St. Ann's West, \$20 million; Port of Spain South, \$25 million; San Fernando East, \$10 million; St. Ann's East, \$8 million. Mr. Speaker, we repaired schools through the length and breadth of Trinidad and Tobago, in all their constituencies. [*Desk thumping*]

Teacher training and development: thousands of teachers have been trained and thousands of workshops have been conducted. I have what has been given for teacher training from 2010, 8,976 teachers trained; 2011, 1,276; 2012, 5,673; in 2013, 3,200. So, Mr. Speaker, about 15,000 teachers were trained over a period of

time in teacher preparation, leadership and management, literacy and numeracy, ICT in education, curriculum content, pedagogy, art and science, et cetera, Mr. Speaker.

School boards: we have now implemented 82 school boards in schools. The Member for Diego Martin West said they are now thinking about putting school boards into schools. We have 82 school boards in schools already. [*Desk thumping*]

As far as expenditure is concerned, how do we spend the money, value for money: Out of the \$4.5 billion that the Minister of Finance and the Economy gives us for recurrent: two point six for salaries, point four, salaries for contract workers; \$220 million for the schools, the government secondary and the board secondary. We give to them close to \$2 million per year, Mr. Speaker. They can do anything that they want to do with it, but they do not seem to know that they can do what they want—under \$50,000 they do not need to get the permission of the Permanent Secretary. So they can do some repairs for the schools, they could put in the ICT things in labs, Mr. Speaker, \$220 million for security; \$240 million for school feeding; 155,000 meals are served on a daily basis at the cost of \$1.2 million; \$110 million for janitorial; \$50 million for the laptops in the first year; \$50 million for textbooks. We have given out 2.2 million textbooks in our four years; \$50 million for school transport. And for the capital development fund under the PSIP, in our first year we spent 83 per cent; second year, 87 per cent; third year 93 per cent, and this year we finished the money because of the work that we are doing under the Public Sector Investment Programme.

So, Mr. Speaker, as I close in the last minute, this has been a formidable Government. This is a Government that is led by an astute and a vibrant, a transformative and a dignified and distinguished Prime Minister.

6.10 p.m.

We are motivated by her ability to move us forward. I personally am motivated. We have a distinguished team in Parliament here, Mr. Speaker, that each one of our Ministers works conscientiously for the benefit of every person in Trinidad and Tobago. When we spend, and all our social areas that we are spending money for, close to 250,000 people are benefiting from this with the Senior Citizens Grant, the pensions, the Disability Grant, the Public Assistance Grant and the increase in salaries for public servants; nearly quarter million people are affected by it.

The last point, the achievements of the ministry of the People's Partnership Government. It says here, as I close, let me just read—

Mr. Speaker: You have 10 seconds again.

Hon. Dr. T. Gopeesingh: Right:

As at March 31, 2014, I am pleased to report that 232 of the 260 commitments and/or promises have been fulfilled.

That is the work of the People's Partnership Government. I thank you. [*Desk thumping*]

The Minister of Science and Technology and Minister of Sport (Hon. Dr. Rupert Griffith): Thank you, hon. Speaker. It is really a pleasure to join the debate at this time. I think, listening to all of the contributions made on this side before will tell you that here is a Government that is a people-centric, a people-oriented and a Government that loves the people.

When you contrast that with the others on the other side, and that includes the Member for Chaguanas West, you see a tapestry thread running through all of their contributions. You will see there is one against the poor people of Trinidad and Tobago. That is a given because it is the same Government that, when this benevolent and loving Prime Minister, who guides the stewardship of this Government, make available resources in so many different ways to the needy in the country, they have refused consistently. You have heard many of the situations where that has happened.

Mr. Speaker, I recall, last Christmas, the Prime Minister decided to give out hampers nationally, not only in her own constituency, not only in the constituency of those of us in the Government, but in the entire country. And what did they do? They instructed their people to refuse the hampers. What a big shame! These are people, and at Christmas time when there is a lot of goodwill and a lot of happiness and camaraderie and appreciation, they have done it.

Mr. Speaker, I want to start by really complimenting the hon. Prime Minister for her oversight and stewardship of this team on this side. I know you heard, since the debate started, the tremendous amount of work that this Government has done for the people of Trinidad and Tobago. We appreciate our Prime Minister for her benevolence, for our strength and for our foresight and leadership in leading this Government and leading Trinidad and Tobago back to a stable society from the one we met in 2010.

I also want to compliment the hon. Minister of Finance and the Economy and his technical team, who worked assiduously over the months to bring together, not

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only the budget statement and the budget, but all of the documents that we all studied in preparation for the way forward, the next fiscal year, 2014/2015. I congratulate the Minister of Finance and the Economy and his team and we appreciate the hard work that they have done, not only for ourselves, but for the people of Trinidad and Tobago.

When I listened to the inputs from the other side, the kind of language that came out today, just today alone. The Member for Chaguanas West—he is never here; he is more out the Parliament than he is in—he was the one who talked about Tweedledee and Tweedledum. What kind of language is that?

When you hear on the other side, they condemn everything. If you listen to just the Opposition, you would think that there is not one good thing that this Government did for the people of Trinidad and Tobago. It is pure negative after negative and I think they hope that, eventually, the people will believe them and that will get them back into Government. But that will never happen; that is fools' paradise. [*Desk thumping*]

In fact, the end result of that kind of behaviour, that kind of criticism—and everybody has an entitlement to criticism; everybody is entitled to their opinion; but what is resounding for them is the fact that each time the people hear them and hear their input, they get turned off and they get fed up and “steups” and walk away sometimes. That is what is happening. And what is even more unfortunate, they do not realize that is what is happening and it is not helping them at all. So, Mr. Speaker, we on this side, we produce while they talk and old talk and talk foolishness.

I, on today's contribution, the limited time I have, there is so much I want to say about the two Ministries that I now have oversight for and I now manage. I also hope I have time to talk a little bit about my constituency. It will have to be a little bit because there is so much going on, the first three and a half years is placed in a 62-page booklet on only performance and things achieved. And the second document which is coming out, which I will make available to all the Members of this Parliament, both sides, would be the performance since the three and a half years to the end, 2015. It is going to be out in a couple months. I want to tell them: you will see performance, performance like you have never seen before in Toco/Sangre Grande.

Mr. Speaker, it is my privilege to address this august House to give an account to the people in this nation of how the Ministry of Science and Technology budget and the Ministry of Sport budget has been utilized in the year 2014 and what we

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propose to do in 2014/2015. I will also speak about the plans to maintain these initiatives, to implement new ones in fiscal 2014/2015. So allow me to begin with the science and technology.

My Government has a vision for science and technology and an objective to bring about a new way of thinking and doing things; a cultural revolution if you will, through science and technology. The Ministry of Science and Technology, I am spearheading a team that is consistently performing, one which is working out of normal boundaries. They have stepped aside from the old ways and they are coming up with new innovations, almost on a daily basis, to keep Trinidad and Tobago in line with emerging technologies.

We have pledged that Trinidad and Tobago, whose rating is going up—we have increased by three percentage points recently, as recent as two weeks. We pledge to continue to grow from strength to strength as far as technology awareness and technology accessibility.

The Ministry of Science and Technology wants to ensure that whatever programmes and initiatives we undertake are able to reach the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago in a meaningful and tangible way. In other words, we want to touch and transform the lives of everyone, in all walks of society: men, women, children; the young and the not-so-young; and the urban and rural, to differently-abled, as well as our elders in society. Whether you are a student, a home maker, an entrepreneur, a farmer, a teacher or a retiree, our goal is to create the link between science and technology and an improved quality of life for our citizens.

And so, you will hear me repeat certain words and phrases today, like “human capital development”, “digital inclusion”, “digital access”, “connectivity” and “innovation”. These are typical words used by those stakeholders who interface science and technology.

So, Mr. Speaker, the creation of the Ministry of Science and Technology was meant to address the significant changes which we are facing today and to equip our people and institutions with tools, skills and understanding that they need to function effectively; and not only function effectively, but in a modern ever-growing, ever technology-oriented society, a society that is run by broadband technology, instant connectivity and effective communication.

Trinidad and Tobago cannot be left behind. The rest of the world communicates instantly by technology, particularly Internet, ICT, Wi-Fi and all of the issues. Trinidad and Tobago must not be left behind and it is for that reason

that my Ministry is pulling out all the stops and putting all efforts so that we are a First World country with state-of-the-art technology that is available to everyone in the rest of the world.

In Trinidad and Tobago, I am pleased to report to this honourable House, that the mobile penetration, as at 2013, stood at 146 per cent up from 142 per cent the previous year. This is one of the highest in the world. We are number one as far as mobile technology is concerned; number one, not two or three; number one. That means, for every citizen in Trinidad and Tobago, they do not only have one, but they have two and, in some cases, people have three mobiles.

But even with growth in technology, Mr. Speaker, that will be a thing in the past because we are now implementing mobile portability, and I will say more about that as I go along and explain what it means because it is a sort of technical term. But with mobile portability, you do not need three phones. One cell phone will enable you to interact with any other cell provider without loss or drop in its service. That means the system has already been worked out so that wherever a call is terminated, that provider will receive the payment, but yet the customer himself will be able to make a call from any site, any place, any geographic. And that is what we are putting in place for Trinidad and Tobago. So you do not need two or three cell phones.

Mr. Speaker, this is one of the highest in the world and exceeds the developed world, which has an average of 128 per cent, and far exceeds that of the developing world, which is an average of 89 per cent. So that 146 per cent shows how far advanced we are with the mobile technology, the cell phone.

The International Telecommunication Union estimates that every 10 per cent increase in penetration—and keeping in mind we are at 146—the GDP will be positively impacted by between 0.08 per cent and 1 per cent. Connectivity leads to economic growth, economic development and this Government has been leading the charge to make Trinidad and Tobago a connected nation.

Mr. Speaker, I have the dollar value to back up this claim. Under the Government's stewardship, revenues from the telecommunications and broadcasting industry rose by 12.6 per cent and this is over the period 2011—2012 and 4 per cent over the period 2012—2013. This translated into TT \$5.3 billion or equal to 3.3 per cent of the GDP for 2012 and TT \$5.5 billion or 3.1 per cent of GDP for 2013. So you see the economic growth, as a result of building out technology for citizens of Trinidad and Tobago.

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6.25 p.m.

Mr. Speaker, the other side will seek to undermine the rationale for the proposed expenditure by the Government. They have criticized, and you know the criticism is so consistent, as I sit here and listen to them, and maybe that is a benefit coming at this point.

You know, calypso is one of the things I like and I always reflect people like my brother, the hon. Member for Pointe-a-Pierre and my brother, Winston Peters, Member for Mayaro. They would bear with me. In the heydeys of Calypso, when Lord Melody and Sparrow used to in their heydays of picong—I think all of you will remember when Sparrow sang that great classic against Melody—and Winston, you could correct me if I am wrong. I know you are the expert here on the calypso and the extempo. I am sorry, Member for Mayaro. You would recall, Mr. Speaker, and I am sure you do, the song: This song, that song, same melody. “If I could ah sing like the Member for Mayaro, I would sing it for you”, but I also know, as a former Speaker, singing in the House is not in accordance with the Standing Orders, so I will respect that. So, therefore, when I hear the other side, I remember vividly that picong between Sparrow and Lord Melody.

Mr. Peters: And Dougla.

Hon. Dr. R. Griffith: And Dougla. Thanks, you see I told you we have the expert here, Mr. Speaker. Do you remember the tune: This song, that song, same melody, no originality? That is the Opposition. [*Laughter*] Budget in 2011, same song; budget in 2012, same song, same melody; budget in 2013, same song, same melody; budget in 2014/2015, same song, no originality. People are getting tired of that. They have absolutely no policy. They make no suggestions of improving. They come as an Opposition with the main perspective that they have to oppose. Come with some constructive thing to build the nation to serve the people of Trinidad and Tobago as the People’s Partnership Government mantra is about: “serve the people, serve the people” and we did not only serve, we delivered and we delivered to the people.

While they come with that shallow kind of negativity, and while they come with the typical complaints—the same old melody—we in the Government do less talking, more action and that is why we are delivering and delivering at a high and excellent level for the people of Trinidad and Tobago. That is what we are doing.

Mr. Speaker, one of the things we realize and part of our policy position is to increase telecom penetration to 98 per cent of the country, and that is a tall order,

and we hope to do that by 2018. What that requires is a buildout of the broadband technology using stakeholders, many of them—I do not want to promote anybody, any one stakeholder—but through the People’s Partnership, the public/private partnership arrangement, we will use our stakeholders to buildout that telecom technology so that citizens living in 98 per cent of the country will know, and will have access to telecommunications.

One of the ways we are trying to do this is we have done what we call an ICT footprint evaluation, and it shows all of the areas in Trinidad and Tobago where there is no ICT or no access to telecom. Using that data from the CSO and the Telecommunications Authority of Trinidad and Tobago, we have decided the whole process of broadband buildout and increasing the penetration so that citizens, wherever they are or whatever point of presence, they will be able to access Government’s services; Government’s systems online and do a whole number of things which I would talk on a little later as I proceed.

One of the ways we thought we could start that build out very early is by putting ICT Access Centres in place. Mr. Speaker, the Cabinet agreed to two phases of buildout of ICT Access Centres. The first phase includes six of them, and we have already established three out of those six, and we have done it within a three-month period. The very first one was built in Penal and that was the flagship ICT Access Centre; the second one was built in my colleague’s constituency, Mayaro, and it is a great one. I hope when he speaks he would mention about the success of that; and the third one was built in Cumana, yours truly constituency. There is going to be another three that would be built out in the next two months: one in Moruga, one in Tobago and one in Tabaquite. That is the first phase of the build out of the ICT Access Centres.

What will these STAR.TT Community-based ICT Access Centres do? This initiative, is targetted at reducing the digital divide through the implementation of fit-for-purpose equipped ICT facilities; fit-for-purpose equipped ICT facilities. The introduction of these STAR.TT Community-based ICT Access Centres will establish a user-friendly technology driven environment within the undeserved communities. An underserved community is simply those communities where there is no telephony access; no access to Internet; no access to Wi-Fi, et cetera. These locations, traditionally, lack basic ICT infrastructure. Online connectivity to Government services and social services, there is no access to that. Additionally, in these areas, there are fewer physical Government agencies and Ministries to facilitate the conduct of transactions and limited access to adequate education and training facilities.

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Mr. Speaker, the Community-based ICT Access Centres will become front-end delivery channels, and I would tell you what they would do for the people in these very, very, rural areas, and that is where the emphasis is, in the very, very, rural areas. It will be providing Government services; it will be providing free Internet access via Wi-Fi and other mechanisms. The Minister of Education spoke about his children when they received that 95,000 laptops by the end of September 2015, all of these children will be able from their point of presence to access the Internet and access free Wi-Fi so that they can do their homework and several other things. [*Desk thumping*]

The ICT Access Centres will also provide ICT and community “needs based” training. So, we know a lot of people are still not yet computer literate. Many of them still need to be able to source and access computers and be able to use them so therefore there is an element of training in these centres. At each centre there is a staff of seven people well trained, not only to manage effectively the centres, but also to do training and assist in many ways so that they can access Government services and online initiatives. There will be conference facilities at these centres; there will be homework and teleworking centres and other services to the citizens and business communities in the remote regions of the country. Those are just some of the basic functions of these ICT Access Centres.

The Cabinet approved phase 1 of the project and we will buildout those six, as I said, in another two months. Already we have launched the three of them I told you, and the other three will be built out. There would be a total of 42 of these centres spread throughout Trinidad and Tobago; 42 of these centres. We have already begun to see the success at these centres. Let me give some statistics of how it is operating at this point in time; the performance at this point in time.

Mr. Speaker, we have been off to an auspicious start, in six short months we can boast of over 3,500 discrete users; over 400 regular monthly users in each of these centres; and over 200 persons receiving ICT training and approximately 40 senior citizens accessing the training. You know, Mr. Speaker, what is really surprising about that is that many retirees, many senior citizens, who have not been computer savvy or have any experience on the computers, you know, they are competing with the school age and the younger ones, and they are really in these centres almost on a 24/7 basis because these centres are open six days a week. Even on Sundays they go there and try to get in and do some work after church and that kind of thing. The seniors are showing a great interest.

What we have done is begin some training which we call “ICT for Seniors” in Trinidad and Tobago. We have done three of those already, and the very first one that was held at the Hyatt, the registration capacity was about 300. The day it was publicized and opened, we had 500 people registered. We had to shut it down and accommodate that group. Since that opening in Hyatt in March, I believe it was, we have had two more and each one was oversubscribed and these are people 50 years and over. That was a big surprise, and we will continue that programme because it is a great success and we are constantly bombarded to find out when is the next one and where is the next one for seniors, and not to mention the young people.

The Minister of Education will tell you in some of the communities where there are laptops, there were no Wi-Fi facilities. So when we build these access centres, we are putting in Wi-Fi and it is free access so that the students, Minister, could now go to these centres and stay within the environment. They have about a 50 to 60 metres range, so within that range the students can stay at home; they can go to the Wi-Fi area in these centres, and many children congregate there to do their homework assignments and to access the Internet and study. So it is a great project.

The centres are being implemented and sustained through strategic public/private partnership as I mentioned earlier. This is evidence of the importance which this Government and the Ministry place on ensuring that we work closely with the private sector to deliver national development objectives.

We have sought and received tangible assistance from the private sector in the form of connectivity—and, as I said, all of the telecom stakeholders are assisting us—computer hardware, security and other support. That has substantially lessened the burden on the Treasury. I will repeat, Mr. Speaker. All of those services are provided to these access centres without cost from our stakeholders, and that is significantly reducing the cost and the burden on the Treasury. So that again is another success story. What I find very amazing is that these stakeholders, they see the value of this and they are coming to us offering help.

Phases 1 and 2 will deliver the 42 centres and the rest of them will be buildout by the end of this year. So I know my colleagues over there say: “Listen, when we getting ours?” Well, I want to tell you, you will receive yours in due course.

Miss Mc Donald: Thank you.

Hon. Dr. R. Griffith: Well, thank you for thanking me. [*Laughter*] What would happen is that we are following a plan. We are just not doing it vialle-que-vialle. As I said, we did the footprint test to see where we have access. We have done the demographic test to see where we have large clusters of children using laptops, and we are looking at the areas that are really starved for access, Internet access, and that sort of thing and that is guiding our buildout.

6.40 p.m.

So, Mr. Speaker, I want to turn my attention briefly on—I have to kind of pace myself because I do want to talk about the Ministry of Sport. SmartTT is a national ICT plan, and this plan is from 2014 to 2018. Mr. Speaker, this brings me to our national plan, and in 2012 and 2013 the Ministry of Science, Technology and Skills Training completed the development of the ICT policy for Trinidad and Tobago; this is known as the National ICT Plan 2014—2018. The emphasis of this plan is on national broadband development, national and high-speed broadband development. SmartTT is the first phase of a larger national ICT road map which is described within the plan itself. The end goal of this is for the ICT sector to become a major contributor to the national GDP in the shortest possible time.

The core of the smartTT plan features five thematic areas: one, innovation and human capital develop; two, access and digital inclusion; three, e-Business and ICT sector development; four, infrastructural development; and five, e-Government—e-Government meaning that at any point of presence, citizens or users of the system will be able to access government services in all of the Ministries of Trinidad and Tobago. So, therefore, information would be easily accessible and people can derive the benefits from such access.

The review of the national broadband plan: the Trinidad and Tobago Government has also recognized the socio-economic benefit to be derived from ICTs and, particularly, the country-wide broadband access. The proposed national broadband plan deals specifically with the development of broadband infrastructure to stimulate intermodal competition—that is, facilities-based competition—and in delivering of a broadband service throughout the entire country.

Mr. Speaker, the broadband implementation plan has been incorporated into the smartTT plan, which is the policy plan, and there are the two thematic areas that I mentioned before, that is access and digital inclusion and the thematic area

four, infrastructure development, are both now complementary and harmonized and are being built out as we speak.

The Ministry is also looking at the e-legislative framework because, as you know, you need to have a legislative backbone to effect some of these e-technologies, for instance, things like online payments and data protection, and those sorts of things. The Ministry is very actively preparing legislation to bring to this honourable House so it would enable the kinds of technologies we are putting in place. Just to mention a few of these are the Data Protection Act, the regulations of e-payments Act, Cybercrime Bill and Cyber Security Agency Bill, Electronic Transfer of Funds Crime Act and the Electronic Transfer of Funds Crime Regulations, Electronic Evidence Bill and the Exchequer and Audit Act and, of course, the amendment of the current Telecommunications Act.

So, Mr. Speaker, there is a very aggressive legislative backbone also being prepared to enable the developments in technology and the developments in ICT. All of this is guided by an interministerial committee and we have 11 Members of Cabinet who formed that interministerial committee; that is where the guidance and the input are provided. There is also a think tank that we refer to as e-Business Roundtable, and this e-Business Roundtable merely is to interface with the private sector, and get their views with the national business and innovation plans. We are going to be hosting a National Business and Innovation Symposium. This will be held on November 18—20, 2014, to discuss developments of ICTs in Trinidad and Tobago.

So, Mr. Speaker, there is lots more I could talk about on science and technology but I want to talk quickly about some of our proposals for 2015, as far as that is concerned, and as brief as I possibly can. Incidentally, Mr. Speaker, all of this, recognizing the shortage of time, would be placed into a booklet for distribution in terms of what we are doing with science and technology in Trinidad and Tobago. So, Mr. Speaker, briefly, and to end, science and technology, some plans for fiscal 2014/2015, and I will go through them fairly quickly—it is more in summary state, like the start—community centres, we are building out the 42, I mentioned that already; the smarTT ICT plan is well under way, a secretariat has been developed and they are working for the implementation of that policy position.

There is a GovNeTT 3.0 and a G-Cloud, a Government Cloud initiative that is being put in place. So in 2014/2015, the Ministry of Science, Technology and Skills Training will implement Phase III of the Government Wide Area Network, which is referred to as GovNeTT 3.0. What that will do, Mr. Speaker, it will provide secure and high-speed connections among Government Ministries and agencies, as well as the means to work more collaboratively and effectively to deliver an enhanced seamless service to the public.

Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Education, and I am sure when the Minister of Health speaks, they will talk about what ICT is doing to really buildout the Health Information Management System for Trinidad and Tobago. I will leave that to them. I hope you will cover that, Minister, and the Minister of Education has already spoken about the impact of ICT on education in Trinidad and Tobago. We will continue the legislative backbone to enable the ICT plans—national broadband plan. There is also a steering committee already established and they are well under way. The Foundation Services Infrastructure is another very important one that the Ministry of Science, Technology and Skills Training is working on.

The Ministry of Science, Technology and Skills Training will implement the Foundation Services Infrastructure, and the FSI is an end-to-end platform to middleware, as it is called, whereby Ministries and Government agencies can reuse common services to rapidly develop, deploy and operate their services. In other words, there would be a high cost-saving with the interchange of information. So, Mr. Speaker, those in a nutshell are just some of the issues that we are doing with ICT and the Ministry of Science, Technology and Skills Training. How much time I have again, Mr. Speaker?—so I can—

Mr. Speaker: Originally, you have eight more minutes.

Hon. Dr. R. Griffith: Eight more minutes, okay, and plus 10. I would want the extra 10.

Mr. Speaker, I want to talk a little bit about sport now. I know this is a very hot topic, but sport is very vital, and I listened to my colleagues on the other side raising issues about sport in Trinidad and Tobago, but, Mr. Speaker, the Government of Trinidad and Tobago takes sport seriously. Sport is very critical to a nation's development. It is very critical for fostering a healthy society through recreational and sporting activities, and also it generates a national and

international interest in sport. If you look at what happened, Mr. Speaker, there were 909 million—that is the historic number of people who viewed the 2010 FIFA World Cup, and several international broadcasting agencies have projected that a number of viewers turned out to the recently concluded 2014 FIFA World Cup, and that was twice as much as those persons physically present and those viewing on TV. So you see the importance of sport, Mr. Speaker.

I just want to go quickly to some of the plans we have for the fiscal year 2014/2015. During this year we looked at the maintenance of several community sporting grounds, and in fiscal 2015 we will continue to maintain those grounds and we are building three, what we call high-power sporting facilities, and these are national sporting facilities, with the status of work as follows: there is going to be a National Tennis Centre in Tacarigua, and this is 70 per cent complete; [*Desk thumping*] there is going to be a National Cycle Centre in Couva and this is 55 per cent complete, and there is going to be a National Aquatic Centre in Couva that is 35 per cent complete, and all of these, the scheduled date for completion would be by May/June 2015.

Mr. Speaker, to commemorate the opening of these centres there would be a national sport festival, whereby we would look at seven critical sporting areas to commemorate the opening of this, and these areas are some of the more popular and common sports and you will hear more about it as we build that out, Mr. Speaker. There would be upgrading works—upgrading works were initiated in 45 community recreation grounds and nine regional grounds across Trinidad, and this is to improve functionality of these facilities for the citizens. Eight of the community grounds have already been completed as follows: one, the Union Recreation Ground; two, Beaucarro Recreation Ground; three, El Dorado Recreation Ground; four, Phoenix Park Recreation Ground; and five, Korea Recreation Ground.

Mr. Speaker, I am hearing my colleagues across the floor saying, “um-hmm”, but I want to let them know that there is another one—Avinash Samaroo Recreation Ground, Inverness Recreation Ground and Williamsville/Kumar Recreation Ground. Mr. Speaker, I hear the “oos” and the “ahs”, but I want to let my colleagues on this side, and of course those on the other side, because some of our Members here still have not yet had their recreation grounds refurbished, but I want to let them know that there are 14 community recreation grounds still in the construction phase and there are 19 grounds that are still in the consultancy phase. So do not feel left out yet; these grounds are in those stages.

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Let me turn my attention briefly to the Sports Company of Trinidad and Tobago. I do not wish to say very much about that at this stage because, as you know—and was presented in this honourable House—many of the issues surrounding the Sports Company are now under investigation, but in fiscal 2014 the Ministry continued to be assisting with the implementation of projects and programmes by the Sports Company of Trinidad and Tobago Limited. Through the efforts of the company, 16 sporting disciplines have benefited from financial and logistical support for programmes to scores of communities where thousands of participants have benefited through guidance and training sessions. SPORTT will continue to monitor and evaluate programmes and projects of the relevant national governing bodies and community groups to ensure that state funding is utilized for activities consistent with other policy goals.

6.55 p.m.

Mr. Speaker, Members raised issues about funding for various organizations, but I want to respond to, I think it was the Member for Laventille East/Morvant, when she made mention about some of the elite athletes—I think it is you, Member for Laventille East/Morvant, correct me if I am wrong—that some of the elite athletes have not been paid. To some extent you were partially right, because I found out by talking to many of them; the payment was behind. But I think the good news, Member, is that I have given the Ministry to ensure that all outstanding payments would be completed by the third week of this month to all the elite athletes. [*Desk thumping*]

So we will continue to do with talent identification, creating a critical mass for high performance sport; developing Trinidad and Tobago for sport tourism product; the revision of key sport policy instruments to ensure relevance and provide comprehensive frameworks for administration and, fourthly, implement a change management initiative—very critical—within the organization.

Mr. Speaker, there is lots of talk about funds allocation, and I just want to quickly—and maybe I will not be able to give all of them, because it is such an extensive list, because I do want in my last 10 minutes to, at least, talk about my constituency. Is that it? [*Interruption*]

Mr. Speaker: The original speaking time has expired.

Hon. Members, the question is that the speaking time of the hon. Minister of Science and Technology and Sport, and Member of Parliament for Toco/Sangre Grande, be extended by 10 minutes.

Question put and agreed to.

Hon. Dr. R. Griffith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I just want to turn my attention to the finance. As I said, this information here would be provided, because I realize time is of the essence. I want to talk about the national governing bodies and the kinds of subventions they received and distributed in 2014, and talk a little bit about some of the projections for 2015.

These are some of the agencies that received subventions from the Ministry: the Motor Car Association; the National Ballroom Dance Association; the National Kickboxing Council of Trinidad and Tobago; the Paraplegic Organization of Trinidad and Tobago; the Point Kickboxing Association; Surfing Association of Trinidad and Tobago; Trinidad and Tobago Association of Masters Athletes; Trinidad and Tobago Badminton Association; Trinidad and Tobago Blind and Visually Impaired Cricket Association; the Trinidad and Tobago Body Builders' Federation; Trinidad and Tobago Boxing Board of Control; Trinidad and Tobago Canoe/Kayak Federation; Trinidad and Tobago Chess Association; Trinidad and Tobago Cue Sports Foundation; Trinidad and Tobago Equestrian Association; Trinidad and Tobago Game Fishing Association; the Judo Association; the Karate Union; Power Boat Association of Trinidad and Tobago; Powerlifting Federation; Rally Car Association; Scrabble Association; Special Olympics; Table Tennis Association; Target Archery Federation; Triathlon Federation; Windball Cricket Association; the Wushu Association of Trinidad and Tobago; the Squash Association; the Tae kwon do Association; the Women's Cricket Association; Trinidad and Tobago Contract Bridge Association and the Darts Association; the Trinidad and Tobago Rifle Association and the Automobile Sports Association, Mr. Speaker. So you see it is quite a list of associations that received.

They received in this 2014 fiscal year, \$7,567,199, and additional grant funding provided by the Ministry. Sum disbursed for the year 2014 was \$19,606,000, and it went to the assistance of the national governing bodies, other than subventions—these are the bodies other than those that received subventions—assistance to sporting serving bodies such as clubs and schools and institutions; assistance to individual athletes and assistance through provision of trophies and medals. This came up to be about \$19,606,000. Funding under the Elite Athlete Assistance Programme was \$3,525,000, a total of \$30,698,000.

Mr. Speaker, very quickly: subvention paid to the national governing bodies by the Sports Company of Trinidad and Tobago: the National Amateur Athletic Association received \$2.8 million; the Trinidad and Tobago Cricket Board,

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\$759,000; the Football Federation, \$10.8 million; the Boxing Board Association, \$1.06 million; the Basketball Federation of Trinidad and Tobago, \$497,896; the Volleyball Federation, \$1.3 million; the Hockey Board, \$923,000; the Amateur Gymnastics Association, \$503,000; the Sailing Association, \$582,000; the Trinidad and Tobago Cycling Federation, \$980,000, and the Trinidad and Tobago Netball Association, \$1.1 million; the Amateur Swimming Association, \$1.6 million; the Lawn Tennis Association, \$696,000; the Rugby/Football Union, \$1.2 million; the Trinidad and Tobago Golf Association, \$772,041 and, finally, the Tobago Draughts & Checkers Association. This total is \$26,158 million.

So, Mr. Speaker, those are some of the figures. For those who raised discussions about certain mismanagement, they have an idea of how the moneys are spent and the organizations that received them. I have about five minutes?

Mr. Speaker: Five more minutes.

Hon. Dr. R. Griffith: I want to turn my attention to my constituency in the five minutes I have. Toco/Sangre Grande is the second largest constituency in Trinidad and Tobago, after Moruga/Tableland, I am reminded by my colleague to my left. It is a constituency, based on the Human Development Index, one of the poorest in the nation. *[Interruption]* What that suggests, we do not have many industries. It is purely a fishing type community and one of agriculture, both.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, in the Front Bench, I am getting a feedback. I am not hearing the hon. Member.

Hon. Dr. R. Griffith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. So it is purely a fishing village and an agriculture type society, with food crops as well as livestock.

The constituency of Toco/Sangre Grande was under the leadership of the People's National Movement for 48 years, and I have never seen such neglect in such a rural area. *[Interruption]* Everything that you could think was bad, was bad. The roads, bridges falling down, high unemployment, no educational facilities, and I could just name it and it was bad.

Mr. Speaker: Please, Member for Diego Martin Central.

Hon. Dr. R. Griffith: One of the things I found out, because the large population of very young—*[Interruption]*

Mr. Speaker: Member for Mayaro and Member for Diego Martin Central, just cool it.

Hon. Dr. R. Griffith: Yes, in the last three minutes I have.

In the constituency, the young people really had no avenues beyond secondary school, and one of the things I pledged within the first year of my tenure is that they would receive an opportunity to access higher education. The good news is, within my first year of tenure we opened a brand new COSTAATT branch. We started off with 400 students, and to date we have over 1,000 students from as far as Rio Claro, to Matelot and to Wallerfield, and even beyond that. Students now have access to higher education in several discipline areas. [*Desk thumping*]

In addition to that, the Sangre Grande Hospital is a very old hospital, still providing service, but through collaboration with the Cabinet and my colleague, the Minister of Health, he is not here, we were able to get Cabinet's approval to extend the current hospital, by putting 36 more beds and a lot of state-of-the-art facilities. In addition to that, we have grubbed the surface next to that hospital, and we will be building a brand new state-of-the-art medical facility for the people of Toco/Sangre Grande.

Many people died between Sangre Grande and Port of Spain, going to get various procedures. Things like simple MRI, CT scan, X-ray, they had to travel to Mount Hope and Port of Spain. They had to wait for six months to a year sometimes and, as I said, many people died without receiving their treatment. Through negotiation at the level of Cabinet, we will be turning the sod, in about two to three weeks' time, to build a brand new state-of-the-art medical facility where they will provide all of those services. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Speaker, in the last minute I have, I have to talk about the Valencia bypass, because when I went to Sangre Grande it was usual—I am sure those persons who go to the north-east area will tell you—the traffic jam starts from almost Arima, during the peak period, to Valencia and beyond Valencia. We have had four Ministry of Works and Infrastructure officers come up there with me—Mr. Speaker, I am finishing this last point, thank you—to look at some alternative to ease that traffic. I want to tell you, we were able to resolve that problem by having the Valencia bypass. It is due to open before the end of this month, and that traffic jam will be a thing of the past to the people of Toco/Sangre Grande. [*Desk thumping*]

In ending, I just want to say that I thank this Government. I want to thank the people for being patient because they were living in that deplorable situation. I can tell you, the people of Toco/Sangre Grande are now ready to vote the

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People's Partnership Government back into government, because of the great service they have had and the gross neglect they have had from that former government.

Mr. Speaker, I thank you.

Mrs. Joanne Thomas (*St. Ann's East*): Thank you, Mr. Speaker, for the opportunity to contribute to this debate.

Firstly, I just want to comment on a comment made by the Member for Tabaquite, when he spoke about the CEPEP and when he said that without the CEPEP the environment could be in a state. I was surprised and pleased to hear him make that comment, because way back when the Member for Oropouche East was on this side, when the CEPEP was introduced, he made comments saying that the PNM have people painting white stones all over the place. [*Desk thumping and crosstalk*]

Mr. Peters: That was what they were doing then!

Mrs. J. Thomas: I am very pleased that the CEPEP which was instituted by the PNM Government, they now realize the worth of it.

Mr. Speaker, 2015 budget, \$64 billion, the biggest ever in the history of Trinidad and Tobago. When you think just last year the budget was the biggest ever, here comes 2015 and it goes to a whopping \$64 billion, so every year it just climbs and climbs. One thing I want to say is that the people of this country are not stupid, and they are not fooled by these goodies. As my colleague referred to it: the Christmas tree that came with all the flashing lights.

The Member for Oropouche East in his contribution made some comments and read some feedback from the citizens about the positive way in which the public has received the budget. I, too, just want to read some comments from our citizenry out there.

7.10 p.m.

I looked at Ernst & Young and a senior partner, and his comments were:

“Government's decision to offer another tax amnesty could result in increased delinquency by taxpayers, says Wade George, partner/regional tax service line leader of Ernst & Young.

And tax receipts—a significant revenue stream for Government—are not being pursued given the challenges the country faces with the Board of Inland

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Revenue (BIR).”

And then, Mr. Speaker, we have economist Indera Sagewan-Alli and she said [*Crosstalk*]:

“...she was disappointed with the budget 2014...[*Crosstalk*] she deemed...”—the budget as—“...lacking in clear-set goals.

Sagewan-Alli said the budget, delivered in an election year was another case of ‘politics trumping economics’ and provided no clear, long-term plan while being rife with allowances.” [*Crosstalk*]

Dr. Browne: Just because you disagree with her, you do not have to disrespect her. She is an economist.

Mrs. J. Thomas: And, Mr. Speaker, the average man in the street—just a few comments. One gentleman said:

“The budget is no different from other budgets. It seems as though they allocated funds without any clear systems in place to get results.”

And this is the man in the street saying this, eh, Mr. Speaker. Then we have another man:

“I am not satisfied with the minimum wage increase. I feel like it could have been higher, around \$18, because people can barely survive on \$15 an hour.” [*Crosstalk*]

Then finally, Mr. Speaker, we have a comment here from the T&T Chamber of Industry and Commerce, and the article says:

“T&T largest business group, the T&T Chamber of Industry and Commerce, said yesterday that billions are being spent annually and the country is not seeing value for money.”

And these were some of the comments that were made by our citizens out there.

Mr. Speaker, this Government likes to boast of “it is a caring Government”, and our Prime Minister who has boasted [*Crosstalk*] that she is a mother and grandmother, she is the one now who manages the book grant. And every single mother and grandmother in this country know that school closes around the first week in July and opens the first week in September, but the hon. Prime Minister comes in the second to last week in August and asks constituencies to send in names for the book grant. And of course you know, it is a whole long tedious process. And up to today, those persons are still waiting to get their books. School is already opened.

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Mr. Speaker, it just makes me wonder. I wonder when those babies will get that baby grant. Because if it is school opened, and the children cannot get the book grants yet, when the baby allowance comes maybe the child could have time reach a year, before they get the baby grant to buy the milk that the Member for Caroni East talked about.

Hon. Member: So, you agree with the baby grant?

Mrs. J. Thomas: Right. Mr. Speaker, this Government cannot be trusted. They cannot be trusted at all, at all, at all. [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. Member: “Yuh hit de nail on de head.”

Mrs. J. Thomas: And I am not just saying this. Mr. Speaker, I have a situation in my constituency. The residents of Riverside Park in Santa Cruz, they have a situation with some illegal developers, and I wrote several times to the Minister of Planning and Sustainable Development. We spoke to the Permanent Secretary. We did the necessary paperwork as regards objecting to the excavation and so that is taking place. I again spoke to the Minister of Planning and Sustainable Development. We had the media come, you know, the press, they all came. They highlighted it. And then for the debate, for the planning debate, I got up and I raised this point about my constituency to the Minister. And he sat right there. Mr. Speaker, when I was finished speaking, he passed this note to me, I still have it. And this note says:

“MP Thomas, I will make a visit. Lindsay will set it up.”

And he signed. This is the Minister of Planning and Sustainable Development, right after I made my contribution he passed this note to me across the floor, promising that he will deal with it. Of course, I went very excitedly to my constituents. I told them, “Listen, I spoke to the Minister, he gave his word.” And then [*Crosstalk*] I have it here, July 11. And the *Hansard*, when he was doing his winding up, of course he said:

“The Minister of Land and Marine Resources and Member of La Horquetta/Talparo gave a perspective from the point of view of state lands.”

And then he said:

“Some included pleas on behalf of their constituents, like the Member for St. Ann’s East, and I did give her a commitment to engage her on the issues that she raised.”

Mr. Speaker, this is the *Hansard* that I have just read from. I just showed you the note he passed to me on this little piece of paper. And as of today the residents of Riverside Park, we are still waiting. We are still waiting. [*Crosstalk*] This is the commitment from the Government.

Mr. Speaker, I also—for the four years that I have been here, you yourself would have heard me how I have been lobbying for the members of Las Cuevas. [*Interruption*]

Mr. Speaker: Please. Please. I would like to hear the hon. Member, please.

Mrs. J. Thomas: Member, when you were speaking I kept quiet and listened, so I will appreciate the same respect, please. Okay? Thank you.

Yes, Mr. Speaker, for four years I have been pleading here for Fort Abercromby. Even this week, the Member for Toco/Sangre Grande asked me, “How is that going along?” And he started some minor works, and I am only asking for this, not just to say of asking for Fort Abercromby, but as long as Fort Abercromby is built and reconstructed, the residents of Las Cuevas Bay, they can become self-sufficient because the Minister gave his commitment that they would manage it. And I mean, the residents, they were all so excited. But again, we are still waiting. We are still waiting. Right? Because in some small way, with the chant that the Government makes, “Serve the people, serve the people, serve the people”, but somehow my people that word means nothing to them.

Dr. Browne: Serve themselves.

Mrs. J. Thomas: Mr. Speaker, and you wonder, how is the \$64 billion affecting them? No way. It has no impact on the residents of Las Cuevas with Fort Abercromby in particular.

I want to also highlight here some members of the public who are in the plumbing business. They have asked me to highlight an issue they are having. These plumbers, businessmen, have been around for 30 to 40 years. The normal process was that every five years they would go and they would have their licence renewed. When this Government came into power, they reduced that time frame to two years. And of course, the plumbers, they have all realized that with two years—just being to renew your licence for two years, and it also gives the opportunity for new contractors to come in, and they can now get their licence renewed as well. Mr. Speaker, you know now they have just not renewed these peoples’ licences. I am talking about businessmen who had been in business for 30 to 40 years.

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And then what is happening now—what is happening to all these employees working for these businesses? And yet the Government talks about a reduction in the unemployment rate. But, Mr. Speaker, I wonder if they do a net of the number of persons out there who do not have jobs. But you see what is happening, the mass employment of the CEPEP and the URP, that is where the unemployment is couched to fool people, but stable jobs, a lot of people out there do not have jobs, and I am talking about a lot of people. Right. [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Speaker, I just want to remind the citizens, do not let these so-called goodies distract you, and just bear in mind all that this Government has done. Do not forget that Constitution (Amdt.) Bill, 2014. Do not forget it. Keep it in your minds citizens. Right?

Hon. Member: Like a thief in the night.

Mrs. J. Thomas: And, Mr. Speaker, as I talk, you know one of the things that comes to mind again is the “\$34 million man”. You know, when I look in my constituency, there is a family up in Luengo Hill, and even in doing my walkabouts I went up there, and I could not believe the place where these people live. You know, the bed is like sponge and a piece of board, you know. I went and I sat in the chair that you know—I went in their house, and I went right down inside. I was so moved.

I know to wait for assistance from the Government, it is no use. And of course, I sent around, you know, the email to a few of my friends from the banking sector where I came from, and a few of my family members, you know to try and see if we could get like—Mr. Speaker, the stove, I do not know if you all know, you know that long time stove where you turn with the wick, the little green stove, you know. And yet the lady was so kind. She was frying fish, you know, and she offered me a piece of fish. Of course, I took the fish. [*Crosstalk*] Right. You know, and I am saying, when I study this “\$34 million man, ent” even do one thing for that \$34 million,” and he feels so comfortable. The contract agreement says that, you know, and he walks away with this \$34 million. And so many people out there are suffering. It is really, really not fair. It is not fair at all.

Mr. Speaker, I want to switch a bit to our tourism in Trinidad and Tobago. [*Crosstalk*] And when you talk about Trinidad and Tobago tourism, our tourism has the potential to provide continued economic growth and develop a kind of tourism destination internationally. Mr. Speaker, and I just want to look a little bit

at the Minister's budget statement on tourism. And in his statement he said:

“Mr. Speaker, consequent on the global financial crisis, the tourism sector, in particular in Tobago entered into a period of financial difficulty; however, the Government acted promptly to arrest the decline and to revitalize the sector.”

I looked at the comments noted in the Auditor General's Report, and wondered a bit about the management of these funds in the tourism sector. And in the Auditor General's Report under Expenditure Control, Promotions, Publicity and Printing, in section 2.118, and this is what the Auditor General said:

“From the review from a sample of 11 vouchers under this vote evidence of monitoring to ensure that funds were applied for the purposes approved by Cabinet was not seen with respect to 4 payments totalling \$2,225,400.00.”

And then in Item 2119:

Payments totalling \$191,359.74 were also seen to be made from this vote for expenses relating to the operations of the National Academy for the Performing Arts hotel even though funds were neither provided for nor released to the Ministry for this purpose.”

So, it is like, Mr. Speaker, everybody just doing whatever they want. It is like their house, their own money so they could do whatever they want.

7.25 p.m.

Mr. Speaker, I looked in the PSIP for 2014, and the sum of \$38 million was utilized during the fiscal year, and from what the report in the PSIP says, it focused on a number of key areas: recreation, infrastructure development, hotels and guest houses and training, and one of the items that was supposed to be utilized with this \$38 million is the completion of construction of new lifeguard facilities at Los Iros and Toco; the award of contracts for the construction of a lifeguard tower at Mayaro and refurbishment works to lifeguard quarters at Salybia and Maracas. And then it says, additionally, several initiatives were undertaken by the TDC for the development of the Tourism Development Programme, with an additional sum of \$17.8 million.

This was the 2014 PSIP. I go now to the 2015 PSIP, and where we see in 2015 the tourism Ministry and the TDC have been provided with the sum of \$73.7 million to undertake projects and programmes. One of the main projects is to provide facilities that would ensure permanent and dependable lifeguard services available at the major beaches, and they also provided an extra \$6.2 million to

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undertake extension work on six lifeguard facilities, the same Los Iros that money was allocated for in 2014, the same Maracas, the same Salybia, the same Toco; and then moneys were given for the refurbishment of facilities necessary to accommodate additional female staff.

So, what I want to find out, so when you go and you build these lifeguard facilities, is it that they are built in a certain way just to accommodate male life guards? You know, it sounds really strange, so you have to get now an extra \$6 million to do refurbishment for female guards. It sounds so very lame and I really want the Minister to give us an idea of how these moneys were allocated for these lifeguard facilities, and I ask him to give us a breakdown of both the \$38 million and also the \$73 million.

I want to take a look at the improvements to the Emperor Valley Zoo. In fiscal 2013, \$15 million was provided for the improvement and expansion work of the Emperor Valley Zoo, and for 2013, what it says is that this money would bring Phase 2 of the works to a completion. I come now in 2014—now this was in 2013 fiscal year—and now we see for improvement and expansion works at the Emperor Valley Zoo, that will continue in fiscal 2014 with another allocation of \$16 million and then they say Phase 3 will then begin. We look then in 2015, and Phase 3 has not begun and they have now allocated another \$3 million. Mr. Speaker, I really want to know, is it that every year moneys are being allocated for the same projects? No, Mr. Speaker, something is really wrong.

Then you look at the Auditor General's Report and it says:

Contracts for Phase 2 of this project were seen to be executed by an entity other than the executing agency appointed by Cabinet and no documents were provided to show this change, and the amount of money utilized was \$14,996,810.70.

Mr. Speaker, when I am going through these numbers, I am like, "I doh believe this." Every year and it is just millions of dollars and poor people out there "ketching their aunt, uncle and nennen". [*Interruption*] You know, it is really, really unfair and that is why I am telling the people of Trinidad and Tobago, do not trust this Government and take note of all these things, moneys are just giving away like crazy.

Mr. Speaker, I am looking again at the 2014 PSIP, and you see \$25.7 million was allocated to the CDA to develop the boardwalk. But \$7 million was allocated for the rehabilitation works to Guave Road, and in 2015 now \$20 million was allocated to develop the same Guave Road. So, it is unbelievable, people put out

these reports, and I do not know if they look and they see, it is glaring where moneys are just—as my colleague from Port of Spain North/St. Ann’s West said, “it is just a numbers game”. You know, nobody is reviewing that so it is no big thing, but it is really, really confusing.

Then in 2013, \$91.4 million was proposed for projects and programmes to improve the industry, and yet where all that money gone? Because, you are looking at airline arrivals dropped by 4.5 per cent, cruise ship arrivals dropped by 49.3 per cent, yachting arrivals, decreased by 3.7 per cent. *[Interruption]* So, Mr. Speaker, I am wondering, where all this money, all the initiatives that it is supposed to be expended for to come up with new programmes to encourage visitors to this country, where is that money going? *[Interruption]* And then I ask myself—you know, it brings to my remembrance \$5 million was paid to a certain artiste to produce a CD. Where is that CD? We never even hear about it. Again, money just giving away and people “ketching”—

Dr. Browne: Their royal.

Mrs. J. Thomas: Mr. Speaker, when you look and scan the Internet on Trinidad and Tobago for visitors outside who want to come to our country, there are certain key areas that you would see to encourage people to come. You have the Asa Wright Nature Centre, of course they talk about the bake and shark in Maracas Bay. Well, of course, the Minister of Tourism is not part of this House, so he is not here to answer me about what is happening with that facility at Maracas Bay. It talked about bird watching, hiking, and I am saying, these things are put out there, why can the money not—when they are doing their strategy can they think about, these are the areas that we have put out there so let us make sure and utilize our money, so when the people come they can see, yes, what was said there to sell Trinidad and Tobago it is a reality, instead of just allocating money all over the place.

Right now in the World Economic Forum, Trinidad is ranked No. 79 out of 140, and why, Mr. Speaker? Trinidad and Tobago is like a gem and tourism can really be heightened with the right management. *[Interruption]* And some of the areas that I am suggesting that we could give focus to—look at Piarco International Airport firstly, that is the first point of our visitors, the ANR Robinson International Airport, the re-engineering of CAL management to enhance its service for international and domestic passengers. I mean, Mr. Speaker, these are simple things, let us see where our money is going. Attention should also be given to the development of the yachting industry and training facilities. Of course, most important, complete Maracas Bay, because it is

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highlighted in everything you click in for Trinidad and Tobago, Maracas Bay is always a highlight. [*Interruption*]

But, Mr. Speaker, I said, you know what, let us not worry, soon and very soon, by the end of 2015 we would put our policy and plans in place and tourism will rise again in Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*]

Dr. Browne: Dawn of a new era.

Mrs. J. Thomas: Mr. Speaker, I also just want to give a little bit again, about my constituency, and I have a particular issue in the Maracas Bay Old Road. Now the residents up there applied for lighting in their area, and they made the request to T&TEC, and you would not believe, T&TEC informed them that the cost for the supply of electricity to the residents of Upper Macaulay Road is \$33,845. So, what T&TEC is telling these residents, you have to find \$33,000 in order that we could get lights.

Mr. Speaker, I wrote the general manager of T&TEC highlighting these residents' pleas and asking for something to be done to address this situation. I also wrote the hon. Member for Naparima, the Minister of Public Utilities, advising him of this situation so that the residents can get their lights. Of course, T&TEC responded to my letter advising me that they have forwarded my request to the national director of the National Social Development Programme and, Mr. Speaker, all these residents are asking for is a little light.

Mr. Peters: How long they were there?

Mrs. J. Thomas: The Member for Mayaro, you know, they keep saying, when they were there? How long these people—you know, it is as though to say this should have been done. [*Crosstalk*]

The people are asking now. Right! They are paying their taxes. That is all they are asking for. I mean, the people do not want much, they do not want much. Simple little request like this; that is all they are asking for. I mean, lights, in this day and age, in an economy with a \$64 billion budget, and they cannot get lights. Mr. Speaker, no, this is really, really unacceptable.

Mr. Speaker, I also asked the Member for Mayaro about my community centre at Gasparillo.

Mr. Peters: What did I tell you?

7.40 p.m.

Mr. Speaker: I am still—

Mrs. J. Thomas: No action—[*Interruption*]

Mr. Peters: It is not a choir, you cannot get everything one time.

Mrs J. Thomas: No action. And he started—[*Interruption*]

Mr. Speaker: Yes, yes, please, address the Chair and not him.

Mrs J. Thomas: Yes, Mr. Speaker. I spoke to the hon. Member quite a while. He came and he did a little “chirip-chirip” and stopped. So, you know, up to now the residents are still there waiting for their community centre.

Mr. Speaker, I asked about the pavilion at the Brian Lara Recreation Grounds, and now that the Minister, the Member for Toco/Sangre Grande is now in charge of sports, I put out this plea again to him. It was sent—the request was sent to the prior Minister, so I normally get responses from you, so I now ask you again about the pavilion on the Brian Lara grounds. Also, preparation for the Ato Boldon grounds. The field, you know, we have made requests as regards to fixing that field there on the Ato Boldon Recreation Ground.

And again, I want to put it on *Hansard*, again, I am making a plea for those residents of Riverside Park who the Minister of Planning and Sustainable Development agreed to come and address their concerns. I again want to put it on *Hansard* that this situation be addressed because it is really, really—with more rainfall there could be serious disaster in Santa Cruz because of this particular illegal development. And the developers, Mr. Phelps and his team, they are not even—they are just going about not adhering to even the regional corporation, no showing or not doing anything there. Mr. Phelps and they are just adamant, and the resident is the last person, you know, that he is thinking about. So, Mr. Speaker, I bring that on the front as well.

I also want to appeal to the Member for Barataria/San Juan, the Minister of Health, about four years now I have been speaking to him about the Maracas St. Joseph Health Centre. I mean, Mr. Speaker, it is a pity I did not get time to bring some pictures and to get your permission to show what these persons have to go through when they go to the Health Centre, and I am talking about elderly persons. You know, it is really—of course, they cannot even dream to go to washrooms. I do not think I will allow even my dog to go in there. That is to tell you how bad it is. It is really, really horrible. I have sent pictures to the Minister, he saw it, and he said, “Yes, I am going to give you your Health Centre”. So, I am hoping that at least this year something happens and the residents of Maracas/St. Joseph get some attention, and that Health Centre is really rebuilt, and the people

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there can now go and get their health needs attended to in a comfortable environment.

Mr. Speaker, I also make a plea for the road in La Hoe in Laventille Road—I mean, I am sure if you go back to the *Hansard*, from since I came here in 2010, I mean, I have, every time I am talking about this La Hoe Road in Laventille Road. Again, I am making a plea, the Member for Tabaguite is not here—[*Interruption*]

Dr. Browne: Where is he, where is he?

Mrs J. Thomas: He left soon after I started my contribution.

Dr. Browne: “He know you was coming with La Hoe Road.”

Mrs J. Thomas: And, Mr. Speaker, I again make a plea for the members of La Hoe in Laventille Road. Also Marshall Lane in Laventille Road, it is really in a dilapidated condition. And, Mr. Speaker, if you go and you check, all the Members—you write, as the Member for Laventille/East Morvant, when she made her contribution, and it is just letters, upon letters, upon letters, and yet your constituents will feel as though you are not representing them. They do not understand, I mean, the begging and the pleading and yet nothing, nothing, nothing is done. [*Desk thumping*]

Dr. Browne: A heartless crew in office.

Mrs J. Thomas: I really—of course, they come and they talk about all that has been done, but ask some of us, most of us on this side, nothing is done in our constituency, or if anything, little is done. And I want to make my plea here today for some of these concerns that I have raised, Mr. Speaker, and that somehow it will be addressed. I am very passionate about it and I am really asking that the Ministers give me some attention, give my constituents, [*Desk thumping*] because \$64 billion, you know, it means nothing to them. So all the praises about the good budget and the goodies, when you see you “doh” have, you know, lights, a good place to rest your head, food to eat, your roads are in a deplorable condition, you know—[*Interruption*]

Dr. Browne: Health Centres.

Mrs J. Thomas: Health Centres, you know what I mean. Even for the young people, the recreation grounds and so, the people “doh” ask for much. So all I ask is if less money can be taken and more spent on the needs of the constituents. And, Mr. Speaker, with these few words, I thank you. [*Desk thumping*]

The Minister of Public Utilities (Hon. Nizam Baksh): Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I am indeed grateful for the opportunity to join my colleagues

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in this debate on the Appropriation Bill, 2015. I would like first of all to congratulate the Minister of Finance and the Economy, Sen. The Hon. Larry Howai, [*Desk thumping*] for the excellent budget presentation here which he presented to this honourable House on Monday, September 08, 2014. I join with him in also congratulating our Prime Minister, the hon. Kamla Persad-Bissessar for her transformational leadership of this country [*Desk thumping*] and for the revolutionary change which she has brought to the benefit of this nation in the spheres of education, health, social services and physical infrastructure, to name a few, and overall for leading the best performing Government that Trinidad and Tobago has seen since independence, 52 years ago. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Speaker, this is the fifth budget presentation of this Government, and I want to make a very strong point here that, if you observe there were no tax increases over those five years. [*Desk thumping*] If we throw our minds back to the PNM days, whenever there was a budget presentation you always had to prepare yourself for tax increases. Even before the presentation of that budget you would see long lines at the gas stations—[*Interruption*]

Mr. Cadiz: Man rocking the Zephyr.

Hon. N. Baksh: People filling up gas, rocking up to see how much more gas it will take, people running in the groceries to buy groceries and stocking up anticipating increases, increases in liquor and cigarettes, even cooking gas people used to buy it and stock it up. And this was the norm under the PNM Government.

Mr. Speaker, today, all of that is history now, five years and this Government has increased no taxes. This in itself is a resounding success of this Government.

Mr. Speaker, the hon. Minister of Finance and the Economy presented to us and to the nation very clearly, the challenging but successful journey through which the country has come, yielding after little more than four years such impressive growth and stability and generating such a high level of investor confidence, both locally and internationally, that it may be looked upon as nothing short of a miracle, but it is really the astute planning and expert management of the economy for which we have to thank the hon. Prime Minister and her Minister of Finance and the Economy, Sen. The Hon. Larry Howai.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to share with the honourable House today, the tremendous contribution which the agencies, under my purview as the Minister of Public Utilities, have made on the journey of the country towards that inclusive

fair and equitable growth, which the hon. Minister of Finance and the Economy described. Indeed, I can say with conviction that the Public Utilities under my purview have contributed significantly to the improvement of the standard of living among all citizens of Trinidad and Tobago.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to take this opportunity to share information on the services of the Ministry of Public Utilities and its agencies and all these initiatives of the People's Partnership Government.

I would like to begin with electricity. The Trinidad and Tobago Electricity Commission is the agency which carries the responsibility for the transmission and distribution of electricity for our entire nation, encompassing residential, business and commercial customers. Over the period 2010—August 2014, T&TEC has seen a large increase in its customer base of 31,307 new customers, and 23,833 of those are residential customers, 7,474 of those are commercial and industrial customers. And as such, an increase most certainly was the result of the new housing developments, and on the commercial side the expansion of the business and industrial plants. And as the Minister of Finance and the Economy reminded this honourable House of the tremendous amount of work this Government has done to transform Trinidad and Tobago into a very conducive economic and business environment and one with a high attraction for domestic and foreign investment.

Mr. Speaker, one of the key indicators on the ease of doing business in any country is the availability of an affordable and reliable supply of electricity. In this regard, the People's Partnership Government has gone the extra mile and has funded on a most consistent basis the infrastructure works that would improve reliability nationwide. Over the period 2011 to 2014, a total of \$279 million was provided under the PSIP. This is a significant injection of funds and it has propelled the works which were needed for the improvement of reliability across the system. A point to note also in addition to the reliability factor, this Government has managed the sector so well to keep rates stable, so that today, the price of electricity in Trinidad and Tobago is the lowest in the English-speaking Caribbean.

Mr. Speaker, I return now to the matter of reliability. If we start with our capital city, Port of Spain and environs, we have to thank this Government for making it possible for T&TEC to commission the Gateway Project which is located in Port of Spain. This project was conceived by the PNM but they never funded the project and this is why over the years Port of Spain and the environs experienced

blackouts. And today, this Government has funded that project and we have eradicated that problem to a large extent. [*Desk thumping*]

The goal of this project was to expand the national grid to ensure that the bulk power generated at power stations is delivered to the various load centres. The energizing of the Gateway 132 kV sub-station took place in April 2013. The completion of the Gateway along with other supporting transmission system developments have allowed T&TEC to be able to transmit power from TGU, Trinidad Generation Unlimited in La Brea, to Port of Spain and environs more easily. The completion of the Gateway project has significantly increased the reliability of electricity supply to citizens living in Camille Road, Cascade, Maraval and the Westmoorings areas as well as the City of Port of Spain. We have therefore ensured, Mr. Speaker, that the energy needs of the nation's capital and its burgesses are met and we are continuing with additional projects to ensure that the future needs will be met as well. I want to make a brief mention of the TGU. Mr. Speaker, I want to assure this honourable House that the focus of this Government is on people.

7.55 p.m.

We know that the PNM Government initiated this project with TGU and it was linked to the smelter plant, and we know the history with regard to smelter plants, the effects it could have on the citizens living in the communities and environs. Therefore, this Government saw it fit to put people first and they decided to call off that project—the smelter plant—and use that generating plant there to take that electricity to the national grid so that the entire nation could benefit from the production of electricity at TGU. [*Desk thumping*]

T&TEC has completed 56 per cent of this transmission infrastructure works to move power from the TGU to the national grid and the whole project will be completed by December 2014. I want to make a note here that we are building a mega substation in Gandhi Village where we are going to take the bulk of the power from TGU to Gandhi Village, and then transport it to the national grids throughout this country. That is going to really solve our problems with regard to electricity. [*Desk thumping*] You know that it will service such areas as the UWI South Campus in Debe and other major projects.

Mr. Speaker, I started with the City of Port of Spain in outlining the great strides made by T&TEC in increasing the reliability of the supply of electricity in this country, but I want to share with this honourable House that the Port of Spain works are just the tip of the iceberg. Over the past four years, T&TEC has worked

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tirelessly at substation upgrades. The construction of overhead lines and feeders are a host of other supporting development works to increase the reliability of supply to domestic customers in areas across Trinidad, to cater for increased load demands and for the load growth on industrial zones, such as Point Lisas and the O'Meara area, including Carapo, Mausica and environs.

The total number of projects in this vein is impressive and I want to take the opportunity, just for the information that I am sharing to the national community and, in particular our MPs here, that they will understand and appreciate the extent of work that T&TEC is undertaking to ensure that we have a reliable supply of electricity throughout Trinidad and Tobago. A total of 11 projects in the northern area covering, for example, the Laventille substation, San Juan, St. James, Diego Martin, Independence Square Central and West, Maraval and Point Cumana.

I make special mention of these projects that are in the north because the PNM Members have the audacity to say that we are only focusing on central and south. So I want it to be known that we are focusing heavily on the northern end for the improvement of electricity supply. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. De Coteau: "Doh take basket from dem, yuh know."

Hon. N. Baksh: We also have seven projects in the eastern region, from Trincity and St. Augustine substation upgrades to the re-conductoring of the lines to Brasso Seco.

There are 10 projects in central region, from the Point Lisas station upgrade to the upgrade of the Freeport feeder and the construction of a 12kV feeder for the NGC facility; 10 projects in the southern region from the Phillipine substation to substations in Syne Village, St. Mary's, Tabaquite, Mayaro, Rio Claro, and construction of feeders at La Romaine, St. Croix and the establishment of the Lachoos Road feeder. So we are delivering and improving the lives of citizens through the length and breadth of this country. We are actually empowering people.

Our sister isle of Tobago received similar attention. The flagship project was the Cove/Milford Bay, No. 2-66 kV overhead pole line. This project was engineered and placed on load on November 19, 2013. This overhead pole line has resulted in the availability of a second transmission line to export power out of the Cove power station, thus increasing the reliability of electricity supply to all areas of Tobago. In addition, previous smaller works included the commissioning of the Studley Park 33/12kV substation in May 2013 to address needs in Goodwood, Pembroke, Roxborough, Speyside and Charlotteville, and the

construction of three additional 12 kV feeders, coming out of the Cove to improve the reliability of supply to Scarborough, Black Rock, Crown Point, Canaan and Plymouth.

Mr. Speaker, those details I have given on the issue of reliability underscores the quantum leap in progress which T&TEC has made under this Government to improve the living standards of all citizens across all constituencies and every nook and cranny in this twin-island republic of Trinidad and Tobago.

On this point of high-ranking of T&TEC in terms of electrification, I share with this honourable House that in the July/August 2014 issue of the *IEEE Power and Energy* magazine, there is a report on Trinidad and Tobago. It says, and I quote from that book:

“It Takes a Village:

The World Bank, one of the most important supporters of rural electrification projects, estimates approximately 1.2 billion people do not have regular access to electricity. In Latin America as a whole, according to the International Energy Agency, the electrification rate has reached 92.3% but that still leaves 33.8 million people without access to electricity...They live mostly in rural and isolated areas that are often neglected by electrification projects due to the high associated costs and technical difficulties.”

But Trinidad and Tobago was shown in that magazine with an electrification rate of 99 per cent, sharing the company of nations such as Venezuela, Uruguay, the Netherland Antilles, Costa Rica, Chile and Brazil, and the percentage of population without electricity to be less than 1 per cent.

The report which I have just quoted, noted that the reason some of the people in Latin America are without access to electricity may be because they live in rural and isolated areas, where it is difficult to take electricity to those areas. In Trinidad, we have looked at the situation where persons in remote areas are not able to access electricity supply, and as a policy response to that, the People’s Partnership Government has in place a subsidy programme where eligible persons can receive financial assistance towards the installation of a solar panel. This is a new initiative of this Government.

In addition to that, the Government has gone further and as recently as June this year, this Government implemented a policy to extend water and electricity to persons living in squatter communities. Imagine the joy of the children being able

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to use their laptops to advance their education, and how the electricity connection will improve so many other aspects of their day-to-day living. Dr. Rambachan made reference to a child who was getting electricity from a neighbour's home to use the laptop. We are going to solve that problem with this programme that we are introducing here, to reach out to people living in squatting communities and so.

Mr. Speaker, our aim with all these initiatives is to ensure that Trinidad and Tobago moves from the 99 per cent to a full 100 per cent electrification rate. [*Desk thumping*] But I understand that the PNM stated that the policy with respect to electricity and water supply to squatters was made simply to catch votes. How misleading. And, you know, this is their type of thinking; this is their style of thinking, and I want to say shame on them—[*Interruption*]

Mr. Cadiz: Shame. Shame on them.

Hon. N. Baksh:—when we are taking electricity to very poor people in this country.

Dr. Griffith: Negative thinking.

Hon. N. Baksh: We are not just catching votes, the votes are already there. We have heard it from them that they plan, by some strange wind, that if they get into power they are going to repeal a number of the measures that the People's Partnership Government has implemented for the benefit of people.

Mr. De Coteau: "Tell dem, man."

Hon. N. Baksh: If the PNM is planning this kind of thing, if they get back in power, woe to the people in this country.

Mr. De Coteau: The Member for Port of Spain North/St. Ann's East did not know you had so much potency.

Hon. N. Baksh: Mr. Speaker, I want to make reference to another programme initiated by this People's Partnership Government, really to reach the poor and less fortunate in our society. This is the Utilities Assistance Programme where, in addition to those that I mentioned, and all the others that my colleagues on this side are making mention of, this Utilities Assistance Programme assists senior citizens, people who are receiving disability benefits, public assistance and beneficiaries, also of the TT card, that they can have a reimbursement on their

WASA and T&TEC bills. Once they fall within those categories, they can make the necessary application and forward it to the Ministry of Public Utilities where we will investigate and grant the necessary approval for those persons to benefit with regard to reduced electricity and water rates.

There is an additional grant that we just embarked upon and that is the water tank, again, where people cannot afford to have proper storage facilities. And you have heard the Minister of Health talk about storage and mosquitos breeding in improper storage facilities. We have taken an initiative where we are providing water tanks and fittings to less fortunate citizens in our country. This is along with the solar panels that we are providing to the citizens. So this is another initiative of the Government, to assist those less fortunate citizens of the country.

Mr. Speaker, I want to go to another very important project of the Ministry of Public Utilities, and that has to do with the illumination of parks and recreation grounds. I am sure, Mr. Speaker, as you drive through this country, and other colleagues here drive through the country, you could see the effects of these lights that we are providing on recreation grounds. What we are actually doing here is improving the living standards of our people.

Hon. Member: That is right.

Hon. N. Baksh: We are doing this in collaboration with T&TEC, and we have been actively pursuing the illumination of public spaces, parks and recreation grounds. The illumination of recreation grounds, in particular, has brought immense joy and satisfaction to communities across the length and breadth of Trinidad. For our youths, they serve as an attraction to participate in sporting activities, such as cricket, football, basketball and netball. Members of the community can address their health goals by using the lighted spaces to walk, run and jog, all in safety and security in the late evening and into the night.

We are doing this in collaboration with the programmes of the Minister of Health, when he speaks about, “fight the fat”. And you know that there is a report which says that we are the fifth obese nation, and we have to do something to address this, and this is one aspect of programmes that we are putting in place to ensure that we could help these people fight the fat. Therefore, the illumination of these grounds here, you could see what is happening. Since 2010 the People’s Partnership Government has illuminated 146 grounds. An additional 14 are awaiting commissioning and there are works in progress on 74 grounds at this time, as we speak. Compare that to the 87 grounds that were done under the PNM since they implemented this programme.

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I want to just make a quick reference here on the grounds that—you know, I am doing this with equity throughout the country, to ensure that every constituency would have lit grounds. But I want to make a reference here, how the PNM did it. You know, they concentrated mainly on their constituencies. I said, mainly, because there are some of their own Members who did not get a ground lit. I want to make reference here: Arouca/Maloney got one. Today, under the People's Partnership Government, they got six.

Hon. Member: What? Nah!

Hon. N. Baksh: Six under the People's Partnership Government.

Hon. Member: “And Arouca eh say nutten?”

Hon. N. Baksh: Yes, Arouca/Maloney.

Dr. Griffith: Say thank you. Say thank you.

Hon. Member: But she would not say anything.

8.10 p.m.

Hon. N. Baksh: Chaguanas East, which was then a PNM constituency, got six; D'Abadie/O'Meara got six and I do not know who was the then MP for that area.

Mr. Cadiz: Tesheira. That is the—

Hon. N. Baksh: Somebody went in a nightie somewhere.

Mr. Cadiz: The glamour girl.

Hon. N. Baksh: Yeah—six under D'Abadie/O'Meara; they got four under this partnership Government; Diego Martin Central, another PNM constituency, got zero under the PNM; under this partnership Government, they got four illumination of grounds; Diego Martin North/East got zero under the PNM, got three under this partnership Government, and they have more to get. Right.

La Horquetta/Talparo, they got zero; under this Government, they got five; Laventille West, he was fortunate, he got eight under the PNM. So much, eight; “he ent even know that”. [*Laughter*] Point Fortin, which is a PNM constituency, got one under the PNM; under this Government, got five more. [*Desk thumping*] Port of Spain North/St. Ann's West, one under the PNM—[*Crosstalk*] You did not make a request. Right? You asked for street lights and so and you got it. Port of Spain South, zero; six under this Government. So, Mr. Speaker, Siparia which was under the Leader of the Opposition at that time got one under the PNM, and Toco/Sangre Grande which was also another PNM constituency got zero under the

PNM. Right. So that we are addressing, under the Ministry of Public Utilities, we are going to make sure that we have equity in the distribution of these lights. [*Desk thumping*] [*Crosstalk*] We have started, you could see it; I gave you the figures there. So, this is the kind of job we are doing in this country.

Mr. Speaker, we are going to embark on a—we are conducting an impact assessment programme on the illumination of grounds and I could tell you that when I drive around on evenings, you could see the number of persons going out there and walking and jogging, and I am talking about the elderly ones. You could see the younger ones going and playing their little small goal, football and cricket and so. But, you know, what this does, the benefit of this, you are bringing families together to go and recreate in these grounds and so on and this is important. You know, what we are also doing is engaging the youngsters there, burning out their energy in sports and detracting them from negative activities, and this is the bonus in these programmes, Mr. Speaker, and I am sure this is a major one under the Ministry of Public Utilities

Mr. Speaker, you know, very often we take electricity for granted, that when you go to your home and you go to enter a room, or you enter the home, you flick on a switch, you expect to see a light coming on. This is something, we take it for granted. But do we ever think and ask ourselves what it takes to get that electricity as you flick the switch, you see the bulb lighting? We must sit and ponder what it takes, how much it takes. When you drive through the roads and so on, you see all the T&TEC lines, all the infrastructure and the sub-stations. This is something we have to wonder how we manage this. I want to really commend T&TEC for their initiative and the kind of solidarity and the teamwork that they have in T&TEC. I really want to commend them for that.

I am taking this opportunity here, under the PSIP, to let the Members of this House know and the national community know, that we are embarking in 2015 to continue the impressive work programme to assure the reliability of supply of power to the nation here. As the economy develops, existing sub-station infrastructure will have to be reassessed. Some key projects already on the board: the San Rafael/Piarco 66 kV sub-transmission circuit programme and the Westmoorings programme and the new generation projects in Tobago.

Mr. Speaker, the San Rafael/Piarco project will address the reliability of supply to meet the anticipated domestic/commercial/industrial load growth in the area. The Trincity ring will be expanded to include a third in-feed from the San Rafael to the Piarco sub-station. When completed, this would yield a critical

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transmission interface for improved reliability and security to those areas, inclusive of the critical load centres such as the Caroni/Arena Water Treatment Plant and the Piarco Airport.

Mr. Speaker, the Westmoorings sub-station now serves the entire north-west peninsula. In January 2014, fire destroyed one of the two existing transmission transformers. The temporary measures put in by T&TEC now assure an electricity supply to the population of the area but the system is a bit fragile. New load demands are being created from the domestic, commercial and industrial customers which include the extensive developmental plans expressed by the Chaguaramas Development Authority. Completion of the Westmoorings programme in 2015 will meet the expected load demands and restore robustness to the associated circuits.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to acknowledge, at this point here, the assistance of the MP for Diego Martin North/East and the Mayor of Port of Spain for promising one acre of additional land for the expansion of the Westmoorings sub-station and this has been a challenge. This is why we could not improve it in the past because we are waiting for additional land adjoining the existing sites so that we could expand this, and we are going to do that in 2015. That will guarantee a reliable supply on the western peninsula and the Maraval area which we are experiencing a little difficulty from time to time at this point in time.

In addition to these two projects, T&TEC will embark upon the replacement of aged and obsolete transmission infrastructure under which it hopes to complete the replacement of ninety-five 33 kV circuit breakers and thirty-five 66 kV circuit breakers as well as several transmission lines structures. For this year 2015, T&TEC has been allocated \$159 million under the PSIP, and we assure you that we are going to embark on those projects as soon as possible as funds are released, and we are going to see a difference under this People's Partnership Government. All those outages and blackouts we were accustomed to under the PNM will now be a thing of the past under this Government.

So altogether, through you, Mr. Speaker, I would like to inform the national population that through heavy investment in and the good governance of the electricity sector, in four short years, the Government has brought T&TEC up to the highest efficiency level in a relentless drive to provide electricity for all, and to support Trinidad and Tobago on the road to sustainable, economic and social development. Mr. Speaker, with few exceptions, outages are now a thing of the past. Do you recall the days when you were cooking and lights used to go off so

you are rushing to cook your dinner very quickly before current goes. You are ironing your clothes, you are rushing to do it because you are expecting current to go anytime. Similarly, when the students are doing their homework, they had to do it quickly because they expected the electricity to go anytime. You are looking at your favourite TV shows and you had to wonder if this is going to go when thing is coming, you know, very exciting in the show, and this is now a thing of the past. Mr. Speaker, we assure you that the initiatives that we are taking— [*Crosstalk*] Well, I told you that there is a difficulty there because of the blowout we had in January 2014 at Westmoorings. So that we are solving that problem; we are aware of it and we are now going to make that history as well.

Mr. Speaker, I want to move on to another critical agency under the Ministry and that is TSTT. I now turn to the contribution made by the Telecommunication Services of Trinidad and Tobago, TSTT. The hon. Minister of Finance and the Economy in his budget presentation, informed us of the important role of Information and Communication Technology, ICT, as we seek to modernize the country and put the frameworks in place to create a dynamic knowledge-based society. He noted that we are making tremendous strides in bridging the deficiencies in access to, and use of ICTs.

Mr. Speaker, in this regard, I wish to inform this honourable House that TSTT is without doubt the leading telecommunications company in Trinidad and Tobago, supporting the Government all the way in creating a dynamic knowledge-based society. The company is in the second year of the implementation of its five-year strategic plan 2013—2018 and it is already having great success with the diversification of its product suite and the shift to new platforms for growth and innovation. Governments all over the world today, Mr. Speaker, are increasingly placing reliance on developing knowledge-based economies.

Towards this goal, TSTT has taken the lead in Trinidad and Tobago in offering mobile, fixed line, broadband, pay-TV, security and other related services. The opening up of the mobile telecoms market proved to be a catalyst for TSTT and it has reinvented its business from a phone company providing just landline, Internet and mobile services to the country's only quintuple service provider offering: voice, high speed broadband, TV, security and mobile services. Also, the company has diversified its mix of technology from copper-based, digital infrastructure into a wireless fibre-optic Internet protocol-based, core infrastructure.

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On this basis, TSTT has been able to achieve some significant improvements and I want to highlight some of those there:

- Its 4G mobile network is firmly established utilizing the most modern technology and providing coverage to 95 per cent of the country's population. This has brought significant mobile data services to the country, literally putting the Internet in the palm of citizens' hands.
- For service improvement and population coverage, TSTT has expanded its number of cell sites, targeting areas with previously poor coverage. The current 2G voice population coverage is 98 per cent for Trinidad and 95 per cent for Tobago. Data coverage for 4G is at 85 per cent for Trinidad and 80 per cent for Tobago.
- The establishment of its BZones, 54 of them through which supplemental broadband access was strategically deployed to certain critical high traffic areas within Trinidad and Tobago, has brought tremendous satisfaction to our population.

Imagine since 2012, communication, for example, from Maracas Beach with the outside world is possible. TSTT broadband initiatives allow us to do that today. Simple but huge in effect. Highly valued by our people and tourists alike, who can sit on the beach and enjoy high speed data services, surf the Internet, send and receive emails, stream live news, music and video on mobile devices.

Mr. Speaker, what has been most noticeable in the past year is the way in which TSTT has taken a leadership role in the societal development of this country; breaking new ground with respect to digital access in the field of education and communication, and also bridging the digital divide prevalent in underserved communities. Some of its notable achievements are as follows:

- For two years now, it has been partnering with the Ministry of Tertiary Education and Skills Training in the provision of note pads to students at this level. This would ensure that our youths are equipped with the tools to facilitate their skills development using technology. In addition, in May of this year, BLINK mobile partnered with the Ministry of Education and Samsung to launch the Samsung Smart School Solution.

And we have heard my colleague, the Minister of Education, making reference to this implementation here along with the Ministry of Education.

8.25 p.m.

Also, in January this year, BLINK Quad-play unveiled Trinidad and Tobago's first gigabit community at the Legacy House Development in Chaguanas. The homes in the gigabit community have been provided with fibre optic connections to the network that allows for Internet speed of up to one gigabit per second. What this means, Mr. Speaker, is that it will take just one second for a user to download 100 million characters of text or 1,250 basic webpages, or 25 songs, all in that one second. Mr. Speaker, we can, therefore, imagine what the gigabit community concept with such high Internet speeds will mean for our schools, universities and critical facilities such as health care and medical institutions and other sectors such as security and transportation. This will be a great attraction for foreign investors who require sophisticated telecom facilities for their global connectivity. In fact, most of our modernization and transformation plans can benefit tremendously from this revolutionary initiative.

Mr. Speaker, I was privileged earlier this year to attend a Mobile World Congress Conference and exhibition in Spain, where the role of governments in this rapidly evolving technological world was discussed by leaders from many countries.

One of the key consensus areas at the conference was that mobile broadband was becoming increasingly important to national economies and the lives of users. It was suggested that in the 21st Century, broadband networks must be considered as basic infrastructures such as roads and railways. That is how important it is. So it is important for us to see the strides TSTT is making in mobile broadband in this context.

Mr. Speaker, I want to touch briefly on another aspect under the Ministry of Public Utilities, that is postal services, TTPost. This is another very important agency under my purview, that of the Trinidad and Tobago Postal Corporation, or TTPost as it is known. Again, in tracing the journey of our country to a return to fair and equitable growth, I must say that the contribution of TTPost was very significant. We all know that the postal sector is an integral part of any country.

Mr. Speaker: These electronic devices are not toys, and whilst the Member is speaking, people are not following the debate. Maybe they are tired, but if you want to leave early, you can. But at least do not disturb the debate, please.

Mr. Imbert: Thank you very much.

Mr. Speaker: Continue, hon. Member, please.

Hon. N. Baksh: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and if I have reached my time I would want the extra time. Mr. Speaker, we all know that the postal sector is an integral part of any country's social and economic fabric and can be a very great asset in driving the country's development. What is critical, however, in these times, in the face of rapid and revolutionary ICT development, is for postal organizations to reinvent themselves to be a very relevant partner in development.

TTPost has risen to this challenge and has taken many positive steps to meet the modern postal needs of the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago. It has made great strides in improving its customer service and infusing the new technologies into business operations.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to identify some of the achievements of TTPost. Recognizing the rise of e-commerce, TTPost has partnered with eZone, an Internet shopping facility, and it is now positioned to be a major player in lucrative and growing Internet shopping market. And we know a lot of people are shopping online these days.

Responding to the expansion of housing developments and the establishment of new businesses in the country, TTPost has expanded its new delivery points to homes and businesses, and as at May 2014, an additional 986 points have been attained.

Responding to a modern clientele, TTPost has stepped up the quality of its service and the overall efficiency and reliability of its postal network. As a result, over the past four years, the corporation has upgraded five delivery offices, opened up five new retail shops and opened 37 new stamp resellers outlets. Accessing postal services is easier than ever before. In fact, the people of Trinidad and Tobago currently enjoy one of the best configurations of delivery offices, corporate shops, franchises and stamp resellers ever.

Mr. Speaker, I am aware that in some of the rural areas we have had some complaints of late deliveries and difficulties in getting mails on time. We are working to solve this problem and the problem we are getting here, we assured them that by the end of December 2014, TTPost would have completed the acquisition of new and modern scooters, which would allow for easier reach and on-time delivery to these rural communities, and this has been a problem.

Mr. Speaker: Your time has expired. The question is that the speaking time of the Hon. Minister of Public Utilities and the Member for Naparima be extended by 10 minutes.

Question put and agreed to.

Hon. N. Baksh: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I want to touch very briefly on another agency of the Ministry of Public Utilities and that is the role of the Electrical Inspectorate Division, which is very critical for all of us as homeowners.

One cannot overemphasize the important role and function of the Government's Electrical Inspectorate Division. They are an integral part of the whole electricity framework, providing timely inspections and granting certificates for all domestic, commercial and industrial electrical installations in Trinidad and Tobago. They maintain a keen focus on ensuring the integrity of the wiring systems in all installations and conduct their business according to the most modern and up-to-date codes, regulations and standards.

For the fiscal year 2014, Mr. Speaker, the EID has already conducted 25,892 inspections in Trinidad and Tobago, conducted 92 fire and electrical investigations and issued 816 wireman's licences and saw after the needs of 31,472 customers who visit its head office and sub-offices on a daily basis for advice and information. They are also a consistent revenue earner, and a total of \$3.6 million has already been collected in inspection fees so far for this year.

Mr. Speaker, only recently we have opened a new office in San Fernando, in La Romaine, and we are looking at opening a new office in central to facilitate those customers in the central region, and I think before the end of this year, we will have another office in Chaguanas.

Mr. Speaker, what I have outlined here this evening shows a steady growth and progress in those aspects of the utilities sector for which I carry responsibility. It shows performance—performance, as they say, beats old talk—and it shows the Government led by our brilliant and courageous Prime Minister, the Hon. Kamla Persad-Bissessar, is working for the people and putting people first. But important too, it shows the huge amount of change which has been made to the physical landscape, as well as in the social and economic fabric of our society. This is unprecedented in Trinidad and Tobago, and for this, the People's Partnership Government has endeared itself to the electorate of this country, Mr. Speaker.

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I want to take a few minutes to just speak briefly on my constituency, which is very critical to me as an elected MP, and you know without them I could not be here. Mr. Speaker, you know, I represent the constituency—I want to claim just after Moruga or Toco/Manzanilla, I think we have to get a surveyor to dispute that, you know. Over the years—I have been in this politics quite a few years, of which I spent a number of years in Opposition. In those days, I never heard about lighting of recreation grounds under the PNM. It was a quiet secret that they kept and only delivered to certain areas. When you speak about roads, we were at a disadvantage. We were accustomed to a lot of potholes and traversing these roads morning, evening and night to get across to work and from work—children going to school.

I am fortunate that there are four major roads in the constituency. We manage somehow to beg and get things done by a little patching here and there. But, now that we are in Government we have to make sure that we could deliver and catch up on those that were neglected over the years. Today I could boast a little bit and say that we have undertaken—that is 183 landslips in my constituency, just after Moruga/Tableland. In fact, there is a vein, a fault in that area when you come from Malgretoute, Iere Village going into Lothians, St. Croix Road, going to Realize Road, down into the Moruga district, lots and lots of landslips and part of Princes Town constituency as well, so we need to address this. One hundred and eighty-three landslips and out of those we have been able to do 48, and still there are some very critical ones that are—*[Interruption]*

Mr. Speaker: Member for Port of Spain South, you want to come here?

Miss Mc Donald: No, Sir.

Hon. N. Baksh: There are very critical landslips that we are dealing with. Mr. Speaker, when you look at it, it is threatening homes. Sometimes I wish I could do a lot more to help those families who have been affected by those landslips. Right now I could see that—I am asking, I am trying to relocate some of those families because homes have collapsed. Their houses have collapsed and families have nowhere to stay. They are staying in their neighbour's garage next door. I have been there and visited. So we are trying to do something to assist those families and I feel for them. Give us a little time and we will address their problems as well.

Right now we have done landslips in Malgretoute Road, Mt. Stewart, Reform, Guaracara/Tabaquite Road, Garth Road, Iere Village, Cleghorn Village, Williamsville, Realize Road and we are doing three right now in Jaipaulsingh Road.

Mr. Speaker, the Land Settlement Agency, I have a fair portion of my constituency where people live on Caroni lands and they have been there since their grandparents occupied it and some without any land tenure and so on, and today I have a representative from the Land Settlement Agency, who would come on a monthly basis and we would invite people from different communities, different villages, to come and meet with the officer to see how we could address their problems and to ensure that they could get some document to give them security to where they reside. You know, without that, they are unable to benefit from some of the social programmes where there are house repair grants and other benefits, and so on. So we need to address this critically. And today, I can say that up to 210 persons have come and visited the office and we are addressing their problems as well and they come on a monthly basis and we still have a lot more to deal with, so that this is something that is critical in my constituency and we are dealing with it.

Mr. Speaker, another critical area, most of Naparima consists of Caroni sugar workers. Most of it had the sugar belt, which was abandoned by the former government and today those people are really striving to make ends meet—
[*Interruption*]

Hon. Members: Struggling.

Hon. N. Baksh: Struggling to make ends meet, and today 252 persons received their deed of lease and they came at the constituency office where we made arrangements so that they could come there and receive it at that level there, 252 of those, and we are still identifying those that we did not reach in that drive. We are looking for them, because of the change of address and we have no telephone numbers or so, but we are going out to do that. Thank you very much.

Mr. Speaker, we have assisted poor families to repair their homes through the self-help grant and we assisted 189 families. Sometimes when there are freak storms or they experience flooding and the homes wash away and these sort of things, those people were beneficiaries of this programme; 189 families benefited.

Mr. Speaker, I work very closely with the police at the Princes Town and Barrackpore stations and we have two police youth clubs in the constituency, one at Barrackpore and one, they operate from my constituency office in Cedar Hill. They have been doing very good work in keeping the young people and engaging them in social work and identifying them where they can get additional support for education and recreational facilities, and doing some voluntary work in their communities.

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8.40 p.m.

I want to make a quick reference, Mr. Speaker, to water projects. That is one of the areas where they suffered for water. Today, I can say that we have completed 34 water projects, from 2010 to now, in the constituency of Naparima. Time would not permit me to read all of those 34, but my people in the constituency know who they are and they benefited. I think they are very happy with the representation I have been making for them.

Mr. Speaker, I was also able to give out 25 wheelchairs. I made representation to business people, to NGOs and so, who assisted me in obtaining 25 wheelchairs for people in the constituency. I also got two recreation grounds upgraded and the Kumar Village Recreation Ground and the Inverness/Borde Narve Recreation Ground. I want to thank the former Minister of Sport and, of course, I had to lobby a little more to the present Minister.

Mr. Speaker, I want to thank you for the opportunity and I could make mention that during my stay there in the last four years, I have seen 14,267 persons who visited my constituency. [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. Member: Excellent work.

Hon. N. Baksh: Excellent work in the constituency of Naparima.

So, I want to take this opportunity to thank all my constituents and, in particular, my staff at the constituency office, for the yeoman service that they lent to me in giving the kind of service to the constituency.

Miss Mc Donald: That sounds like your final speech.

Hon. N. Baksh: That is in preparation for the next election. You do not know that. [*Laughter*]

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Speaker: Please, please, please.

The Minister of Public Administration (Hon. Carolyn Seepersad-Bachan): Thank you, Mr. Speaker, for the opportunity to contribute in this year's budget presentation.

Mr. Speaker, I believe that the role of Government is to facilitate development. Our job is to provide goods and services, develop programmes, policies and projects and create an environment in which our citizens could be comfortable, committed and, most of all, creative. Our job is to take care of the

infrastructure and simultaneously to develop benefits and opportunities to make life better for all our citizens.

Mr. Speaker, in that context, therefore, I would like to congratulate the Minister of Finance and the Economy which, in my view, he has brought together—he has weaved together—all the various threads which would emerge in a tapestry. The development of a nation will not take place over one year, but over a period of time. You would recall, since 2012, in this Parliament, after assuming the portfolio of Minister of Public Administration, I embarked on what is called the Gold to Diamond journey—we refer to it as G2D. This journey uses the successes of the public service. We have celebrated 50 years in 2012 and from the successes of the public service we are able now to look at how we want to transform institutions, processes, systems and improve governance overall in the public service. All of this to be able to deliver more value for money, to enhance national competitiveness and to accelerate the ease of doing business.

We defined the Gold to Diamond vision as—we call it several names. You could speak to it as the no wrong door—members here would have heard me speak to this before; the no wrong door approach; bundled offerings, the one-stop shop for government services; multichannel access and joined-up government. What this means is that we would be able to go into any public office, by the year 2022 and be able to obtain any public service.

Mr. Speaker, in moving forward in that way, when we start talking about the Gold to Diamond journey itself—this 10-year journey that have designed, starting in 2012 and ending in 2022—one of the things that we must put it in the context of, is what we have and the challenges that we face today in the public service.

As we all know what we are trying to deal with in the Gold to Diamond journey is how we modernize the archaic processes and the bureaucratic systems within the public service; the low levels of customer service, which we hear about every day and productivity; and, as we know today, as well, customers, citizens, not only do they want to tell you how bad your customer service is, but they also want to participate. They want to give suggestions and they want to be part of the process in improving services delivered by Government, in addition, how we actually deal with the declining ease of doing business and the global competitiveness. All of this, it is deemed that the public service is an impediment to the ease of doing business in Trinidad and Tobago. Most important, we have had a lack of career opportunities for professionals, including support staff due to the archaic job descriptions, many of them existing since 1962. The Gold to

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Diamond initiative proposes to employ strategies whereby a ministry has the right resources at the right time with human resources possessing the right competencies to effectively deliver outstanding value to the ministries' clients.

Mr. Speaker, this year—to put all of this in context—I really want to treat with what I call the modern 21st Century public officer. Who is this modern 21st Century public officer? When I speak to the profile of this modern public officer, this is an individual who is multi-skilled, highly competent in technical areas of functional groups, proactive, motivated, autonomous—meaning I do not have to depend on somebody to give me an instruction—efficient, “I’m very concerned about citizens so I am customer and citizen-centric and I am also very technology savvy.”

Mr. Speaker, the move to what we call our HRM Architecture—we refer to it as the Diamond HRM Architecture—because, as you know, I have said this before in this House, that the structure of the public service is very pyramidal. It is bottom heavy with very little middle management. The new diamond structure involves actually expanding the middle management level which is where we expect to see a number of new professional opportunities and empowerment.

So, Mr. Speaker, when we are speaking about this new public service and this new HRM Architecture, we are talking about the creation of more modern and integrated jobs, opportunities for public officers to become more mobile in their career paths; the bringing of the public service in line with needs of the 21st Century, the implementation of a structure and classification system that can attract and retain technical expertise through modern compensation systems. For too long it has been said that the compensation systems that we have in the public service is unable to retain the expertise that is needed. Fifthly, Mr. Speaker, speaking to the stronger adoption of a meritocracy approach to HRM in which appointments and promotions are based on tested, on tested ability or achievements and competencies.

So, Mr. Speaker, when we speak of the new public officer, he or she is, therefore, someone who becomes engaged in flexible work with people in an integrated way, while acquiring new skills and competencies. I want to make this point, Mr. Speaker, that when we celebrate the diamond anniversary of our nation in 2022, the public service would have been modernized. It would not have been modernized by Ministers—when we speak to government, as Government Ministers—but by the public officers themselves. They will be the driving force; the brains behind the technology and the spirit of this progress.

Public officers, at the end of the day, are also consumers of the same goods and services as any other citizen. Therefore, they want to be part of the solutions because they want better lives for themselves, their families, their communities and their country. If they are buying into modernization, it is because they see the benefits that are daily becoming available, apparent and accessible.

Mr. Speaker, to start this whole process I need to put this in context because one of the first things that we have done is we have developed a new public service philosophy. This philosophy is driven by the provision of courteous and reliable service whilst safeguarding the public interest and upholding the public trust. This is a very important concern, because when we did surveys you would note that citizens want to know that they can trust public officers. The public service is committed to ensuring that it is fit for purpose; it is structured, staffed and resourced to constantly deliver quality service to citizens in Trinidad and Tobago and its client groups.

The philosophy embraces the view that organizational and individual adherence to the public service's core institutional values, as well as the principle-based, purpose-driven behaviour and an orientation to achieving results that are among the key requirements for a modern effective public service. When we speak to the core values, we are speaking about honesty, integrity, objectivity and impartiality.

I say this because what we have done, as well—I move to the next point—last year I spoke about the competency-based framework approach to the public service and there are many benefits from that. This year, I am pleased to say that we are ready to move forward with this particular project in that a consultant has been sourced, through our open tendering process, and we are now ready to award this project which will last for the next 13 months. Therefore, the 21st Century public officer would have skills and we would now see a competency-based framework which will allow for the public officer to have skills, knowledge and behaviour that lead to successful performance. This is what we refer to as the competencies. So the modern public officer will have, at least, 10 competencies which they will continuously improve from one level to the next because in the public service itself you would have about six levels in the middle management, three at the top level and probably three to four at the bottom of the organization. Each of these competencies would have to be built and they will have to continuously improve as they move from one level to the next.

What are these competencies we are talking about? For example, understanding the big picture; changing and continuous improvement; how do

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you respond to innovation; how do you seek out opportunities to create effective improvements and making effective decisions. We make a lot of decisions, but if we want an empowered organization, then public officers must know how to make effective decisions, and these decisions must be objective; they must exercise sound judgment and, most important, they must be evidence-based. They must be able to be results driven—deliver results. How do they achieve commercial outcomes? Are they results based? Are they delivering value for money?

Therefore, at the senior level—you would be looking at the senior level to be able to ensure that they bring in a culture for value for money. When we are dealing at the lower levels of the organization we will expect public officers, modern public officers, to question and challenge, respectfully, where there appears to prevent good value for money. How do they manage quality service; how do they deliver at a pace; how do they engage people? For example, leading and communicating. What are their communication skill sets? When we talk about leadership—principle-centred leadership—fairness and opportunity; how much of that is created by the leaders in the organization; and, most important, collaborating and partnership. We talked already about team development, that is an important competency and it is about how you build trusting relationships; positive and trusting relationships, and at the senior level, what are you doing to develop an inclusive environment.

Most important, Mr. Speaker, how do we build capability at the senior level? Are the senior level managers encouraging talent management within the organization; and for the lower levels, are junior public officers involved in a continuous learning culture? So, we are in the process of awarding this contract. This project will take another 13 months to roll out and we expect to spend at least TT \$12 million on this particular project.

Mr. Speaker, what will be the benefits of this competency-based framework? This is going to be the core. It will allow, for example, open and transparent recruitment processes because now we can use competency-based interviewing techniques. We have started that already in the service, using competency-based assessment approaches. Secondly, it will allow for effective performance management systems. Thirdly, it will allow for a new compensation policy which we are in the process of developing; a new compensation policy which will not only deal with what we call performance reward system, pay for performance, but will also reward you for competencies that you develop, and new skill set that you develop in the organization.

What we envisage is that at the lower levels of the organization, we will devise a compensation system that will reward you for building competencies and at the senior levels of the organization, you will be rewarded more for performance, part of which is how you help to develop the competencies within the organization.

Mr. Speaker, on this basis, therefore, I want to say that this will help us significantly in terms of workforce planning, learning management, succession planning and career development, because at all times we are able to assess the skills gaps and be able to put learning programmes in place to address this.

8.55 p.m.

Mr. Speaker, in terms of the diamond structure of HRM Architecture, it is important to note that one of the things that we have done over the last year, is that we have looked at all the jobs, and I mentioned this last year in my budget contribution, and this is a continuation. We have looked at all the jobs, the skill sets that are required for a modern public service. Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to say that at the middle-management level which we are focused on, because this is where we expect empowerment, this is where we expect a lot of innovation to take place, we have developed a number of new jobs. I am talking here about close to 49 positions—job descriptions—that we have developed for the middle-management area.

Let me just tell you the areas we are talking about: information and information technology; information and communication technology, ICT; monitoring and evaluation; project and procurement management, because without programme management, we will not be able to actually deliver on performance informed budgeting and results-based management; facilities management; communications; new forms of HRM, for example, the HRM specialist who can take care of change-management issues.

So, Mr. Speaker, we have looked at the structure, the competency-based framework I am speaking to, will work alongside a competency-based framework for the professional stream as well. So they go hand in hand, Mr. Speaker, and based on consultations and so on that we have held we were able to come up with these new job descriptions. I am pleased to say, that all of those 49 positions have gone to the Chief Personnel Officer of the Personnel Department for classification. So that we will now have pensionable positions in these areas.

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Mr. Speaker, I just want to give one example of how it works, because one of the things that we did was that we actually looked at the ICT framework. I am just using this as an example to show you the process that we used over the last year. So in terms of the methodology itself, because we recognize information as a strategic resource in any organization, we started with that stream, ICT, because we recognize how weak it is.

I do not know if many of you know some of the jobs that exist on the establishment for ICT. And these jobs include, and I will just name them: the EDP Manager, the data clerk EDP; the control clerk EDP, conversion equipment operator, computer operator. Mr. Speaker, that is the extent of ICT jobs on our establishment of the public service. And, therefore, this was why we took the opportunity to look at creating that framework for ICT in the public service.

So we embarked on a project to standardize a set of IT fields across the public service, through the development of a model organizational structure. What this means, Mr. Speaker, is that we have developed and we have looked at Ministries, and we have developed model structures for different categories of Ministries. Therefore, the standardized job descriptions and job designations were developed.

Now, this was developed, in terms of when we looked across the board, through the workshops, and coming out of that, we got 22 standardized jobs descriptions. We utilized the skills framework for the information age, which is called SFIA. It is an English-based system, but we used that in the absence of having a competency-based framework of our own. So that became our competency-based framework, the professional side, and we were able to develop those ICT positions.

Mr. Speaker, I just want you to understand as well, that there are seven levels of responsibility in that ICT stream, and what we have seen today, are jobs such as those involving ICT governance, for example, Mr. Speaker, you know, security. But in order to achieve those jobs, one of the things the report had to do—the project, was they had to carry out a visioning exercise. I am just illustrating this to show you the methodology that was used, this was used for all the others, whether it is monitoring and evaluation, whether it is legal, whether it is communication, facilities management, project management.

So we did a visioning exercise, for example, in ICT. You will note that, for example, they had to do things like the cloud computing. Whatever the new job skill sets are, they must be able to take care of mobile computing, cloud computing, how you bring your own devices to work, process automation,

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crowdsourcing, security, data protection, mobile workforce, because many people are able to work from home going forward. And, therefore, Mr. Speaker, based on that visioning exercise, is how we were able to come up with those 22 positions and we were able to come up with those standard structures.

I am pleased to say that that has gone for classification, and right now, Mr. Speaker, they are being used in contract positions. Just before I go to contract positions, just let me also say I am pleased to announce, last year I indicated that we had come up with the whole MSO series which replaces all the MSO stream (management support office stream) which has been created to replace the clerical and manipulative group within the public service, they replaced the clerical and secretarial framework, and this is the new backbone of the new structure. You know, we are talking about multi-skilled public officers with greater scope, competencies and autonomy.

I mentioned this last year, Mr. Speaker, these people who would be technology savvy, who are capable of multi-tasking and customer services, with some project management capacity. I am pleased to say, Mr. Speaker, the management support office stream or what we call the management support stream, support series, has been classified by the CPO. The terms and conditions have been determined for these positions, and my understanding is right now there are ongoing discussions between the union and the CPO for the adoption of these positions.

So, Mr. Speaker, we will see a new stream coming in, in this fiscal year for the management support series which will replace the archaic clerical streams that were there before. I would also like to indicate that while we speak to these positions that are to become pensionable positions, become permanent positions on the establishment, we have no other choice that while we wait on this process, the classification process, that we use contract positions. As a result of that, all the jobs that have been developed, the job descriptions, et cetera, we are using them for standardized contract positions with standard terms and conditions.

I really want us to speak to this issue, because one of the problems I had coming in as Minister of Public Administration, was when I looked at the process and the complaints and the pleas from contract officers, for terms and conditions to be determined. I do not know if you all are aware, Members on the other side, that you have people who have served on contract positions three, six years, and their contracts have come to an expiration, and there have been no terms and conditions for these contract officers in the public service. As a result of that, I

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have seen recently someone who got their terms and conditions after their contract expired more than six years ago. I consider this unacceptable, Mr. Speaker.

So as a result of standardizing the contract job descriptions, and the terms and conditions, we reduced the delays—you know, the protracted timeframes required to determine terms and conditions for a contract officer. So as a result of that, a contract officer who is coming in, a job is advertised, that person who is applying for the job, actually knows the terms and conditions on which he or she is coming on for that job.

And, Mr. Speaker, as a result of this situation as well, I found myself in no other position, but to look at how we were able to actually reduce the backlog. It was amazing to me how many Ministries complained about backlogs. My colleagues, Ministers, came to me with lists upon lists of contract positions that terms and conditions had not been determined for. Now, when terms and conditions are not determined, contracts cannot be executed, and this is why the Auditor General continuously reports on the number of non-contracts, contracts that do not exist for employment, because no terms and conditions have been determined by the Personnel Department.

Mr. Speaker, I started a backlog project in the Ministry of Public Administration, in collaboration with the Personnel Department and with the appropriate use of technology and with the appropriate use of temporary staff, we were able to regularize terms and conditions for at least 1,492 persons, by April of this year. And we are about to complete, we believe we have done about 2,000 employees to date. We are starting that project again, and I am not going to stop it until we clear that backlog completely. I find it unfortunate, I find it unfair that contract officers have no contracts to go to a bank. So on that basis, let me say even the MSO series that we have, we are going to continue as well with what we call BOAs, Business Operation Assistants, as the interim contract positions for the MSOs, until the MSO series comes in.

Mr. Speaker, I want to say as well, that the GHRS, because we are dealing with a very merit-based system—the GHRS has developed a database, and they have assessed using the computer laboratories, because we are using multi-phased type of assessments for recruitment and selection. So they have been assessing those who applied online to the GHRS, through their database, and they have assessed them at their computer laboratories, Mr. Speaker.

I want to say that in October 2013, GHRS conducted a competency-based exercise involving 339 applicants. Let me just say, the e-recruitment applications

for BOA Is stand at 1,428; BOA IIs, 1,104. And little by little, Mr. Speaker, batch by batch, they have been going around the country using the various campuses of the UTT to actually assess these BOA Is, and BOA IIs, so that we have a database of people already assessed in competencies, whether it is in memo writing and Excel spreadsheets, PowerPoint, project management, Mr. Speaker, ready for employment. This is the way that we will also build the skill sets, and give people the opportunity and the experience which they themselves can go out into the private sector, because these are the skills sets that are needed even in the private sector.

In terms of executive leadership, I just want to continue to say that, you know, we continue the Executive Leadership Programme, and we have—you know, it targets two levels of public officers: leaders and deputy permanent secretaries. Activities under this programme will continue to include under the development programme, the Deputy Permanent Secretaries Orientation Programme, the Harvard Kennedy School of Business Executive Education, Managing Change in a Dynamic World, Harvard Kennedy School of Business Executive Education, Chaos, Conflict and Courage; Caribbean Leadership Programme, Leadership Development Programme. I think, Mr. Speaker, you will realize as well, you had Members from within this Parliament who participated in this leadership programme. Mr. Speaker, this programme cost us as of last fiscal year, \$600,000.

Mr. Speaker, one of the issues that we are dealing with, the modern public officer must be flexible. The modern public officer, you know, I hear a lot of people talk about traffic into Port of Spain, and the only way to get here is by a rapid rail system, when we should be looking at new ways of working, whether it is through flexitime or hot desking. What does that mean, Mr. Speaker? People can come out and work from six to two, they can work from seven to three, eight to four, nine to five, 10 to six, but it requires us to re-engineer the work processes to allow for some autonomy which we are doing right now, Mr. Speaker.

In part of our—in the whole issue, we noticed that we have a shortage of high cost accommodation. If you want to provide accommodation that is conducive for the modern public officer to work, then we have to provide expensive and sophisticated workstations. That means, and this is a global practice, it means that not all employees can be at a workstation, some will be in the field. For example, case managers in the Ministry of the People and Social Development, field officers in many of these Ministries, and in most cases some of them, they work from home, and sometimes be on the job.

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In fact, the ratio, Mr. Speaker, tends to be almost seven to eight workstations for every 10 to 11 employees. And this is where we need to go. Our outfitting policy which we did in collaboration with the Ministry of Housing and Urban Development, allows for this sophisticated type of workstation environment, and for such working environments. And with the technology and a public officer, the 21st Century public officer who is technology savvy, we can have that high degree of independence and responsibility. Mr. Speaker, this is where we are going—this is where the public officer of the 21st Century must be going. If we are to go that way, then we also have to talk about training and development.

The Public Service Academy, Mr. Speaker, is one of the facilities that the public service has to allow for on-the-job training, and in-service training for public officers, and to allow for capacity development. Let me just say for the last fiscal year 2014, PSA, the Public Service Academy trained over approximately 800 public officers from various agencies of the Government, and this was at a cost of \$2 million. These training programmes, for example, Mr. Speaker, included business communication, financial management and procurement, professional development, leadership, organizational improvement, service delivery, service excellence, customer service, Mr. Speaker, because you will know that at many of the public agencies a lot of customer service agents will now be available because of that service delivery excellence training and customer service training.

9.10 p.m.

In particular, all our BOAs, starting at the bottom of the organization, must have customer service training. In addition to these local training programmes, PSA also facilitates foreign training programmes in cutting edge fields such as ICT, engineering, monitoring and evaluation, waste water management, renewable energy and the like, and this means that public officers are also exposed to international programmes and global interactions.

In fiscal 2015, we shall be embarking on a project to strengthen the Public Service Academy, mainly to make it into something like a civil service college as has happened in Canada, and we have seen one. We have seen the Public Service College in Singapore. One of the areas we want to strengthen is what we call e-learning because if we are to accelerate the learning and the experience of the modern 21st Century public officer, we have to accelerate the training and development within the public service. To do so, we can do so by e-learning because we will reach more public officers at that time.

We are looking at an e-learning strategy that will actually be dealt with in three phases, the first phase being that they will be able to do most of their work online and be certified for the first phase. The second phase will allow them to interact with other members from other agencies at the training centre and there they will also be certified and then, at the third phase, they must come back into the Ministry and actually implement what they have learnt before they get a final certification. Only when they have completed all three phases, can they be deemed to be certified in the particular area. So, this is how we will accelerate this area and how we will accelerate the learning and development in the public service.

Mr. Speaker, I want to turn my attention now to scholarships and training because a lot has been said about scholarships even during this debate. I want to start off by saying, we have increased the number of scholarships in the Ministry of Public Administration and, in fact, approximately 1,935 scholarships were awarded to nationals over the last three years and this will increase by the end of this month to 2,085. We also expect, by the end of this month, we would have spent close to \$245 million on these scholars over the last fiscal year.

You know, I am sorry that the Member for Port of Spain North/St. Ann's West is not here because she constantly raises this issue about scholarships and the problem I have is that every policy—since I have come into this Ministry, we have developed policies for deferral of obligatory service, for continuation of scholarships; sometimes you may have a problem and you may have to ask for an extension on your scholarship. We have developed transparent policies for the duration of your commitment of your obligatory service.

Mr. Speaker, one of the things I want to say is that every one of those scholarships that we have on offering, each one has an evaluation framework, which is published on the website, and each of those frameworks, you can actually go on and you can actually score yourself and know how you will score because it is an objective set of criteria before you can be shortlisted for an interview. There is a set of eligibility criteria. If you do not meet it; you cannot cross that hurdle.

And I want to say to all Members because, you know, many times Members of Parliament approach me; they make requests of me, saying that they want help. This person missed the deadline for a scholarship, and I have to tell them there is absolutely nothing I can do because the system will know if I went in to interfere.

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That is one of the good things about e-services, you know. When you have an online automated system, there is no interference by anyone, not even a public officer because it will be time stamped. So, if you miss your deadline, that is up to you. If your referees do not—and that is one of the things we warn, we warn, we warn, students, candidates: make sure, get on to the site. There is no paper-based application. It is all online. You can do online applications anywhere in the country, from any ttconnect centre.

You can monitor the progress of your own scholarship, so I always wonder when the Member for Port of Spain North/St. Ann's West, every time, talks about who are the people who are getting scholarships, I want to tell her where she can find them. Just go on the website of the Ministry of Public Administration, under scholarships, and every name is published. The person who was awarded a scholarship, the area of study they are pursuing and the institution at which they are studying. So it is completely transparent and open. And I will have it no other way.

In fact, I have a challenge right now because I will speak to the open government and in open government, we have to be able to publish all of government data. The Ministry of Public Administration, I have made a commitment that this will be the Ministry that will start open government and publishing its data sets. And I have indicated to my Ministry that I would like, for example, to ensure that all the final scores of these students must be published.

I am being told by my legal department that they have to check with the Data Protection Act and all of that and whatever, but I am insisting that we go to that point where the scores themselves, from the interviews, can be published on the website so there can be no question. I intend, whenever we are dealing with taxpayers' money, we must be totally accountable for public funds. [*Desk thumping*]

We have increased the number of scholarships in the allied health care area: meteorology, forensic science, pathology, oncology, cardiology, neurology and these will be coming on stream this year—some have already come on stream—and that is because when we look at the staffing requirements, the skill sets required for these modern health first services that the Ministry of Health is trying to offer through some of the infrastructure projects that they are doing. The Minister of Health will speak more to those issues.

I just quickly want to say one other issue and that has to do with the placement. One of the problems we had with returning scholars—they used to be frustrated because they could not be placed. They cannot get a job and one of the reasons is that we have a situation where many of them study in areas which are not aligned to the development needs of the country. If it is—and we do not interfere with the A level CAPE students—I am talking about all the other scholarships—they are all aligned to the interim human resource needs of the country and, therefore, if we need petroleum engineers, that is on the list as a priority one. If we need financial analysts, it is there.

The interim human resource needs are up on the website. If it is not listed, even if you are a first class honours, you will not get a scholarship. It must be on the interim human resource needs list. Since we have been doing that, we have been finding that there is less frustration for the students when they come back here and they have to be placed, even if they have to be placed nationally.

I want to say as well, Mr. Speaker, by opening up this new middle management level and opening up the number of new professional opportunities which did not exist before, we now have a number of new opportunities for these returning scholars. As a result of that, we have also accelerated the placement process.

In the past, I would have heard scholars complain: they have returned to Trinidad and Tobago, six, seven, eight, nine months and no placement. These people are sitting there starving. We have developed a placement policy after meeting with returning scholars and carrying on consultations with all of them. We now have a new placement policy. It is on our website. One of the first things is that the Ministry of Public Administration must place this scholar within three months of returning to Trinidad and Tobago.

Secondly, it must be in an area of their field of study. It makes no sense that someone who has studied in a particular area is placed somewhere else where they cannot further develop those skill sets. In addition to that, in order to be able to accelerate their experience and accelerate their own development, you know when scholars return, they are not yet ready for work, so we place them on the Associate Professional Programme, it is called the AP Programme where they get an opportunity to develop skill sets.

We also have them on the Professional Development Programme and this Professional Development Programme is not cheap. It is about \$800,000 where

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we take each of these scholars, we carry them through a process where they must be able—and they have re-designed it and we have actually revamped it where they are able to develop new skill sets, whether it is in team building, leadership; how they develop their own career path, analytics, so that they are actually ready for the world of work. So when they are eventually placed, when all of them are placed in these positions, they are ready to start working on teams. So they learn a bit of project management within the public service; the methodology, et cetera.

So, Mr. Speaker, just very quickly, we do employ these APs. They are \$9,000 a month. We try to keep it down to one year. Before, it was two, three years we carried on APs because we could not find places for them. Today, we have set ourselves a process that they must be placed within 12 months—no more than 12 months on the AP programme, and all of that because when they are on an AP contract, they cannot get a car loan, they cannot get a mortgage, so they are dependent on their parents, et cetera, so the faster they come off the AP programme and get out into a permanent job, then they can start becoming self-sufficient.

All of this I am saying here in terms of institutional strengthening and so on. The Service Commissions Department has been operating with a lot of old systems and the new type of competency-based framework we are speaking to—competencies, new and modern processes for selection and recruitment, et cetera—how do you operate in a dynamic environment.

The Canadian Public Service Commission and some of the other public service commissions, globally, are charged with the responsibility, for example, of understanding the HR strategy of the organization and ensuring that the organization meets its HR strategy. They also perform roles of auditing and compliance to ensure that procedures are followed and that the approaches are merit based.

Mr. Speaker, we have started a project, and I am pleased to say that institutional strengthening of the Service Commissions Department will start this year at a cost of \$10.3 million. This is part of our PSIP programme and, therefore, we will be able to modernize systems in the Service Commissions Department itself. Similarly, in the Personnel Department, the CPO's office, we are also looking at new forms of management, new practices, et cetera, and they will also be embarking on an institutional strengthening project at a cost of \$7.7 billion.

I just want to turn very quickly to our e-Government and Knowledge Brokering Loan Programme because this is part of transformation of the public

service. I think a lot of people look at e-Government as a technology solution; it is not. If we are to have transformation, we have to have e-Government and e-Government means that we are talking about people and how effective it can be.

It was really a programme that was designed to increase the effectiveness and the efficiency of public services through expansion, development and implementation of e-government solutions. There are many such projects and I do not want to go through all of them. They range across the public service, including the Parliament here, the *Hansard*, e-Parliament, et cetera.

I know my colleague, the Minister of Land and Marine Resources, will also speak about unmanned aerial vehicles, the drones for the mapping system. That is at a cost of \$11 million. The aerial and LiDAR survey that we are talking about, we have not had this survey done since 1991. That will be at \$7 million. The upgrade of the Cadastral Management Information System at a cost of \$22.9 million. So all in all, with land surveys and housing, it is about \$41 million that we are speaking to.

The Minister of Health will also speak to the development of master plans for San Fernando, Port of Spain and the Eric Williams Medical Sciences Complex hospitals at a cost of \$18 million. My colleague, the Minister of Diversity and Social Integration, spoke to the National Archives project for the modernization and that is also under this particular project.

Just to show you very quickly how this works, it is just that it uses—and I just want to use an example because the Minister of Science and Technology spoke to the Middleware software, the foundation system interface which will allow us to roll out e-Government services quickly.

Once that is implemented, we will be able to get into authentication. We will be able to roll out the e-payment systems, online payment systems and, as a result of that, we would be able to see more e-services over the next fiscal year.

I am just giving you an example. One of the projects that we are working on, just to show you how it works together with transformation. As we know, the Inland Revenue Division is one of the pilots under the Gold to Diamond to put in the new HRM Architecture, but to go together with it is what we call the GenTax upgrade and, therefore, we have already implemented the new hardware and software under this programme to the cost of \$9 million. The actual GenTax e-service, which will allow us to see e-filing coming into effect, will be at a cost of TT \$35 million and that will roll out over the next 12 to 13 months.

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But important in that project, Mr. Speaker, will actually be the change and project management and communication to the internal and external stakeholders. What this means is that as we roll out those e-services, people themselves, the citizens, will have to be able to understand. We will have to communicate so that the change management issues can be addressed.

9.25 p.m.

In fact, Mr. Speaker, I want to say that we are partnering, through the Commonwealth Secretariat, with another Commonwealth country that is leading in this area of e-taxation, e-filing for us to understand the change management issues we will go through at the Inland Revenue Division. This is how transformation takes place, and that is just an example of how we are using the e-government and knowledge-brokering loan to support the transformation at the Ministry of Public Administration.

Business continuity management, Mr. Speaker: As we move ahead, we are ready to start. Last year, I mentioned business continuity management. Sometimes we look at it as in terms of being resilient in times of crisis but, more than that, it is about how we work going forward that we always can continue; there is always business continuity. So our processes and systems are reengineered to allow for business continuity.

In this fiscal year, we are ready to start—we have started the project already in this last fiscal year 2014, and we have PricewaterhouseCoopers, their Advisory Services Division. In fact, we are ready to roll out the CM policy.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, the speaking time of the hon. Member for San Fernando West and Minister of Public Administration has expired. The question is that the speaking time of the hon. Member for San Fernando West and the Minister of Public Administration be extended by 10 minutes.

Question put and agreed to.

Hon. C. Seepersad-Bachan: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to my colleagues. The last project I want to speak to here before I turn to my constituency is what we call “The Excellence in Service Delivery—the Diamond Certification Project”. We are taking service delivery to a higher standard. Last year, I spoke to this project. The project actually started in June 2014, and a number of services have participated in our pilot; 34 services to be exact. Twenty-two of these services, in January to March this year, applied to be certified; assessments began earlier this year and were recently completed; 20 services were assessed against the eight criteria which I described.

Let me just remind Members that the Diamond Certification Project itself was developed based on the ease of doing business index, the global competitiveness index, the employee service research findings, and the criteria for certification were actually aligned to those criteria in the competitive index where we are suffering—whether it is in terms of technology, customer service, continuous learning, the areas that we need to make a quantum leap in. So we are encouraging our government services to start practising in that area.

Just to remind you, there were eight categories; eight main criteria, which under them each of them have sub-criteria—whether it is the customer-focused culture; how they engage their customers and staff; how easy it is to do business with them; how they deliver on promise to put things right when they go wrong; how they give clear information; be open and accountable through websites; be committed to delivering value for money; continuous improvement and innovation and, most important, about partnership.

Partnership means they get points. They get a lot of points if they could partner with another agency that can help them offer their service. So if I can walk into NALIS and start the process of renewing my driver's licence, they get points for that. If I can pay my parking ticket in NALIS, then I can do so. I am not saying it is happening yet, but this is how we want the partnership, and many of them have started this process.

So, Mr. Speaker, we are getting ready for certification. The first cohort will be certified by the end of—not all of them. Some of them will not make the certification so they will go back into the second cohort. By the end of October, we will finish the first cohort. We are taking applications for the second cohort. What is interesting, Mr. Speaker, is what I saw in terms of the enthusiasm among public officers who wanted to participate: how many of them willingly participated and wanted to be part of this programme; how many of them on their own initiative were able to achieve.

I want to thank here today—because what we will be seeing going forward is new service charters on the walls of each of these service agencies, and if they pass and they get certified, a diamond logo will go up over their doors, and they will get to wear a pin which says that they are certified. I want to thank today—because it involves an independent assessment done by auditors and by an independent assessment panel because, you know, it is not done only by the Ministry of Public Administration. The independent assessment panel is chaired and comprises of members from the private sector. I want to thank Mr. Gary Voss

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and members of his team for the time they have put into this particular exercise, this particular initiative.

I also want to thank the leaders from the Judiciary, the Chief Justice himself who participated, because the Family Court is one of the services. We have one of the schools participating from the Ministry of Education; the Minister of Health, because the St. James Medical Complex, the Sangre Grande Hospital, the Tobago Scarborough Hospital are also part of it. The Minister of Public Utilities, one of his T&TEC offices is part of it. My own Ministry of Public Administration, the Scholarships Division, is one such service. I am just trying to show you the range, but there are others as well.

Mr. Speaker, just in terms of finishing off this, we will also have what we call the Virtual Call Centre. It would work alongside with what we call the TTconnect face-to-face and it will involve a CRM, a customer relationship management system and a knowledge-based system. All the services that are participating in this certification programme, you must be able to access their services through this call centre.

Most important to this call centre, Mr. Speaker, we refer to it as a Virtual Call Centre because it allows many of them to stay from home and work; whereas some will be in-house, others will be at home. So it allows new job opportunities for the disabled, for the elderly and for those who are stationary at home because of family issues. So that is how we have widened the job opportunities for members of the public who cannot get to an office in Port of Spain or any other Ministry.

Just the last part on open government: just to say that open government promotes participation and collaboration between governments and relevant stakeholders. One of the ways that we are doing this—I just want to say Trinidad and Tobago is one of the 64 OGP member countries, the only Caricom member state to have joined the partnership to date, and during fiscal 2014/2015 we expect that open government activities undertaken by the Ministry of Public Administration will include finalization of the Trinidad and Tobago Government action plan; the data classification policy and framework and we will be represented at the Open Government Summit.

Mr. Speaker, together with the data classification on policy and opening up data sets, it will allow for the reuse of data by citizens who can actually develop applications; whether it is an application for your mobile or your app and you

actually use those in the public domain. That is how we want to develop ICTs in the sector.

We are also launching what is called the Diamond Buzz Project. The Diamond Buzz Project will involve young people who will get involved in these types of activities.

Mr. Speaker, the last thing I want to go to here is my constituency. I just want to thank the constituents of San Fernando West. I want to thank my staff and just to say that one of the things that we have been able to do—very quickly—is that we are very happy that some of the projects that we have started in the constituency, we have noted that the Waterfront Project has finally come to the conceptual design. The consultants are finished with that project. Although, I mean, as citizens, we had come together in San Fernando—the constituents—and we had developed this plan, and finally this will bring some economic activity.

I want to thank the Ministry of Food Production for two projects that were started in aquaponics, and this is where we are able to actually look at fish farming. It was started in La Romaine and on the Train Line. I also want to thank them for the Jumbie Bay Fishermen. They have just rehabilitated that facility which for years has been in that condition.

As well, I also want to say, you know, the Member for Oropouche West spoke about the URP women, and for some time now we have been encouraging many women into the URP Women's Programme for training opportunities. I am glad today that they have equalized the salaries and so on but, very important, we have been encouraging them into how they open their own business activities—how to become entrepreneurial—and I thank NIDCO together with the Central Bank of Trinidad and Tobago that comes in every so often, and for these women they actually offered computer literacy programmes—I am sorry, financial literacy programmes—so that they will know how to start their business, how to save money on it, et cetera.

One of the things, recently, we also had, in my constituency office, training for many of the leaders of the URP Women's Programme, and I am pleased to say that because of that training programme, Member for Oropouche West, it will now become part of the programme, which I think was badly needed because the women themselves did not have the confidence to start the business. I thank the Minister of Works and Infrastructure for the several roads and curb and slipper drains that we have been able to achieve in the constituency.

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In addition, we have started an environmental initiative in San Fernando, and I thank the Minister of Arts and Multiculturalism who was able to help us start what we call a regional Carnival, and during that regional Carnival, we were able to launch the Green City of San Fernando, keeping it clean, and we actually deployed recyclable bins donated by a contractor, and we were able to actually—after the Carnival was finished—distribute them to other schools and so on. Today, we are launching the Green City. For the children of San Fernando, we have started the anti-bullying programme. I know my time is up, Mr. Speaker. I thank you and, you know, I thank the constituents of San Fernando West who have me here, and I say thank you to all of you. [*Desk thumping*]

ADJOURNMENT

The Minister of Housing and Urban Development (Hon. Dr. Roodal Moonilal): Mr. Speaker, I beg to move that this House do now adjourn to Tuesday, September 16, 2014 at 10.00 a.m. to continue the debate on “An Act to provide for the service of Trinidad and Tobago for the financial year ending on the 30th day of September, 2015”.

Mr. Speaker, while I am on my legs, may I indicate that it is also the intention of the Government, as discussed with the Chief Whip of the Opposition, that the Government serves notice that on Friday, September 19, 2014 at 10.00 a.m., it is the intention of the Government to debate through all its stages, Bill No. 4 on the Order Paper “An Act to amend the Proceeds of Crime Act, Chap. 11:27, the Anti-Terrorism Act, Chap. 12:07 and the Financial Intelligence Unit of Trinidad and Tobago Act, Chap. 72:01”, in the name of the Minister of Finance and the Economy; that is Friday, September 19, 2014 at 10.00 a.m.

So, I beg to move, Mr. Speaker, that this House now adjourn to tomorrow at 10.00 a.m. to continue the debate on the Appropriation Bill. Thank you.

LEAVE OF ABSENCE

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, before putting the question for the adjournment, I have received communication from the hon. Kamla Persad-Bissessar, Prime Minister and Member of Parliament for Siparia, requesting leave of absence from today’s sitting. The leave which the Member seeks is granted.

Question put and agreed to.

House adjourned accordingly.

Adjourned at 9.37 p.m.