

Appropriation Bill, 2015

Saturday, October 10, 2015

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Saturday, October 10, 2015

The House met at 10.00 a.m.

PRAYERS

[MADAM SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

APPROPRIATION (FINANCIAL YEAR 2016) BILL, 2015

[Third Day]

Order read for resuming adjourned debate on question [October 09, 2015]:

That the Bill be now read a second time.

Question again proposed.

The Minister of Tourism (Hon. Shamfa Cudjoe): [*Desk thumping*] Thank you, Madam Speaker. First and foremost, I would like to thank God Almighty for the opportunity to stand here in this House today, a Member of the 11th Parliament, representative for Tobago West of the strong, committed dedicated team of the People's National Movement. I would like to congratulate also, the Minister of Finance for his budget presentation.

We have been in Government for just about a month, and we hit the ground running. I think that this budget presentation and package show fiscal prudence in keeping with the promises of the People's National Movement, and in keeping with our commitment to put country first before party. It also reflects our ability and strong leadership to make the hard decisions, and to do what we have to do when we have to do it, rather than wait and just wait to hear what the public has to say, and wait to hear what people have to say before we make the hard decisions. So, Madam Speaker, I want to commend the Minister of Finance for a diligent package for fiscal 2016.

Now, I want to jump right to it. Yesterday as I sat here, I sat here in awe because I spent the past five years as a Member of the Senate on the other side, and this time around I got the chance to see the operations of the Parliament, and the operations of being in Government from over on this side. I listened to the contributions of the Members of the Opposition who would have spoken yesterday, and I said to myself: "Oh how things and times and people have changed". I want to remind the speakers, namely, especially the Leader of the Opposition, that while you may say that we are a minority Government, I want to remind you that you are a majority Opposition. [*Laughter*]

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You came into power—you are not even in power. You came into Opposition with 31 per cent as you say of the votes, which means roughly 69/70 per cent of the nation did not vote for you. [*Interruption*] They did not support you, right? Secondly, I hear the Member for Tabaquite, who is not here today, all of a sudden speaking about Tobago and have all this concern for Tobago. Where was this love and concern for Tobago during your five years? [*Desk thumping*]

And might I remind you that the people of Tobago did not support you 94 per cent, [*Laughter and desk thumping*] that makes you more of a majority Opposition more so in Tobago. The people of Tobago East rejected you 92 per cent; majority Opposition. [*Interruption*] The people of Tobago East did not support you 94 per cent. You are in Opposition now, deal with it. [*Desk thumping*] You are a majority Opposition. Now, and that is fine, and you would say that while you sit on your Opposition chair.

Hon. Member: “Doh” respond to him. He could not do that while he was in the Ministry of—[*Continued interruption*]

Hon. S. Cudjoe: So, Madam Speaker—no, I want to remind them because it seems like they have forgotten. Through you—so much to say—I want to remind them to find a way to deal with it, because after the Leader of the Opposition made her contribution yesterday she left, and she is not here again today to face the House or to face the Prime Minister sitting directly opposite her. [*Interruption*] It must be difficult after such an election campaign to sit on that side and to look at the Prime Minister. As the Leader of the Bench said on the first day, we are in charge of this House, and you are going to deal with it. You are going to learn to deal with it, because we are going to be in this place for the next five years at least, and in your face for the next five years at least, like a “jumbie” from Les Coteaux. [*Laughter*] So, find a way to deal with it. So on another day—and it is interesting, Madam Speaker—[*Interruption*] because on another day—when you have your chance you would speak.

Hon. Member: Shhhhhhh!

Hon. S. Cudjoe: When you have your chance, you will speak. You probably did not hear about me. [*Laughter and desk thumping*] So, Madam Speaker, on another day we would speak about the nepotism that this country would have suffered under the People’s Partnership. On another day we will talk about the 5,000, the thousands of people that were fired in the first year, many of them their contracts had not expired as yet, and they came into Government in May 2010 and by December, the Central Bank would have reported that they would have fired over 5,000 contract workers.

I am now in the Ministry of Tourism and as I reflect on the TDC minutes of the meetings, it is hundreds and thousands, even millions of dollars in legal fees, and in buying out contracts for people who were working under the Ministry and in TDC. So to come here and to pretend to cry crocodile tears, that, you know, people are saying that they are afraid for their jobs, that is nonsense; total nonsense. [*Desk thumping*] Because many Ministers would speak about walking into Ministries where people just three weeks ago, five weeks ago, even a month ago, now get a contract for three years that they are hardly qualified for. So take that somewhere else. So, I want to remind you to deal with it.

Let me tell you something. I had a good conversation with a friend of mine who was going through divorce, and we would share stories of how the divorce counsellor would tell you practice in the mirror each day saying: “Hi, I am Jane Brown, and I am happily divorced”. You need to practice in the mirror saying: “Hi, I am Miss Kamla Persad-Bissessar, or I am Mr. Bhoewarie, I am now in Opposition”, [*Laughter*] practice it each day, [*Desk thumping*] but, Madam Speaker, this is not the time for therapy or for tidbits. I am going to move on with the business of the people of the country.

Madam Speaker, I want to take this time out to commend you and to congratulate you on becoming Speaker of this House. [*Desk thumping*] I looked at the way you controlled the House and you handled yesterday’s proceedings, and I felt very proud as a woman, and I said that is Speaker. So, Madam Speaker, I want to congratulate you.

I want to respond also to the contribution—a little piece of the contribution of the Member for Couva North. She did not say much that was warranting a response, but the matter of the IDB project, the CREW Project that deals with waste water treatment. She said that: “This is their project, and we need to speak about that”. That is a People’s National Movement project. I, in 2011, went to Jamaica along with a gentleman, Singh, who was working at WASA at the time to help to negotiate the final piece of that arrangement with the IDB. I represented the Tobago House of Assembly and I remember the country that was keeping back the project was Trinidad and Tobago.

All the other Caribbean countries were ready to go, but Trinidad and Tobago was holding back their participation for this project, because they came in, telling the people that it is a PNM project, and they were not sure if they wanted to participate in it, so the rest of the region had to wait. I remember coming back to the Senate and speaking to Mr. Winston Dookeran—at the time he was the Minister of Finance—trying to encourage him to keep their commitment with the international organization.

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So to stand here and tell me about waste water—and there are so many stories to tell about that waste-water treatment plant project, because there is a part of the contract that says you must engage small operators from the area in which you are doing the project, and the Government had this idea that they were not going to work with the Tobago House of Assembly. They brought over their contractors from Trinidad to do that CREW Project.

It also was supposed to come with a public education programme; that never happened in Tobago for that CREW Project. I know the intricate matters of that project. I helped to negotiate that project while I was employed at planning. So to come here and tell me that this is your project, that we had to beat “yuh with ah stick on yuh head” to participate in. Take that somewhere else.

So, let me go on, because this is not the time for tidbits. Let me tell you something, the people of Trinidad and Tobago have already dealt with the People’s Partnership. I should say have already dealt with the UNC, and they have already had their say, and now the people of this country would have their way. So I am going to proceed with the business of the people.

So, many of the stakeholders out there in the country are calling this budget a good budget. I turn to the President of the Trinidad and Tobago Manufacturers Association, former Senator of the 10th Parliament, Sen. Dr. Rolph Balgobin. He said this is a just and courageous budget.

The young people from the different organizations and NGOs are saying that this budget hails a victory for young people with its benefits for OJT, for housing, for GATE, for HELP as we speak to the Graduate Recruitment Programme and the Youth Development Institute, and the vast majority of opportunities that are there for young people. So the young people are hailing this budget as a victory.

So, Madam Speaker, I would not be distracted by the naysayers. The Trinidad and Tobago Chamber of Commerce says that they look forward to the changes which would ensure an adequate supply of foreign exchange, for legitimate transactions and clearing the backlog for foreign exchange, because we are all well aware of the big mess that they have caused as it relates to foreign exchange. As a matter of fact, anything that they touch they destroy with their long, strong arm of corruption. So, Madam Speaker, the People’s National Movement is now in charge, and we would treat with these issues accordingly.

The people of Tobago join the rest of the Trinidad and Tobago community in saying that this is a fair, reasonable budget. The Tobago House of Assembly received 4.44 per cent of the national pie, the largest proportion of the national pie

that we have ever received in the history of this nation; [*Desk thumping*] \$2.345 billion for recurrent expenditure; \$404 million for Development Programmes; \$23 million for URP. Tobago also received \$1.13 million in funding for other central government agencies.

10.15 a.m.

Madam Speaker, we are particularly pleased about the Government commitment to support more flexibility for capital expenditure for the Tobago House of Assembly. The Government has committed to public/private partnerships for the Tobago House of Assembly development projects, and a wide range of measures and mechanisms to finance our development agenda such as grants, technical assistance and representation to international organizations such as the OAS and the Inter-American Development Bank. As simple as this seems, Madam Speaker, this is a far cry from what we would have been through under the UNC Government over the past five years. So I commend this Government on behalf of the people of Tobago.

Now, it is not a perfect budget, it is neither a perfect allocation. I do not think that any departments or any Ministry could stand up and say: “Okay, we got the perfect share of what we asked for”, but it is fair and reasonable, and it takes into consideration the real current realities and the real current issues that we face in this country coming against the backdrop or coming after the heels of the worst Government to ever govern Trinidad and Tobago.

Now, Madam Speaker, the people of Tobago are also pleased about this Government commitment to meaningful dialogue, meaningful cooperation and meaningful communication. I remember we had to write the former Prime Minister letter after letter, months after months, simply asking for a meeting with the Chief Secretary. That would be a thing of the past under this People’s National Movement administration.

Representation on boards that are critical to the development of Tobago: we have had a 30-year tradition of having representation on boards such as T&TEC, Port Authority, for the Tobago House of Assembly. Under this UNC Government nothing, none of that. That would be a thing of the past, and we have already started making the different board appointments to include the Tobago House of Assembly. As simple as it seems, this goes a very long way for the development of the Tobago House of Assembly capital investment agenda and the development of the people of Tobago.

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You see, this is not just about a PNM in Tobago and a PNM in Trinidad, but this is about a commitment for a fruitful relationship that would give the necessary impact to the development of the people of Tobago. This is about sensitivity, this is about collaboration in such a manner that would take the people of Tobago from one level of our development to another.

We also welcome the unequivocal, genuine and sincere commitment for internal self-government at the level of the party and at the level of the central Government and among our Cabinet colleagues. We also welcome the different commitments for airport expansion, because this has been a longstanding issue and there have been promises after promises, after promises, under the United National Congress.

The investment in Cove: I remember the former Minister of Finance making all these promises and speaking about these developments to happen at Cove, and then when you check the budget not one cent under the development programme for Cove for the eco-industrial project here in Tobago.

Police stations: the police station at Old Grange in Tobago West—my representative for Tobago East will speak about the police station in Tobago East. Incentives for farmers, the police constabulary so that Tobago could have our own police service or our own police staff to treat with matters relating to the Tobago House of Assembly and tourism in Tobago. Finally, finally, we have received funding sufficient to start the RC school, the Scarborough Roman Catholic School. Border protection to protect Tobago against illegal drugs and narcotics, and for protection for the fishermen, and the list goes on and on. Investment in small business, different opportunities for our young people. The people of Tobago join in saying that this is a fair and reasonable budget, and we also look forward to the commitment to revisit the budget in six months.

You see, Madam Speaker, this is a reality check for the nation. Serious times call for serious measures and I think this budget presents a fair balance as it treats with austerity measures, as it treats with social programmes and different avenues to help to diversify the Trinidad and Tobago economy. Again, I say, I welcome the commitment to revisit this budget in six months.

Madam Speaker, I want to speak a little bit about tourism in Tobago because there was much concern by the Member for Tabaquite and the Member for Couva North who did not find the time to give the same recommendations to former Minister Hadeed and the other four Ministers of Tourism that would have been under their Government, but they now have advice for the people of Tobago and

for tourism in Tobago and for tourism in Trinidad and Tobago. But the commitments to the Tobago House of Assembly and the tourism industry in Tobago as the main contribution of diversification of the Tobago economy: the construction of a new terminal for the ANR Robinson International Airport. Our commitment to making the loan facility that is available to the Trinidad hotel operators available to Tobago. This has been a longstanding issue and has been placed on the shelf since March of 2014. Since March of 2014, they could not come to a solution with the Tobago House of Assembly. So only hotel operators in Trinidad have been benefiting from this loan and from this grant programme.

Madam Speaker, this Government had starved the Tobago operators in their efforts to punish Tobagonians and in their efforts to emasculate the Tobago House of Assembly, but as an old woman in Bon Accord would have once told me: “They knocked us down but they did not knock us out”, and this time around we are going to see that the people of Tobago and the hotel operators in Tobago get what they deserve to take the tourism industry in Tobago forward. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker, that is the trademark of the People’s National Movement. We do what is best for the people, we do what is best for our communities and we do what is best for our country, and that is leadership People’s National Movement style. Leadership is about making the hard decision. It is about decisiveness, it is about decency, it is about dignity and it is about integrity, something that the UNC knows nothing about. [*Desk thumping*]

So I am humbled. I am thankful to be a part of this Government. I am thankful to be a part of this Cabinet, and I welcome my new appointment as the Minister of Tourism. You know, Madam Speaker, I listened to some of the comments in the public domain based on the appointment, but I paid no mind to some of them because there was one person saying: “She is too young to be a Minister of Tourism.” I sat here yesterday and I watched the hon. Member for St. Augustine, he looked over to us and he said: “That is a children side.” Member for the Congress of the—“I go to say” the Congress of the People, the congress of a person. [*Laughter*] A congress of one, has the temerity to say: “It is a children side over there.” Because for a long time, for five years we watched people who are not so young sit in these spaces in the Ministries and make decisions that would have done more than too much to fatten the pockets of their friends and family and less than little to advance the cause of development of our people and our country. So it is interesting to sit on this side and hear him say: “It is a side of children over there.” Shame. Shame on you, the congress of a person.

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Now, Madam Speaker, I want to move on to tourism. I assumed duties on September 11, just over three weeks or we could say roughly one month ago in the Ministry as the Minister of Tourism. I have met members of staff, a fairly young team, some who are ready to work and some who are fed up, some who are demotivated by the lack of leadership, no sense of direction and no clear guidelines and policies in the Ministry.

I met with stakeholders, some of the movers and shakers of the sectors and some of the champions of the industry. They have reiterated the concerns about the challenges they face, their hopes, their aspirations, their recommendations as we move forward. I have met with different stakeholders from the hotel industry, from the restaurants. I have met with people who are involved in ecotourism, sports tourism. I have met members of investTT and so on.

We had convened the very first meeting. I held a meeting with the stakeholders where we made a commitment to reconvene the stakeholders standing committee which had been defunct since the year 2012. We have made a commitment to develop a meaningful relationship that promotes communication, cooperation and representation so that we could finally reap the maximum benefits of the tourism sector and we could move forward in taking the tourism in Trinidad and Tobago to where it needs to be.

They had many ideas, many different plans and many different remedies. They speak about different opportunities and different possibilities, but one thing is clear, Madam Speaker, is that they feel that there has been no clear plan, no clear sense of direction and no clear policy for tourism in Trinidad and Tobago.

Madam Speaker, when I was a younger person, my mother would say: "If you do not know where you are going any road would take you there." So they have complained about five years, four different Ministers, four different Permanent Secretaries, several different development plans and expenditure in the billions and billions and billions.

Now, there has been obscene levels of spending and I think, or should I say the stakeholders would have said that they have not seen enough for the spending that we have put out under this Ministry and through the TDC over the past five years. Most of the major projects that we as the People's National Movement would have left on the books in 2010, we have come back in 2015 to meet nothing or very little done with those projects. Anything they put their hands on over the last five years has evidence of wasteful spending, political interference,

recklessness, rampant and boldfaced corruption. Madam Speaker, I would point out to you some of the—I would highlight some of the projects that I have met in this Ministry and some of the projects that we are going to move forward, and I would give you an update as to what I have seen so far.

The sugar village and museum project: this is a project that would have been conceptualized in early like 2000, 2003, and this project is a project that I am very fond of. As I learn about this project, I fall in love with this project more and more, each and every day, because the plans are grandeur. I refer to this project as the Disney World of the sugar industry, and it is a plan to develop a sugar village and there would be a school, there would be a swimming pool and to bring back the same feel and look of what the sugar cane village or the sugar cane industry would have been like many, many decades ago. Now, under this Government, they took the decision to—under the previous Government, they took the decision to move forward with this project, and it was not until a couple months before they demitted office that they decided to try to expedite the project. Over the years they would have brought in railroad tracks from abroad and different artefacts to try to bring this thing to life. They would have established a committee headed by Dr. Samaroo, who I think is a guru in the sugar cane industry and he was helping the steering committee to move forward.

Earlier up in this year, about April or so, they went to Cabinet and they changed the steering committee into an implementation committee and removed Dr. Samaroo from being the chairman of the committee and moved him to be the consultant, and they would have placed this guy—Ayoung or Achong. He is the chairman of the regional corporation in the area because they had plans of him running for election. So the thing now became political and they stopped meeting. One of the reasons for the committee stopping meetings was because the election was coming up. So I have met in this Ministry, this sugar village museum and the sport centre and so on, the cultural centre and so on that is supposed to go with the sugar village at a complete halt.

I have heard Members of the Opposition saying: “Oh, they stopped this project.” No, this project stopped under you. Under your watch this project stopped, but we have made a commitment to restart this project and \$7 million under the IDF has been allocated to the sugar village project and museum.

As a matter of fact, when they changed the steering committee into an implementation committee they were allocated \$10 million under the previous government, and because they tried to rush the decision and they were not ready for implementation they did not get to use the \$10 million. That is what I was told.

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10.30 a.m.

So, I move on now to upgrade of beach facilities and, as I read through the Minutes of the TDC, I am seeing that the majority of the tendering processes for these upgrade in beach facilities was done by sole selective tendering or very selective tendering. I have read about a chairman who has been very concerned about the type of tendering, or very concerned about the excessively selective tendering process that the TDC was using to award these projects. Many of the notes in the Minutes would say, we have to rush this project because it is in the best interest of the country, and I refer to TDC Minutes of January 21, 2015, page 10.

Madam Speaker, I move now—no, I was going to move to Maracas but I want to leave Maracas for later. Madam Speaker, the nature trail project—okay, I cannot put my hands on the nature trail right now but I read it enough to know it by heart. So, the nature trail project—here it is— and I read Minutes of the TDC from January 21, 2015, where the board is being encouraged that they need to hurry up with this project; they need to speed up this project—we need to speedily issue the RFPs. They issued RFPs to two companies, the Trinidad and Tobago Incoming Tour Operators Association and the eco project, and they were only given 10 days and the board was told that they have to rush because this is in the best interest of the country.

The Minutes of March 25 shows that the project had been approved and later on in May the project had been started. The cost of this project is over \$1 million and \$576,000 has already been paid to the Trinidad and Tobago Incoming Tour Operators Association—\$576,000. I want to read from a little report that says:

On Thursday, August 06, a team from the TDC conducted an interactive site visit to the first 9 kilometres of the trail from Grande Riviere to Sans Souci where it was unanimously agreed that while quite a lot of work has been done, has gone into the development of the trail, it was not yet ready for consumption of the general public.

This is the first 9 kilometres of the trail, and over half of the money for the project has already been given to the contractor. Now, there is some discrepancy and the project had been halted because the contractor is making claims for \$180,000 and the Ministry of Tourism has not agreed, but, miraculously, on September 15—out of nowhere—the project has restarted. That is the nature trails project for you.

Madam Speaker, I move now to advertising and marketing. I read in the Minutes, January 09, 2014, where members of the board are complaining that the TDC is spending a lot of money, or the Ministry of Tourism is spending a lot of money and they are not seeing where the advertising is going, but I came across an

interesting contract, or an interesting matter to deal with FV Marketing, where this company was paid to do a marketing project where there is no contract and there is no Cabinet approval. I was befuddled. I was befuddled, Madam Speaker, by this development because I do not understand: how do you move \$7 million of public funds without the approval of Cabinet?

I have here, in my possession, a letter written on January 18 to the PS at that time, because months after, or, should I say, a year after this money was disbursed. It is a \$10 million project and \$7 million had already been given to FV Marketing. In March 2015—a matter of fact—let me find it. So, in 2015, Madam Speaker, the Minister now approaches Cabinet asking for cover approval for the \$7 million that had already been paid out to FV Marketing. Cabinet does not approve and sends back questions asking: why was Cabinet approval not sought? Who is FV Marketing and Advertising Agency? Was the tender process in keeping with tendering procedures? These are the questions being asked by Ted Ramsanahie, the advisor to the Minister, to Ms. Donna Ferraz, who was the Permanent Secretary at that time. Donna Ferraz responds by saying, I refer—*[Interruption]*

Mr. Indarsingh: Let me assist you with that pronunciation?

Hon. S. Cudjoe: “Doh school me”.

Mr. Indarsingh: Let me assist you with that pronunciation?

Hon. S. Cudjoe: You are in the Opposition, do not school me, and you would have your time to speak. Madam Speaker, please protect me before I have to protect—“I doh like to have to protect myself”. Please speak to the Member for Couva South.

So, Madam Speaker, I refer to—this is from the Permanent Secretary at that time, I think it was Donna Ferraz:

Execution of the National Tourism, Education and Awareness Programme

I refer to correspondence of January 21 with regard to queries posed by the Finance and General Purposes Committee of Cabinet Note at caption—

And that is Cabinet Note: 13/2/11 Vol. I, and it says:

Pertinent information relative to the issues queried is attached for consideration. The Ministry of Tourism is available to respond to any queries on the information supplied. However, I wish to advise that this information was all that was available from the Ministry’s records and the Companies Registry, Ministry of Legal Affairs. If any information is required it is recommended that contact be made with Mrs. Juliana Johan-Boodram...

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—who was the Permanent Secretary in the Ministry of Tourism during the period that this project was executed.

So, I think Permanent Secretary, Mrs. Juliana Johan-Boodram, has some questions to answer, and I think the nation would like to know how do you manage to move \$7 million of public funds into the hands of a private company for marketing that we cannot put our hands on to say, okay, this is what it was paid for. How does that happen in an Opposition?—well, now Opposition, then Government that come here to speak about transparency and accountability, and your constituents have these concerns. Take that somewhere.

Madam Speaker, I want to move now from this infamous \$7 million to the Maracas project because every day you learn something more and more and something more corrupt taking place either within the projects approved by the Ministry or the projects of the TDC. I want to move to Maracas because I heard a lot of song and dance. As a matter of fact, last week—no, as a matter of fact, about Thursday or so, the *Guardian*—somebody from the *Guardian* called me and said, I heard that you have cancelled the Maracas project, and the Member for Tabaquite came here yesterday speaking in that light like the Maracas project has been cancelled, and—[*Interruption*]

Dr. Rambachan: Never.

Hon. S. Cudjoe: Well, questioning about whether or not it would be continued, and you have the same books that I have. You have the same books for the budget that I have. The Member, I should say, has the same books, the same material, and I guess what they would have been doing is looking at the development programmes, the front pages, and seeing that no money was allocated there, but this was done under your Government and this is an IDF project. So, if you turn to the pages in the back of the same document under IDF you would find \$30 million allocated to the project. Reading is essential. I was educated by a United Negro College Fund (UNCF) scholarship that said, “A mind is a terrible thing to waste”. It is essential to read, so turn to the back of your book and that information is there. The same \$30 million was allocated to the project.

I want to speak a little more about this Maracas project because this project was granted to Kallco a couple weeks prior to the election. As I go through the Minutes of the TDC you could see the directors being rushed, saying that the Minister says that this project needs to be—in 2014 they are saying, the Minister needs for this thing to happen by 2015, we have to rush. So that the RFPs were issued on Carnival Friday and the bidders had to respond by the following Friday

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after Carnival. So, anyway, the project was granted to Kallco on June 08, 2015, and this is a project that is of great importance. It is one of our big ticket items under the Ministry of Tourism. I had the chance to visit the project, week before last week—no, last week I had the chance to visit the project and I spoke to the members of CISL and Mr. Lee Young, and the members of Kallco would have done a presentation.

Now, we were told that this project is the same project that the People's National Movement would have been spending \$230-something million and now they are getting the project for \$89 million. When you examine the scope and the particulars of this project you are talking about a much smaller scope of works, Madam Speaker. And this thing was rushed, because you are seeing in the correspondence where Kallco is instructed to hold a launching—hold a launching quick. So, the launching was done in July, a couple of weeks before the election, and now Kallco, after being rushed, would have submitted claims for the launching. They have submitted 200 claims to the tune of some over \$274,000 for the launching—for the launching only, and, to date, the claim has not been approved.

This, as you know, Madam Speaker, Maracas beach on Ash Wednesday is part of our Carnival product, so we look forward to that. As I toured the project last week I am told by Lee Young, the engineer there, that this project is two to four months behind time. If this project is two to four months behind time chances are if things continue to go the way they are going this project would not be completed in time for Carnival. But I want to highlight to this House that Kallco has made several claims, so in addition to the time constraint, their financial constraints, due to the claims that Kallco has made—so, Kallco, one of the claims is for unforeseeable physical conditions. Kallco is saying that they now see a swamp there that they did not know existed there before. A swamp, a swamp that had been there all this time, Kallco now see the swamp and decided to make claims for the swamp. Then the other one is unforeseeable physical conditions. There are at least four claims for more time or for more money for this project, and the list goes on and on and on, Madam Speaker.

So, yes, the Maracas project is still on, but, Madam Speaker, I think that we need to pay some more attention to what is happening with that project, and I seek particular interest in this project because I know how important this is to the people of Maracas. There are some other parts or some other provisions of the contract that speaks to employing people from the Maracas community. I had a conversation—well, at the presentation last week I am told that they have been

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unable to totally fulfil their commitments in that regard because they have not found anybody from the community that has the specific qualifications to be employed. So, Member of that area, talk to your people.

10.45 a.m.

Madam Speaker, I want to really raise this matter as a matter of urgency and a matter of priority to the national community, because I do have some concerns as it relates to value for money with this Maracas project, and whether or not this project is going to be completed in proper time.

Madam Speaker, I want to state that each and every day I learn something new, of some new project, of some new proposal, of some new programme in this Ministry. I am new to the Ministry, so is the PS, but slowly and surely we are getting to the bottom of it. Getting the necessary information is like pulling teeth—from those who claim to know nothing, to reports that cannot be found, to little or no cooperation I would say from the TDC.

That brings to the fore my concerns about the TDC, the Tourism Development Company. To date, my experience with the TDC that this Ministry has inherited or has working with it, I think it is safe to say, just like the stakeholders of the tourism industry, just like the workers in the Ministry have said, TDC seems to be a law unto itself and TDC seems to be a runaway horse. This is a classic example of the tail wagging the dog and not the dog wagging the tail.

I understand that TDC is responsible for marketing and is seen more or less as the implementation arm of the Ministry, but TDC implements or markets according to the Ministry's policy, but this is a reverse of what is happening. The TDC goes out and does what it wants. You are home one day and you hear TDC is getting ready to go on a trip somewhere. Today, right now as we speak, TDC is somewhere out there with a 10-member team participating in a private event that they would have funded for over \$100,000 and participating in something like a fitness competition, 10 members at \$20,000 per uniform—right now as we speak. So TDC is a law unto itself; the tail wagging the dog, rather than the dog wagging the tail.

Madam Speaker: Hon. Member for Tobago West, your 45 minutes have now been spent. Do you wish to extend?

Hon. S. Cudjoe: Yes, please, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker: It is granted.

Hon. S. Cudjoe: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

I want to highlight some of the issues with TDC, because TDC spends the bulk of the money under the Ministry for tourism. I think the TDC has become beyond the control of the Ministry and beyond the control of the board. As you read the minutes you hear different directors saying that they do not trust what is being presented to them by the tenders committee but, Madam Speaker, as the Leader of the Bench would have said, we are in charge now, and we are going to run TDC; TDC is not going to run us. [*Desk thumping*]

Here we have under the Ministry one state body, 167 employees strong, paying at least \$16 million in base salary per year. All the workers under the TDC are working for the highest possible amount that they could work for in their salary range. So let us say there is a marketing specialist and the range is \$19,000 to \$23,000, bet your bottom dollar, despite the qualification or the experience, that person is working for the \$23,000 which is the upper limit. And we are only talking here about basic salary.

I have witnessed through the minutes and through conversations the strangest hiring and firing processes under the TDC, and that would have been highlighted in their altercation with the Joint Select Committee earlier this year. You are seeing stories of the tea lady becoming an accounting specialist, the person who used to answer the phone becoming a marketing specialist. You could be anything; you could be anybody in the TDC. Everybody on the organizational chart is a specialist. There are even people hired within the TDC where there is no position, and it tells you on the chart this position is not mentioned under the organizational structure. So I am very concerned.

This is a well-resourced, well-travelled, well-funded and well-entertained company. I have come across them granting onto themselves Massy vouchers for groceries for Christmas to the tune of \$194,000; that is at least \$1,000 per employee. Then on top of that they throw themselves a Christmas party for \$153,000. Madam Speaker, I am coming across month after month, trip after trip, junket after junket. I understand that in the business of tourism there will be some travel, but most times my question is: Does everybody have to go on the trip? Do you have to go to each and every trip?

That is my concern because I have come across trips to the tune of half a million dollars for four people going somewhere. I saw a World Trade Market, two point something million dollars. Even their travel schedule for the next coming weeks—let me give you an example. We have an officer who went to Chile, October 3 to 10 to Adventure Travel World Summit—whatever that is—\$91,880; then a four-person team to go to Curacao, October 19 to 23, \$120,000. That is petty compared to the other things that I have seen; trips of four hundred and something thousand dollars.

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If there is a tourism conference or a conference related to tourism going on anywhere in the world, bet your bottom dollar, members of the TDC are going to be there; they have been there. And in some cases to no knowledge or no correspondence to the Ministry; no collaboration with the Tobago House of Assembly, they just up and go. It gets better and better.

You see, there are some other expenses relating to members of the board. For instance, I came across Daren Ganga, who was a director of the board, he brought to the board for sponsorship to the tune of US \$70,000 for CPL. After the Ministry of Sport said that they were not going to finance it, he brought it to the board and the board financed it. I have read in the minutes where another member brought to the board a verbal proposal—a verbal proposal—for \$90,000, and they approved it saying, “You know what, it is a verbal proposal, we give them \$45,000”. A verbal proposal, I have never heard of such a thing; and the list goes on and on and on, and there are several others. Private parties, somebody launching a fashion something. You want some money, check the TDC. [*Laughter*]

Madam Speaker, there are some other expenses, like there are companies stationed in six different areas: Scandinavia, the US, London, and they are paid to do marketing for the TDC. They are paid to do marketing; that is in addition to what the TDC is supposed to do. So here we have Trade Consultant and Consumer Marketing, US \$31,640 per month, and that is in the US; that is paid to Trade Consultant and Consumer Marketing, and another public relations company called Cheryl Andrews Marketing Communications. The United Kingdom, Advantage Management Group, fees of £10,000 per month; then Canada, AVIAREPS Tourism Canada, paid Can. \$10,700 per month; Scandinavian market, Spirit Company, paid 10,000 euros per month; India, a company called Beautiful Planet, paid US \$7,412 per month; and in Germany, AVIAREPS AG, paid 8,000 euros per month. So if we are paying them out in the market, what is TDC really paid to do? Madam Speaker, the list goes on and on, and as we go you will hear more, because we have five years at least to tell you more and more and more and more.

I want to close on TDC, because somebody has clearly abdicated their responsibility. I have read in the minutes and my interactions or my altercations with the TDC so far, and that of the new PS also has been that they do not feel any need to collaborate with the Ministry. The TDC has been doing what they want to do and then informing the Ministry after, or we hear or find out. But as I said before, we are in charge now and we will run the TDC, the TDC will not run us.

I want to say, at the end of the day, we have to get to exactly—because you spend a lot of money on marketing and the concern really is: What are we marketing? I think this time around, the focus has to be on improving the product, and that is going to be our focus in the Ministry, improving the product; of course marketing also and improving quality and customer service. We have set out to work with the stakeholders. We have decided to meet religiously on the fourth Thursday of every month to treat with our issues and to move forward.

There will also be a very close relationship and collaboration with other Ministries; for instance, the Ministry of Works and Transport to deal with signage, the Ministry responsible for building proper toilets and restroom facilities at the different tourism attractions. We will be working with standards for proper certification and proper standards in the tourism and hoteliers industry.

Madam Speaker, this is going to be a collaborative effort, because for the most time we have been spending money building the tourism product, building projects and we do not have a proper collaboration or a proper relationship with, let us say, the local government body. So who is responsible for maintenance of these sites after we have built them? Who is responsible for supervising these sites? Every Ministry has a tourism interest in it, and they are going to play a pivotal role in moving tourism forward.

I want to also commit to strengthening and improving our relationship with the Tobago House of Assembly. As you know, the tourism season is high up on us again and we have cruise ships coming in as early as October 29. The different Ministries in the Government will have to collaborate to ensure that there is proper airlift to Tobago, and so ensure that there are the necessary buses and the necessary infrastructure and services that will be necessary. So we have a long way to go, but I as Minister and my team in the Ministry make our commitment to working diligently to take tourism from the back seat to the driver's seat of the economy in Trinidad and Tobago, and to give tourism the respect that it deserves.

There have been those who sat in government and sat at the head and at the helm of this Ministry for years, and have done less than little to take it forward. That is a thing of the past. We are going to do our work and our homework to put tourism where it needs to be.

Madam Speaker, I thank you.

Mr. Rodney Charles (*Naparima*): Madam Speaker, let me first congratulate the Member for Tobago West on her maiden speech in this House. I wish to remind her that maths and facts are stubborn things; $66\frac{2}{3}$ of the population did not vote

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for the party on the other side and, therefore, it is not a fact that they are a majority government. She said 94 per cent of Tobago voted for them. I could say in Naparima 15,000 voters voted for the United National Congress and 18,000 in Chaguanas West. [*Desk thumping*] She also said that the Opposition Leader left after she spoke. That is not consistent with the fact. [*Interruption*]

Hon. Member: Address the Speaker.

Mr. R. Charles: She said that we should accept the fact that we are in Opposition; that is the reason why we are here, Member for Tobago West. We have taken the oath that we will “bear true faith and allegiance to Trinidad and Tobago and will uphold the Constitution and the law”.

Madam Speaker, first let me congratulate you on your appointment as Speaker of the House of Representatives. I will also like to congratulate the hon. Prime Minister on his appointment. It is manifestly clear that he has found favour with the wheel of fortune, hence his appointment. I am, indeed, happy for him and wish him well; after all he is my Prime Minister. I take this opportunity to advise the hon. Prime Minister that he follows in the footsteps of a very great leader, Mrs. Kamla Persad-Bissessar. [*Desk thumping*]

Paraphrasing Sir Winston Churchill, never in the history of this great country has so much been done for five years to so many by one courageous lady. [*Desk thumping*]

11.00 a.m.

And as he walks out, as the hon. Prime Minister leaves—[*Interruption*]

Mrs. Persad-Bissessar SC: I am still here.

Mr. R. Charles:—and the Leader of the Opposition is still here, I would recommend that he, in following her footsteps, gives 10 per cent of his salary to the Children’s Life Fund. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Imbert: Point of order, 48(5). [*Crosstalk*]

Dr. Khan: Conduct of a Member?

Mr. Imbert: He is constantly using the adjectives “he”, “she”.

Madam Speaker: I would ask all hon. Members of this House—[*Crosstalk*] I am on my legs, please. Hon. Member for Barataria/San Juan, I am on my legs. I would like all hon. Members of this House to observe the Standing Orders. There is a Standing Order that says that we refer to Hon. Members either by their portfolio or by their constituency.

Mr. R. Charles: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. And secondly, Madam Speaker, on September 07 the people had spoken, and I wish to remind hon. Members never to confuse the voice of the people with the voice of God. When the people had a choice centuries ago between Jesus and Barabbas, they chose Barabbas.

And the Lord said: "...forgive them; for they know not what they do."

And fourthly, I thank the 15,000 proud UNC citizens from Naparima who voted for the United National Congress and the 3,000 who did not. We have proud citizens like Daren Ganga and Jason Mohammed. Someone somewhere so designed Naparima that every possible UNC vote from Gasparillo to Ben Lomond to Williamsville to Garth Road to St. Cross Road in Princes Town, to Lengua to Debe was corralled into our constituency. [*Crosstalk*] For those north of Caroni, my seat covers Diego Martin to Arouca, with a shift of a street or two here and there, three are marginal constituencies will become safe UNC seats.

Madam Speaker, the first budget of any administration is expected to set the tone for its approach to governance. Will it be characterized by continued bickering?

Dr. Moonilal: Madam Speaker, 53(e).

Madam Speaker: Hon. Members, let us please hear the contribution from the hon. Member for Naparima, please.

Mr. R. Charles: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. The first budget of any administration is expected to set the tone for its approach to governance. Will it be characterized by continued bickering, a "we in charge" attitude here, and antagonism, or will it be consensual as we collectively confront the challenges of a society that aspires to become a First World nation?

Accusatory words from the Minister of Finance like nepotism, greed, immorality, betrayal, officially sanctioned corruption and cronyism may appear to be good politics in the short term, but does nothing to engender the kind of consensus necessary to deal with the plethora of economic and other challenges which we face. But the unearned \$15 million granted to friends, family and supporters in the trade union movement, which some were smart enough to reject, at least publicly we presume, do not qualify as cronyism. It also makes no sense since all, as far as the *Bible* says, including the arrogant Members—the hon. Members next door, opposite have sinned and come short of the glory of God. Much as they believe they are specially anointed, the scripture says that their righteousness are like filthy rags in his sight. In fact, as in Mathew 24:24 it is written, and I quote:

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“For there shall arise false Christs, and false prophets, and shall shew great signs and wonders; insomuch that, if it were possible, they shall deceive the very elect.”

But the MP for Laventille who spoke yesterday is an honourable man.

Hon. Member: Which one?

Mr. R. Charles: So are they all, all honourable men. Laventille West. If the budget statement as presented by the Minister of Finance is meant to set the tone for the next five years, Trinidad and Tobago is in the unenviable position of being led by a Government apparently without a plan. [*Desk thumping*]

The Minister of Finance’s budget was essentially an exercise in deceptive arithmetic and bookkeeping. The late Lloyd Best would have said that it lacked a higher mathematical analysis like algebra. It lacked a trigonometry. It lacked a calculus. By contrast if one examined Singapore’s budget for 2015, one sees a clearly overarching architecture based on a theme “Building Our Future, Strengthening Social Security”. Sub-heads of Singapore’s budget deal with:

1. “Developing Our People
2. Investing in Innovation and Internationalisation
3. Assurance in Retirement
4. Supporting Families, Strengthening Community
5. Preserving a Fair and Sustainable Fiscal System”

If one were to examine one of the sub-themes “Developing Our People”, in the Singapore budget compared to ours, one would find four major points:

“Lifelong Learning: Our Next Phase of Development”

Singapore is looking at universal preschool education; universal primary education; universal secondary education; universal tertiary education; and lastly, universal adult education. They take you from cradle to the grave and they have a plan to ensure that you are capable of surviving and succeeding in the 21st Century. Nothing like that. In our budget it is arithmetic—take money from here and put there. Take from this and do this, rather than providing an architecture to take this great country forward.

The second point they talk about starting in the school years: taking learning into our careers; targeting support for career progression. Bearing in mind that

each citizen in the 21st Century will change seven careers, research shows. Seven careers in their lifetime. So they help you to adjust to the changing careers as they evolve.

Whereas our Minister of Finance's budget starts with the accusation of cronyism against the Opposition, that of Singapore alludes to a vision as follows, and I quote from their own because we could learn. And Singapore says:

“This budget is focused on building Singapore's future. We must reach our next frontier as an economy, with firms driven by innovation, and higher incomes coming from deep skills and expertise in every job. We must ensure a society that is fair and just, where everyone has a chance to move up and do well regardless of where they start. And we must complement a culture of personal effort and responsibility with stronger collective responsibility especially for the elderly.”

Here we have cronyism, corruption, stealing on the other side, et cetera, and they are speaking about a vision to take a serious country forward. If you go to the budget for India and the budget for Japan you do not see that kind of what we call standpipe gossip. One sees ideas and views to take a country forward.

So, if we go back to a First World country, they say, first we must invest in skills of the future. Where in this budget we see anything about skills for tomorrow? And they say they will empower every individual to learn and develop throughout life. Where—my political leader talked about the silver economy. Where in this document do you see anything for people like myself over the age of 60?

The Singaporean says:

“Second, we will continue to restructure our economy, and support the next generation of business successes by promoting innovation and internationalisation.”

For heaven's sake, where are we compared to what they are doing? How would we compete? And they say:

“Third, we will invest in economic and social infrastructure for the future, to create competitive strengths, a...liveable home for all Singaporeans, and quality healthcare.”

And they go on and on. Whereas our budget speaks to the arithmetic and bookkeeping of reducing VAT, or subsidies on gasoline, or increase in the Green Fund or allocation to respective Ministries; Singapore's budget provides an algebra, a calculus, and a road map and a plan for making a 21st Century leader in a range of competencies not for the challenges of today, but to create the next generation of

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internationally competitive industries and citizenry. To put it briefly, our budget lacks a vision and a plan. You see, the main difference is sad to say, the difference between their Minister of Finance and ours. Our new Prime Minister has cited Mr. Imbert's wealth of parliamentary experience as the reason—sorry the hon. Member for Diego Martin North/East, I apologize. Our Prime Minister has cited the hon. Member Diego Martin North/East's wealth of parliamentary experience as the reason he was given the nod to help this all-important Ministry. I beg to differ. It is his experience as a parliamentary salesman. He comes here to this House with theatrics and paints a picture of gloom and doom, promises consultation after consultation in what—look every one of these is a consultation. On one, page 90 and paragraph two.

“Madam Speaker, we will be guided by a framework of general principles as we seek to arrest the decline in the sector. Stakeholder consultation will be essential.”

Two paragraphs down:

“Accordingly, we will commence”—business—“discussions with all stakeholders on the adoption of appropriate strategies and incentives...”

The next paragraph:

“We will also move forward with a comprehensive review of existing arrangements along the natural gas value chain and where necessary, implement appropriate measures...”

The next page:

“Accordingly, in this shortest time possible, after consultation with the industry, we will introduce a new and appropriate fiscal regime designed to encourage further exploration in fields on land...”

And in the very next paragraph:

“We will engage all energy sector stakeholders, upstream, midstream and downstream, in meaningful consultation...”

That is five in two pages. I could go on and on. It is a consultation budget without plans. Yet they say they had a plan and a vision, so when they got into Government they will start on the ground running. Clearly, that is not so.

But dear Minister of Finance, it is a question of competencies, and I will show you why Singapore is where it is, and why Trinidad under the PNM will be where we are. Mr. Heng Swee Keat who is their Minister of Finance was a managing director of the Monetary Authority of Singapore which serves as the Central Bank of

Singapore. He was CEO of the Trade Development Board and holds an MA in economics from Cambridge University and a Masters in public administration from Harvard. His predecessor is an economics graduate from the London School of Economics and Cambridge University.

So, we are left with a hodgepodge of rudimentary, often conflicting ideas, which make no sense, have no coherent purpose and are often deceptive. I will go into some of the deceptions in the budget. Deception number one: We are told that the PP Government, the People's Partnership Government, overspent with annual budgets increasing from \$46 billion in 2010 to \$62 billion in 2015. Yet this budget, with significantly challenging revenue streams, will spend \$63 billion next year with a real deficit of \$21 billion. That is a deception.

Deception two: They say, they are going to contain expenditure and get into a fiscal balance by the year 2018, but highlight a number of projects that call for significant capital expenditure. The completion of the San Fernando to Point Fortin Highway; the construction of the San Fernando to Mayaro freeway; construction of the Wallerfield to Manzanilla highway; the construction of the Port of Spain to Chaguanas highway; and the mass transit system, an inconsistency between the aspiration and the projects that have been outlined.

11.15 a.m.

Madam Speaker, secondly, the budget speaks about the need for economic diversification, which common sense would say must include agriculture and tourism, and it was good to hear the hon. Member for Tobago West speaking about the tourism and the challenges she faced. Yet the budgetary allocation for the sector—that is agriculture—has been cut from \$1.5 billion last year to \$831 million in 2016. So we are talking diversification, but we are not seeing the match with the allocations.

Tourism, the other area that one would look at in the context of a diversification strategy has been cut from \$212.38 million last year to \$177.86 million in 2016. In 2014, \$24 million was spent on tourism development, and that has been cut to \$22 million in 2016. So, the third point of deception, they talked about OPVs on page 32 of the budget and they gave the impression that this is a panacea for locking down our borders and we will all live happily ever after. OPVs are useful even if defective and overpriced, but they are not the panacea as touted on the other side.

The United States, with the most sophisticated navy in the world with 10 aircraft carriers, 328,000 sailors on active duty, 110,000 in reserve, 10 frigates, 62 destroyers, 72 submarines, among other assets, have not been able to lock down their borders from the same drug lords that supply drugs to the United States. So, what we are

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saying, it is part of a plan, not a total panacea, and therefore we took the correct decision initially to deal with the challenges of crime on the ground first and then deal with the other areas afterwards. [*Desk thumping*]

CNG is given the status of an environmental saviour. You see, when you do not read widely and you do not understand, it is written on—I will get the page. They say they have it as a replacement for gasoline, and that is okay, and it is touted as a cure for our environmental issues. This bears in mind that on a per capita basis, Trinidad and Tobago has the second highest carbon footprint in the world. But studies, including one by James Bradbury, Senior Advisor, Energy Policy and Systems Analysis to the US Government and others, suggest that if burning natural gas in vehicles is to deliver even marginal benefits, methane losses must be kept below 1 per cent and 1.6 per cent compared with diesel fuel and gasoline respectively.

Whether natural gas has lower life cycle greenhouse gas emissions than coal and oil depends on the assumed leakage rate of methane. The global warming potential of methane over different time frames, the energy conversion efficiency and other factors. In simple language it means that if one has to have a meaningful environmental impact by the use of CNG in vehicles, we must look at how it is produced, stored and delivered to ensure that the leakages of methane are minimized. And you know, thank God no mention was made in this budget speech about a plywood factory in La Brea, because if they do that, run. The hon. Member for La Brea, do not live in La Brea if that happens. A report on formaldehyde by the Australian Government National Industrial Chemicals Notification and Assessment Scheme concluded that occupational exposures to chemical from formaldehyde pressed wood products can cause significant health concerns.

Another Italian case study in the International Journal of Forest Engineering, July 1999, Vol. 10 No.2 showed significantly high risks as a result of exposure to formaldehyde for workers in plywood industries in Italy. In a sixth deception in the budget, 20 per cent increase in OJT compensation is not a sustainable option given the temporary nature of OJT jobs. The graduate training programme does not reconcile the workers' need for permanent employment with the optimum size of the public service given high wage bills in the public service, low productivity and the fact that the private sector is starved of competent qualified human resources.

Singapore, in their planning for the future, is looking towards lifelong learning and building a society designed to overcome the new challenges which the globe faces. And here we are with a wealth of human resources, some of the best and brightest young people in the world, saying to our graduates, look some extra

money, be happy with that. And I ask, is that the extent of our aspirations? On the question of foreign exchange on page 50, it is posited as essentially a process efficiency challenge, we are going to revert to the old system so that we could give foreign exchange more efficiently, but that confuses the fact that if you increase the efficiency and you have a supply problem, ultimately you are going to run out. You are just developing an efficient flow to hasten the day when we are depleted of foreign exchange. So, the question becomes a supply management question for dealing with the inflows of foreign exchange.

We have number seven, VAT reduced from 15 to 12.5 per cent, but revenues will increase by \$4 billion, another deception, and it goes on and on. But, I would like to address the question of our foreign policy, and they would like us to believe that our foreign policy arrangements are in chaos. But I will recall the words of the Prime Minister yesterday when she said that a UN report, Trinidad and Tobago alone accounted for 27 per cent of total global foreign direct investment inflows among small island development states.

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: The Prime Minister said that?

Mr. R. Charles: Sorry, the Leader of the Opposition, the former Prime Minister. So, we are the beneficiaries of significantly high FDI inflows into our country. And over the last five years we were proud that we strengthened and enhanced our position in global trade, because diplomacy is not about interacting with people, it must serve the needs of the financial and economic needs of the country. And we strengthened our position globally, and this is evidenced by multiple bilateral trade agreements and partnerships with regional powerhouses such as Guatemala, El Salvador and Panama. All of these were able to negotiate and brought into effect a partial scope agreement with Guatemala, with El Salvador, and another one with Panama.

So, we have moved significantly to enhance the status of Trinidad and Tobago abroad, and that is why when it came to the elections at the ICC we were able to get the President, former Justice Anthony Carmona, elected as a judge of the International Criminal Court, and when he demitted office to become President of Trinidad and Tobago, Justice Geoffrey Henderson, we were able to get him elected because of the stature we held while we were in office. But there is a fundamental question, if we are to excel in the global village like Singapore, why is it that the hon. Member for Diego West, as Prime Minister, did not seize the opportunity at this year's annual general assembly meeting in New York? Here was an opportunity as a new Government to meet and treat with global leaders and tell them that Trinidad and Tobago is on the global stage. Could it be that the problem was who he would appoint as acting Prime Minister?

Hon. Member: Deyalsingh. [*Laughter*]

Mr. R. Charles: And maybe there was some concern in that regard and therefore he chose to remain in Trinidad and Tobago.

There is another question in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs about the security of information that is sent from the head office to our missions abroad. We send it by emails at this moment and in the diplomatic bag. Emails are subject to being spied upon by foreign people at the UN and other countries with whom we go to negotiate. Oftentimes at the UN I formed the impression that other ambassadors knew the instructions I got from head office because they had somehow hacked into our emails. So, therefore, the ambassador from, let us say Israel, would be asking me how are we going to vote on the Palestinian issue? And I formed the impression that he might have known the instructions I have gotten in an email.

The point is that when the colonial powers left in 1962, they left encryption devices in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Unfortunately, they left it with a PNM Government and there is no encryption at all of information that moves from one mission to another. [*Crosstalk*]

Madam Speaker: Members! Members!

Mr. R. Charles: In the Ministry of Foreign Affairs there is a challenge that as we speak 90 per cent of foreign service officers are contract employees, and the 10 per cent that remain are over age 56. Which means within five years we are going to have a dearth of experienced foreign service officers, and replacing them would be a number of contract officers.

One of the things that we were concerned about and we would have treated with this if we were elected, I would ask as a citizen of the country, that the Government takes the opportunity to treat with the development of a cadre of professional permanent foreign service officers. In Japan—I went to Japan about three years ago and the foreign service officer from the Japanese foreign Ministry who was escorting me, she was under 35 years old. She graduated from the University of Tokyo, then she joined the Japanese foreign service, she was sent to France for three years to learn French and immerse in the French culture, and she told me that within two months she was going to Germany to learn German, and then subsequently she goes to South America to learn Portuguese.

So, over a 10-year period their foreign service officers will have a plethora and a breadth of experience that the Trinidad person will not have, particularly, as they are on contract. So, my suggestion is, that if we are to—like Singapore, like India, like Japan—move into the 21st Century and engage the global village meaningfully, that we treat with the resources we have in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in the context

of the global community and this budget. The global community is moving towards—they have moved away from millennium development goals to sustainable development goals. They are looking at a non-fossil economy, and how they can operate in a sustainable environment, and they have identified 17 goals. When you look at our budget, you do not see a reflection of where the globe is going and where we are headed. We are headed in the arithmetical level—it reminds me of what we used to call in the days in the university, the rear-view mirror effect. We are looking forward, but we are looking in the rear view and we are looking backwards. That is the reality of this budget compared to what one sees the global community going.

So, we stand if we are not careful, we are going left and the whole global community is going right. Item one of the Sustainable Development Goals, no poverty. Where in this budget does anyone see anything dealing with poverty? It speaks to consultations and meeting when we look at the social safety net. Limited information, nothing that one could look at in the context of serious countries that are moving forward. The other one is zero: hunger. I have no sense, no architecture from this budget what we are doing in terms of hunger, and I have seen studies that show that poverty in Trinidad is 17 to 18 per cent of the country. I am not sure, but it does exist.

11.30 a.m.

Good health and well-being: Trinidad and Tobago—and when I was at the UN, we—and my medical friend, the hon. Member for Barataria/San Juan could tell me—we have a high incidence of non-communicable diseases deriving from obesity, et cetera. Lifestyle diseases, 67 per cent of our deaths are somewhere related to the non-communicable diseases: strokes, hypertension, diabetes, cancer, et cetera. If we are talking health and you look in this budget you are seeing dollars and cents, arithmetic. We are going to spend here and take here and divide here and multiply. We see nothing, no architecture dealing with good health and changing our lifestyles to reduce the pressure on our hospitals.

Quality education: We looked at the Japanese, where they say, “we are educating our society for the next generation of jobs”. Here we see GATE: “we will look and review GATE and we will”—et cetera. Nothing in terms of an architecture or a plan.

Gender equality: Do we have data about salaries for women as opposed to men in our country? What is happening in terms of—is there a disparity? [*Crosstalk*—decent work and economic growth; industry, innovation and infrastructure. Reduced inequalities—[*Interruption*]

Dr. Moonilal: Madam Speaker, 53.

[Madam Speaker stands and looks at Members]

Mr. R. Charles: Thank you very much. You see, it is difficult to contemplate that if you lack a plan and if you lack a vision and if you do not relate to what is happening in the global economy, we will be going nowhere. That may be difficult for some people to understand and internalize. They are talking about a host of 17 goals, and our foreign Minister, when he went to the AGM of the UN General Assembly, he said that we are committed to these. But if we are committed we need to see it in the budget.

Before I close, I would like to talk about the concerns of my constituents, 28,000 people who voted in Naparima. Naparima is a proud place. We have Barrackpore Vedic School which will celebrate its 60th anniversary. We have the first Presbyterian Church in Trinidad and Tobago, the Grant Memorial Church in Iere Village, in Naparima. We have the first Spiritual Baptist Church in Trinidad and Tobago, also in Iere Village; the first mosque. And yet this great constituency compared to, when you look at the budget and the allocations with the Princes Town Regional Corporation, the cuts to the Princes Town Regional Corporation, it suffers from neglect, Madam Speaker. And when I look, it has, *[Crosstalk]* we have one secondary school in the entire Naparima constituency, *[Crosstalk]* one, ASJA Girls' Secondary School.

The budget speaks about a cut for ASJA Primary School. We have Jordan Hill Primary School that produces its fair share of students in the top 100 in the SEA examination. That school is closed as we speak and there is no budget allocation for it in the budget. *[Crosstalk]*

In respect of the ASJA Primary School, we budgeted for it in 2015 and it was cut in the budget in 2016. Brothers Presbyterian School is in need of repairs, no allocation in this budget. So while Japan is speaking of educating their society for the next generation of jobs, we are cutting, cutting, cutting, in a constituency that does not ask for help. We are a constituency that when they killed the sugar industry we were left stranded. But our people learn to work hard and not to depend on handouts from the State.

So therefore, when I look on a per capita basis and I see what Tobago gets, no jealousy, no anything, Tobago happy—proud for you on a per capita basis—and there are challenges in terms of being apart from Trinidad. But when I compare that with what we get, the question I ask, are we second-class citizens in

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Naparima?—and as a representative for that constituency we intend to push for equality, because they talk about, let us do this together. [*Desk thumping*] But when it comes to the allocation of resources it is clear that we are left behind.

In terms of agriculture, we are in fact the bread basket. We feed you. We feed them. We have turkey farms, chicken farms galore, agriculture, et cetera, at all levels and we see a cut in the agriculture. And they mamaguy us by saying that they have put zero-rated VAT on agricultural equipment. When I speak to the farmers they tell me that the zero rate already exists by this People's Partnership Government. [*Desk thumping*] Deception.

So the point is, we are on this side, we had a vision for taking Trinidad and Tobago forward. My political leader talked about a blue economy. Where in this budget is there anything about a blue economy? In fact, the information is that the resources of the fish are being depleted. And the increase in gasoline is going to affect the fisheries because the boats need fuel in order to survive. As I already spoke, there is nothing about the silver economy and absolutely very little on the green economy in this budget. So we are headed for a fossil fuel economy for the next year at least, when the whole world is going towards a green economy.

The question we ask is, what is the mix of public and private sector employment, and entrepreneurship? If we cannot provide the jobs, what entrepreneurial activities are we going to engage in and how are we going to foster a climate of entrepreneurship? And I may say that in Naparima we are by and large entrepreneurs, taxi drivers, we have our little parlours and shops, car repair places and we provide—we do not depend, but we work hard to cater for our needs.

And while I am at it, at the Ministry of Communications, perhaps we read every day about people being sent home. We read every day of contracts being terminated, and my question is—there are two questions: Were we not told that there is going to be no witch-hunt at all with the new Government? We were told that. And the other question is, are we as citizens not guaranteed by the Constitution, freedom of religion, freedom of class, freedom of creed and freedom of association, the right to join political parties. That is the basis of our democracy. And if people perceive that they are going to be punished for their political allegiance—perceived or otherwise—then heaven help this country. [*Desk thumping*] And they have an opportunity because they say, let us do this together and all their actions speak to a superiority complex, “we are in charge now”. They let you know that and they speak about an arrogance that we are corrupt, and as I say again, all have sinned and come short of the glory of God. Much as they would like to believe that they are anointed, God is not a PNM. We are citizens, we are a democracy.

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[MR. CHARLES]

So ladies and gentlemen, as I depart it is my hope that those on the other side will move away—[*Crosstalk*—it is my hope, Madam Speaker, that those on the other side will embrace the challenges of creating a society where every creed and race and where every one of every political persuasion will find an equal place. So we on this side say, let us do it together. If you cannot do it we could teach you how to work together. How can we create a society in which all of us can work together?

So, Madam Speaker, we tried in our time to create a society where everyone had an opportunity to enjoy the good patronage of this country. When we gave laptops we did not ask what race you were, what class you were, which geographic region. The people of Tobago were equally able to access a computer, a laptop, as the constituents of Naparima, it was all equal. When we gave old-age pensions, which we increased twice—did we?

Dr. Gopeesingh: Yeah.

Mr. R. Charles: Twice in our term, in our tenure. We did not ask whether the person over 60 or 65 was Chinese or White or East Indian, we did it for all. When we built the highways in Valencia, when we built the overpass in Aranguez, when we built the highway in Diego Martin and the health facility in Diego Martin and when we built the boardwalk in Diego Martin, we did not ask, we did not say which political party, how did the constituency vote. We did it for all. So we have set a legacy for them to follow in terms of ensuring that all the people in Trinidad and Tobago are able to access the goods and services in the country.

So we look forward to what they are going to do in terms of—and hopefully the Minister of Finance, the hon. Member for Diego Martin North/East, will be able when he comes in the budget to provide us with some sense of where we are going and provide us with a sense of an architecture of how we are going to develop this country. At the end of the day it does not matter whether you are a UNC or whether you are a PNM, it matters that Trinidad and Tobago reaches First World status. So when we leave, our children and grandchildren will inherit a better country. We are willing to work with them where they have ideas. We are willing to support anything in the interest of Trinidad and Tobago. What we will not do is to blindly support—[*Interruption*]

Madam Speaker: Hon. Member for Naparima, your 45 minutes is now spent. Do you intend to avail yourself of the additional 10 minutes?

Mr. R. Charles: I will. Thanks very much, Madam Speaker. We are willing to work with our friends opposite once they are clear that their policies are leading to

a better life for Trinidad and Tobago. We are willing to work. What we will not do is sit and take insults, especially when they are not justified, when we have delivered. They indicate on platforms and elsewhere that we spent \$400 billion. It was never more than \$290 billion. [*Desk thumping*] And what they never said is that, and our political leader said it, a significant component of that went to salaries and wages and transfers to state and subsidies.

So if 70 per cent of the moneys went to salaries and wages then they cannot complain, where did the money go? We did a lot with little. [*Desk thumping*] The efficiency is there for everybody to see. And the question is, as far as I have been around a long time, and I think this is the first time that the PNM has come, the party opposite has come into power when the revenue situation is not the best. We told them that we had the experience to deliver in the context of low revenues of oil and gas. We look forward to see how they will deliver and what will be their track record as they move forward. We wish them well and as I indicated we will support anything that makes sense and redounds to the benefit of the people of Trinidad and Tobago.

11.45 a.m.

In that regard, I will ask them to eliminate the smugness, to eliminate that sense of superiority and entitlement. It is unbecoming in a 21st Century country. [*Desk thumping*] Madam Speaker, I am asked to remind them that 66 per cent of the population did not support them. So while they may posture and while they may be smug and what not, they ought to recognize that there is a broader Trinidad and Tobago and recognize that they are given a trust.

In closing, I beg of them, I ask them, to put country first. Let us do this thing together so that we can make Trinidad and Tobago a better place for our children. But before we do that, this budget has to be reviewed. This budget has to be looked at and it has to be placed in a visionary context.

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

Madam Speaker: Hon. Member for La Horquetta/Talparo. [*Desk thumping*]

The Minister of Communications (Hon. Maxie Cuffie): Thank you, Madam Speaker. And may I extend congratulations to you on behalf of the constituency of La Horquetta/Talparo on bringing grace and dignity to this House.

Hon. Member: Back to the House.

Hon. M. Cuffie: Madam Speaker, I have risen to speak on this Bill on behalf of the constituents of La Horquetta/Talparo, all 26,031 of them, the majority of

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whom voted overwhelmingly to see a return of the People's National Movement to Government. [*Desk thumping*]

I want to begin on this note since the budget presented by the Minister of Finance, my friend from Diego Martin North/East, is a budget that has great implications for the people of La Horquetta/Talparo. I also want to recognize the work of my colleague from Arouca/Maloney, the Minister of Planning and Development, for ensuring that La Horquetta/Talparo got its just due in this year's budget. You see, Madam Speaker, since Monday, September 07, I have been meeting weekly with my constituents and hearing of their needs, their concerns and their fears, and there is a lot that needs to be done in La Horquetta/Talparo.

I want to congratulate the last speaker who clearly survived the "No Rodney" campaign that was being waged in the UNC and can still appear here to speak strongly in defence of that party. [*Desk thumping*] Although he began his contribution, for a minute there I thought he was speaking on behalf of the Government of Singapore. I listened to him speaking about the former Prime Minister's stewardship and I recall that he was her campaign manager and he was also the person who assisted her in New York at the United Nations, and I remember that he failed to get her—

Mrs. Persad-Bissessar SC: Who is "he"?

Hon. Member: That is right. The hon. Member.

Hon. M. Cuffie: My apologies—that the Member for Naparima not only failed the Member for Siparia in the last election, he also failed her in getting her desire—

Hon. Member: Siparia. Siparia.

Hon. M. Cuffie: Sorry, my apologies, Madam Speaker—failed the Member for Siparia in getting her—in getting the—

Hon. Member: The Member.

Hon. M. Cuffie:—the Member—

Hon. Member: Rewind.

Mrs. Persad-Bissessar SC: Still make your contribution, okay?

Hon. M. Cuffie: No, no, no. I know where I am going—in getting Trinidad and Tobago—the Member for Siparia's dream to get the small arms treaty for the country.

Mrs. Persad-Bissessar SC: It was not our dream; it was Trinidad and Tobago's.

Hon. M. Cuffie: No, it was your dream.

Mr. Indarsingh: If you think that kind of belligerent behaviour will get you anywhere—

Hon. M. Cuffie: The Member for Naparima also failed us in the ACP; he failed us in the Commonwealth, so we cannot take communications advice or strategy advice from the Member for Naparima who seems to be lost in Singapore while we are here in Trinidad and Tobago.

I am here because the good works of the UNC—if there were any—were lost on the constituents of La Horquetta/Talparo. Madam Speaker, while the constituents of La Horquetta/Talparo were experiencing poverty and, in some cases, deliberate neglect, those on the other side were busy feeding at the trough for five years. When they were tired feeding, they simply billed the State for more to pay for gastric bypass surgery to fix their bloated stomachs. That is what they have done to us.

Dr. Gopeesingh: 48(4) and (6).

Mr. Al-Rawi: Which Member of the House is he talking about?

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: Which Member is he talking about?

Madam Speaker: I am on my legs, please. I would like to remind Members of the provision of Standing Order 54(2). In terms of the objection, I overrule. You can continue, hon. Member for La Horquetta/Talparo.

Hon. M. Cuffie: Madam Speaker, we have had to endure five years of bloated budgets and all we are left with is a gastric bypass treasury. The most bloated budget over the last five years was assigned to the Ministry of Communications where the Government spent billions of dollars. So that before I delve into the concerns of La Horquetta/Talparo, I wish to speak a little on the Ministry of Communications.

You see, Madam Speaker, every day I go into that Ministry I am confronted by the sheer wastage and corruption that have taken place in the Communications Ministry, whether it was part of the office of the Prime Minister when the Member for Siparia was responsible, whether it stood on its own or was absorbed into the former Ministry of Trade, Industry, Investments and Communications.

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Over the last five years you would be horrified that while the country was shocked to learn about LifeSport, even more brazen robbery was taking place literally right before our eyes, being captured on our TV screens and on billboards all across the nation. The most bloated budget was at the Government Information Services Limited, a company that I had the privilege of leading from 2007 to 2010.

I would just like to remind the Member for Naparima of one thing. He spoke at length, as did the Member for Siparia, about the persons whose contracts were ended under the PNM over the last month. For the period June 01, 2010 to 31st October 2010, 2,075 officers in the public service did not have their contracts renewed.

Hon. Member: How many?

Hon. M. Cuffie: Two thousand and seventy-five persons, from June 2010 to October 31st, 2010, did not have their—

Mr. Al-Rawi: 2010 alone.

Hon. M. Cuffie: Two thousand and seventy-five persons.

Hon. Member: Wow.

Hon. M. Cuffie: And I would like to remind both the Member for Naparima and the Member for Siparia that I was one of them. [*Desk thumping*] Over that time, the annual audited accounts of GISL were always prepared and bills were paid on time.

Mrs. Persad-Bissessar SC: Would the Member give way? Would you be kind enough to advise in your survey of whatever is being done under your Ministry, whether the bills that were owed by the PNM to the TV station—whether the bills owed to the CNMG station prior to 2010, whether those bills have been paid?

Hon. M. Cuffie: Madam Speaker, I will get to the bills of CNMG, and if they were not paid over the last five years that can hardly be my responsibility.

Mr. Indarsingh: It belonged to the PNM.

Hon. M. Cuffie: The Ministry is awaiting the report from 2012 to 2014—the audited reports of GISL which are now in various stages of incompleteness. But whatever they do, they cannot hide the sheer wastage and corruption that have occurred under their administration. [*Desk thumping*]

The estimated total subvention for 2015 was \$69.9 million for GISL, an increase of 124 per cent over the subvention in 2011 of \$28.9 million. This means, Madam Speaker, GISL was spending more than twice the budget of when I left it. To put that into perspective, you should remember that UNC came into office following the international financial collapse, but while the world was downsizing, the Government and GISL were becoming more and more bloated.

Total expenditure for 2015 is estimated as \$83.8 million, as against \$38 million in 2011, an increase of 120 per cent in 2015 over 2011, or an average of 30 per cent per annum. Madam Speaker, while the budget was doubling, they were producing less. Under the watchful eyes of the Member for Siparia, GISL staff grew from 54 in 2010 when I left, to 121 in 2015, an increase of 120 per cent or an average of 31 per cent per annum.

The wage bill grew by 104 per cent, doubling from \$8.8 million in 2010 to \$18.4 million in 2015 or an average of 26 per cent per annum. Madam Speaker, the company became bloated as it became a feeding trough for the friends, family, boyfriends, girlfriends of those holding high office in the so-called People's Partnership. Personnel were recruited without the required academic qualifications, skills and experience, contrary to all policies governing state enterprises.

According to the internal auditor's report of September 21, 2015, there were breaches of the tenders policy and procedures for selecting. There were instances of overriding of controls and non-adherence to established procedures for state companies. This included the advertising of vacant positions on the approved structure.

The internal auditor expressed concerns about the substantial portion of the staff budget allocated to freelancers and raised the issue of value for money. Madam Speaker, what the internal audit report shows is that while under the UNC the country was flooded with false papers, at GISL they did not even bother to have papers. [*Laughter*] Your birth paper became the most important qualification.

Hon. Member: No paper.

Hon. M. Cuffie: The Member for Tabaquite at one time had responsibility for communications and presided over this sorry state of affairs. I expect him at some point to state how many members of his family were employed there and whether they were qualified for the jobs they held. The Member for Siparia also appointed her speech writer as chairman of GISL and his family also feasted at the trough.

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Madam Speaker, the corruption was not just confined to the UNC, but also the Congress of the People. I was shocked to learn, on assuming office at the Ministry, that a former chairman of the Congress of the People had been paid \$200,000 to do a communications plan for the Government through GISL.

12.00 noon

When the plan was submitted, it was found to have been downloaded via the Internet from a Province in Canada. The entire document was plagiarized with hardly a word or a comma changed. The document was rejected by the staff of the Ministry. Would you believe just like in LifeSport, they refused to give back the money? Two hundred thousand dollars for what was in effect a photocopy. And, Madam Speaker, do you want to know what the real tragedy is? The Member for St. Augustine, leader of that party, said not a word and I would like to believe that he must have known about this development.

Madam Speaker, when they finished feeding, GISL's outstanding debt to suppliers had risen to an estimated \$35.8 million including debt to the media of \$9.5 million. I had left a debt free company in 2010, Madam Opposition Leader. When I went to the Association of Caribbean MediaWorkers Conference last week I met a delegation of media companies who complained that GISL owed them a total of \$9.5 million, and was either unable or unwilling to pay.

Dr. Gopeesingh: That was something from your time.

Hon. M. Cuffie: There are also receivable—no, it was not. There are also receivables from Ministries of an estimated \$7.6 million which is difficult to quantify since in many instances there are no supporting vouchers. But while much of what transpired over the period can be blamed on mismanagement and corruption, GISL also had something called Project ICON, an acronym for Integrated Communications Outreach Network. It was nothing more than a con job.

Madam Speaker, the main beneficiary of this \$50 million contract is a man who had a way with words, and it struck me that when those on the other side were agreeing to name this Project ICON, they never realized that the man was conning them. Project ICON was hidden in the 2014 Estimates of Expenditure as expenditure for the implementation of a strategic plan. Now I have done strategic plans and I know of no plan for a company that size which can cost \$50 million. No company in Trinidad and Tobago would pay \$50 million for a strategic plan. That \$50 million was never about a strategic plan, but was nothing more than a

costly, ill-conceived and badly implemented project aimed at enriching a few people and hopefully getting the UNC elected into office. It has not brought any value to Trinidad and Tobago, and all we are left with is the message that said the Government is working for you.

On paper, Project ICON included one-minute video clips featuring Government Ministers commenting on opportunities and services, cable advertising, electronic billboards, multi screens and radio and television advertising. Under this project, there are three contracts including one between a consultant who was paid—now this is a consultant, a resident of Trinidad and Tobago, residing in Trinidad and Tobago, who has been paid US \$10,000 a month. So imagine why you cannot get US \$500 to travel, and businessmen cannot get US dollars to meet their international obligations. GISL was paying every month a Trinidadian, living in Westmoorings, US \$10,000 a month.

Mr. Imbert: What? For what?

Hon. M. Cuffie: A strategic plan.

Now imagine that this man, hired as a consultant by a state company, also gets them to buy him a fully maintained SUV. This is the same consultant that the GISL Board appointed as a CEO from January 05, creating a conflict of interest between a consultant managing a state company while he has a contract with them. As at July 2015, the total sum of US \$190,000, that is, just over TT \$1.2 million, was paid to the consultant and acting CEO.

When I assumed office, I found a file in the Ministry where the consultant was threatening the Permanent Secretary if he does not allow the contract to continue. So imagine this man is a consultant, acting CEO, hired by a state company, threatening the Permanent Secretary, even after a change of Government, to extend his contract for another year.

Dr. Moonilal: Thank you very much, hon. Member for La Horquetta/Talparo for giving way. If the identity of that person is known to the hon. Minister, would you be kind enough to state the name? Otherwise you are casting aspersions on several persons who may have been employed there in different capacities, so that we will also be aware of the person you are speaking about.

Hon. M. Cuffie: Madam Speaker, I am quite sure that the Member for Oropouche East, the Member for Siparia and the Member for Naparima, who all signed on the contract, know who this person is. [*Desk thumping*] [*Interruption*]

Mr. Charles: Would you give way, please? Madam Speaker, I thank you very much, and in the interest of clarifications—[*Interruption*]

Hon. Members: No, no, no!

Mr. Charles: He called my name—*[Interruption]*

Madam Speaker: Hon Member! I now call the Member for La Horquetta/Talparo.

Hon. M. Cuffie: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, as I was saying, GISL has spent over \$42 million for various services under the ICON project through which they on that side were all conned. There are invoices to be settled totalling \$21.9 million. It is difficult to come to grips with the total cost of the project and an audit is therefore required. For in addition to the \$50 million ICON project, the Government was also conned into a \$62 million contract with another service provider. The management estimates the total expenditure so far in the region of \$80 million.

Hon. Member: Eight zero?

Hon. M. Cuffie: Eight zero, the strategic plan. Now when I spoke to the Association of Caribbean Media Workers last weekend I told them that we had spent \$90 million in total on state media over the last year, but that was before I got the latest information. I have since discovered that at GISL alone the figure was \$80 million, and there are real similarities to LifeSport. The ICON project included I am told, the installation of 500 screens across the country as part of a contract with a service provider. Madam Speaker, only 95 screens were installed, but the service provider was paid in full for all 500.

Madam Speaker, the malpractices in GISL, while numerous, are still being uncovered. Personnel were instructed to sign cheques by the consultant, acting as CEO, since he was not an employee of the company. Project ICON appears to have been a web of mismanagement, vanity and waste. The new board has moved decisively and made appropriate business decisions to stop the abuse of state assets including valuable airtime and to hold the executive management accountable for their decisions. We are still getting to the bottom of the extent of the wastage and corruption, and I intend to keep the Government and the Parliament apprised.

I now come to the Caribbean New Media Group which is supposed to be state-owned media entity but which became, under the direction of the Member for Siparia, a UNC party organ. Madam Speaker, over the last five years CNMG was haemorrhaging money, and over the last financial year the losses peaked as there was a frantic attempt to do everything to support the UNC.

Madam Speaker, based on the audited accounts for the year ended December 31, 2014, revenues totalled \$30.2 million and expenditure \$53.6 million. The total loss was \$23.4 million. Growth in revenue over the four years from 2010—2014 was minus \$2.2 million or minus 6.5 per cent. This means that the station was worse off when they left than how they found it. CNMG's performance actually deteriorated under their watch. Total expenditure grew from \$45.2 million in 2010 to \$53.6 million in 2014, an increase of 18.6 per cent.

In 2010 when they went in, the company was losing \$12.5 million. By the time they were finished with it, the total loss for 2014 was \$23.4 million. The losses almost doubled. Almost every year the company has lost more money than the previous years. So in 2010, the losses were \$12.5 million; in 2011, it rose to \$14.1 million; in 2012, it was \$13.4 million; in 2013, it rose again to \$15.7 million; and in 2014 to \$23.4 million. Total losses for the period 2010—2014 therefore amounted to \$79.2 million.

The increase in losses was mainly attributable to the increase in staff cost from \$17.4 million in 2010 to \$28.8 million in 2014, or 40 per cent. I guess that is why the Member for Naparima could say that they employed a lot of people. Staff cost is projected at \$26.8 million for 2015. Like GISL, CNMG was a haven for party supporters.

As at August 31, 2015, revenues were estimated at \$21.4 million and expenditure \$37.4 million. The loss for 2015 is estimated at this point at \$15.9 million although this was an election year when there was a significant increase in advertising expenditure. Madam Speaker, total Government subventions to CNMG over the five-year period from 2010 to September 2015 amounted to \$59.5 million. That is your tax dollars jumping up in steel band.

12.15 p.m.

Two radio stations in the CNMG group, 99.1 FM and 91.1 FM, reflected losses for the period 2010 to 2014, with a similar trend projected for 2015. However, radio Sweet 100.1 FM usually makes a profit of approximately \$1 million. Madam Speaker, we all know that in the private sector both television and radio turn in annual profits or close down.

Madam Speaker, the CNMG Group has had a weak performance with respect to audience patronage. In the Market Facts and Opinions surveys for 2012, 2013 and 2014, none of the programmes ranked within the first 16. The performance of the morning show was dismal and was nowhere on the radar of viewers.

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Worthy of note is that up to 2009, CNMG's prime-time news was rated in second place by the surveys. The main reason for the decline of the station is the use of it as a political vehicle. The Member for Siparia's decision to debate herself on CNMG would have had a significant impact on the station's already declining credibility. The Member for Siparia's decision to debate herself on the station [*Laughter*] would have had a significant impact on the station's declining credibility.

Madam Speaker: Members, please settle down.

Hon. M. Cuffie: The rampant propaganda, politicizing and draining the station of some of the country's best media talent have severely wounded the viability of state media in the country and we the taxpayers have been made to pay.

Madam Speaker, many would recall that originally, when the new CNMG was transformed from the old ttt its operations were aimed at having the highest quality resources, both equipment and human talent. Over time, the company's operations deviated from its initial business climb to a politically-operated machine, significantly impacting the credibility of the company. This is a most unfortunate situation because the TV station was good and had competitive programmes, especially its news and current affairs programming where it began to fall down.

There is an enormous potential for creativity at CNMG. There is an opportunity to build an enviable product that adds value to the range of cultural entertainment and education options for citizens. Also, there is an opportunity to support communication between government and citizens in a manner that is informative and educational. CNMG has well-trained and competent employees who are among the most experienced in the industry. But over the period 2010 to September 2015, the company maintained an average of 123 fixed-term employees. The total number of these employees increased from 105 in 2010 to 133, an increase of 26 per cent over the same period. The wage bill for this category of employees also increased by 26 per cent over the years, from 13.9 per cent to 17.6 per cent.

The headcount in the news room of CNMG is 35 fixed-term employees and 15 freelancers, a total of 50. The total cost per annum for these 50 persons, including freelancers, in 2014, was \$24.4 million. The wage bill for freelancers alone in 2014 was \$6.8 million. Significant growth was seen in the area of retaining freelance services, the cost of which doubled over the period 2010 to 2015, from \$3.5 million to \$6.8 million.

Madam Speaker, the total wage bill for fixed-term employees, plus freelancers grew from \$17.4 million in 2010 to \$20.4 million by September 2014, an increase of 40 per cent. Let me give the reasons for those increases:

1. The practice of executive instructions for retaining services from freelancers and consultants with total disregard for policy guidelines of state enterprises.
2. Inconsistent requests for outsourcing of freelance services. One consultant and freelancer earned two sets of salaries amounting to \$36,900 a month. Another earned four salaries from the same company amounting to \$46,000 a month.

Mr. Deyalsingh: How many salaries, four?

Hon. M. Cuffie: Four salaries from the same company.

Mr. Deyalsingh: “Nah man.”

Mr. Al-Rawi: Break that down for the common man. One man have four salaries?

Hon. M. Cuffie: Yes. The other one had two. Additionally, freelance services from Ground Report and Face Off, two of the political programmes, contributed significantly to increasing the freelance bill. Hear this, \$793,692 for Ground Report, \$427,700 for Face Off.

3. They were changing the organization, creating new positions, without approval.
4. They were charging above market rates for specially selected freelance services.

This means, Madam Speaker, that over the last year UNC party hacks were being paid \$1.2 million to go on air and say the vilest things about the Member for Diego Martin West, as part of the Member for Naparima’s “No Rowley” campaign. We the taxpayers ended up paying for that.

Mr. Deyalsingh: How much we had to pay for that?

Hon. M. Cuffie: \$1.2 million.

Mr. Deyalsingh: How much?

Hon. M. Cuffie: \$1.2 million for old talk.

Mr. Charles: Madam Speaker, 48(6).

Madam Speaker: Hon, Member for Naparima, could you succinctly deal with the point of order you are raising?

Mr. Charles: The point of order is you are saying that some expense from the “No Rowley” campaign was attributed to that institution? Tell me what—
[*Interruption*]

Madam Speaker: Member, you have raised 48(6), which says that no Member shall impute improper motives to a Member—[*Interruption*]

Mr. Charles: Yes, no expense—[*Interruption*]

Madam Speaker:—to a Member of the House. I would expect if you have raised 48(6), that is why I have asked you to succinctly develop it, it gives me—
[*Interruption*]

Mr. Charles: He said—[*Interruption*]

Madam Speaker: One minute, please. I am on my legs. I would expect that the point would relate to an improper motive being made in the statement by the hon. Member for La Horquette/Talparo against another Member of this House. I do not get that from what you have just said. Okay? And I rule that there is no—
[*Interruption*]

Mr. Charles: You see—[*Interruption*]

Madam Speaker: Okay? I recognize that some of us are new and we may not be very familiar. But in terms of, I think we all need to be guided very strictly by Standing Order 54(2). I have ruled that there is no imputation of improper motives against any Member of this House.

Hon. M. Cuffie: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I would just like to alert you that I would be claiming my additional 10 minutes and possibly injury time because of all these interruptions.

Madam Speaker, in the new dispensation, and based on sound business and performance management principles, the new board of directors took business decisions to hold the executive management accountable for the dismal performance of this station over the last five years. It is my understanding that the board of directors will soon be advertising for a Chief Executive Officer for CNMG.

Madam Speaker, many would question the need for state-owned media, and rightly so, given the dismal history. We intend to engage the population in determining a way forward. But the Ministry of Communications is not just GISL and CNMG. I was shocked to learn that many of the issues facing the line Ministry made no advance since I was there in 2010, as an employee at GISL.

The Chaguanas Library, which was about to start in 2010, was neglected by the UNC Government in its heartland constituency. It has also been abandoned by the contractor. The pace of library construction nationally has stalled. The National Archives, which had a plan for a new home also in Chaguanas, that plan has been abandoned for a makeshift structure in its present location.

[Dr. Rambachan accidentally knocks over his glass]

Miss Mc Donald: What is wrong with you? “Why yuh so nervous? What is this nervousness about?”

Madam Speaker: Hon. Members for Port of Spain South and—

Hon. M. Cuffie: Madam Speaker, I appreciate that the Member for Tabaquite may be still in shock.

The Government Printery was forced to shut down its office in Port of Spain and had to relocate to Caroni at a monthly cost close to \$300,000. The Freedom of Information Secretariat is barely functional, as it has been deprived of staff, as the Government focused more on suppressing information than enabling the public’s access to information.

In fact, under their watch, the Government has been taken to court as a result of their failure to comply with 41 freedom of information requests made by the Heliconia Foundation to various ministries and agencies. The court also ruled against an earlier decision by the Ministry of Planning and Sustainable Development, under the Member for Caroni Central, to comply with a freedom of information request.

Madam Speaker, because of their unwillingness to provide information, they starved the Freedom of Information Secretariat of resources. Data protection suffered a similar fate with no access to resources as its effort to get staff and critical legislation passed came to naught.

The Board of Film Censors cannot now even find a home to do their work. That is the kind of neglect experienced by the ministry while the party people partied.

Madam Speaker, I want to return to my constituency of La Horquetta/Talparo. Madam Speaker, as bad as the neglect of the Ministry was, it was worse for the constituency of La Horquetta/Talparo. Over the last year, as I campaigned in the constituency, in fact over the last month since becoming MP for the constituency, I have realized the extent of the neglect that has been visited on the constituency by the United National Congress and the Members on the opposite side.

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12.30 p.m.

Now, I still have a home in that constituency. Over the years I have been represented by the Member for Caroni Central, by the Member for Caroni East and the Member for Chaguanas West. Madam Speaker, I can say without contradiction that the parts of La Horquetta/Talparo that formerly fell under Caroni East, and all those areas, have been totally neglected.

You see, Madam Speaker, this constituency has some of the worst roads in Trinidad and Tobago, in places like Mundo Nuevo, Tamana and Todds Road. Now, despite what the Member for Couva North said, people are experiencing a lack of water over the last five years, despite all the claims of water for all. La Horquetta/Talparo is a relatively new constituency, which elected its first Member of Parliament in 2007 as the constituency of La Horquetta/Talparo.

The constituents of La Horquetta/Talparo welcome this budget. This is so for the simple reason that this budget recognizes that they exist, and for the first time brings tremendous benefits to them. Do you know, Madam Speaker, that for the last five years there was not a single major project in La Horquetta/Talparo. We saw billions being spent—[*Interruption*]

Madam Speaker: Hon. Member? Hon. Member for La Horquetta/Talparo, your 45 minutes have been spent. I understand you have indicated you intend to avail yourself of the additional 10 minutes. I want to suggest that now is an appropriate time for us to break for lunch. This house is now suspended for the lunch break. We shall resume at 1.30 p.m.

12.32 p.m.: *Sitting suspended.*

1.30 p.m.: *Sitting resumed.*

Madam Speaker: The hon. Member for La Horquetta/Talparo.

Hon. M. Cuffie: Thank you, Madam Speaker. [*Desk thumping*] When we broke I was referring to the billions spent in Siparia, hundreds of millions spent in Couva, Chaguanas West, St. Augustine, but nothing for La Horquetta/Talparo.

Madam Speaker, I was elected and I have to say to the shock of the Members opposite on the basis that the PNM will return the Tamana Intech Park, and bring development back to the constituency of La Horquetta/Talparo. [*Desk thumping*] I promise the constituents of La Horquetta/Talparo that we will end their neglect and start rebuilding. [*Desk thumping*]

I wish to sincerely congratulate the Minister of Finance and the Minister of Planning and Development [*Desk thumping*] for keeping faith to that promise. The budget, which the former read last Monday, included \$12 million for the resumption of work on the Tamana Intech Park, and the provisions for the creation of a new town in the Wallerfield area. That will bring massive investment [*Desk thumping*] to the north-eastern part of the constituency.

Hon. Member: Wallerfield to Manzanilla Highway.

Hon. M. Cuffie: And I am reminded of the Wallerfield to Manzanilla Highway. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker, the country does not know that under the administration of the Member for Siparia, \$1.2 billion—let me repeat, \$1.2 billion which had been allocated for the Tamana Intech Park was instead reallocated to Siparia. That \$1.2 billion which would have created jobs and brought development to the rural communities of Tamana, parts of Cumuto and Wallerfield was taken instead to Penal for the University of the West Indies south campus and the law school in her constituency.

They moved the contractor from work on the Tamana Intech Park to the southern campus of the University of the West Indies. When I raised the matter previously, pointing out that the only real project brought under the previous administration for the constituency of La Horquetta/Talparo was a jail, which cost \$350 million, the Member for Siparia was dismissive.

Madam Speaker, the Member for Siparia and Leader of the Opposition has pointed to the economic benefits which the south campus brought to her constituency, including raising property values and major employment. Madam Speaker, those are the same benefits which we on this side in 2010 had hoped to bring to the constituency of La Horquetta/Talparo, the majority of whom live under rural conditions.

The University of the West Indies, St. Augustine Campus, created by the vision of the PNM is in the constituency of St. Augustine. This constituency has been historically represented by Members on the opposite side. In that constituency, homes are rented, there are shops and parlours, bookstores and all manner of business establishments which cater to the university students.

Every week I pass by the Santa Rosa Correctional Facility which the UNC brought to my constituency. I see no economic activity, “not ah parlour, not even ah nuts vendor”. This is the difference between their vision for La Horquetta/Talparo and the bright future articulated by the Minister of Finance

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who has ensured that under the PNM, real development will come to the rural communities of Tamana and Cumuto, [*Desk thumping*] with the creation of the new town in Wallerfield and the jobs that will come with the resumption of Tamana Intech Park.

Madam Speaker, the week before the election, the Member for Siparia paid a visit to La Horquetta to open a pan theatre. The building was opened despite the fact that the toilet facilities were not properly done, so that filth flows across a playground used by children in the area. It was never connected to the sewer lines; that is her legacy; from the sewer lines in La Horquetta to the Beetham Wastewater Treatment Plant; corruption from the smallest scale to the largest; that smells to the high heavens.

Miss Ramdial: Rapid rail.

Hon. M. Cuffie: And now I will come to the Member for Couva North and the rapid rail.

Miss Ramdial: Thank you. [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. M. Cuffie: In closing, Madam Speaker, let me respond to my friend from Couva North. Now, she read an article that I wrote some time ago on the rapid rail, and suggested some departure from the PNM's position, and the views expressed by my Prime Minister. Let me inform the Member that the PNM's position is no longer about rapid rail. We are talking about a mass transit system. [*Desk thumping and crosstalk*]

Miss Ramdial: Semantics.

Hon. M. Cuffie: We have invited the Inter-American Development Bank here to examine the data—[*Interruption*]

Miss Ramdial: Semantics.

Hon. M. Cuffie:—and suggest policy options. I am 100 per cent comfortable with that option—[*Desk thumping*]

Miss Ramdial: Semantics.

Hon. M. Cuffie: Madam Speaker, I wish to commend to the Member for Couva North the several articles I wrote on the Member for Siparia as even better reading. [*Desk thumping and laughter*]

Madam Speaker, I come from a rural community. I was born in the village of Poole in Rio Claro, where I still own property, and grew up in Todds Road Village, where I still have a home. As I said before, I am a Caroni native.

Mr. Indarsingh: “Yuh cut cane? Yuh plant rice?”

Hon. M. Cuffie: I know—my father was a cane farmer—I know first-hand what it means to be neglected by the UNC. They are slow to recognize it, but a new day has dawned in Todds Road Village and La Horquetta/Talparo on September 7.

A new day has also dawned in Trinidad and Tobago. The country has rejected the slogan of: “Your Government Working For You”. This new Government under the leadership of the Member for Diego Martin West is working with you, and we will all build this country together. [*Desk thumping*]

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

1.40 p.m.

Mrs. Christine Newallo-Hosein (Cumuto/Manzanilla): Thank you, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, I would like to congratulate you on becoming Speaker of the House, and also I would like to congratulate the Member for La Horquetta/Talparo on his maiden speech.

Madam Speaker, over the last few days I had the difficult task of trying to comfort persons after this budget was announced. Many persons across Trinidad and Tobago were hospitalized, for many feared that there would be exorbitant increases of taxes. [*Crosstalk*]

Madam Speaker: Members, please.

Mrs. C. Newallo-Hosein: This is in fact true, and I would not use the privileges of Parliament to speak anything that is untrue. In addition, Madam Speaker, with the mere mention of the PNM Government admitting that they invited the IMF to discussions, it is the view of the NGOs that there would be serious implications for the most vulnerable and, as such, the Government needs to be clear and clear the air on the subject of these discussions. What they feel is a genuine fear.

Madam Speaker, I just want to come—before I continue with my debate—and just mention a couple things that the Member of Parliament for La Horquetta/Talparo raised. To be exact, the Member for La Horquetta/Talparo raised on Sunday, October 14, 2012, a response to the then:

“Opposition Leader Dr. Keith Rowley”—as he—“highlighted the implementation of the Rapid Rail project as the key to a new PNM administration policy to introduce growth in the economy.”

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I am reading from what the MP had written at that time.

“As much as I can see a Rowley-led administration presenting a superior alternative to the hapless bunch of PP incumbents, the Rapid Rail project is a costly and flawed engineering solution to an economic problem that the Opposition Leader should reconsider.

The engineering misdiagnosis has already seen billions expended on building new highways and other engineering infrastructure that are quickly overcome by the ever growing demands as the traffic on the roadways continues....

Our traffic problem will never be solved by engineering solutions, since it is an economic one caused by the disincentive to public transport created by the inefficiencies of a long-standing government policy that favours a fuel subsidy as a mechanism for passing on to the citizenry an oil-wealth dividend.”

Dr. Gopeesingh: Who said so?

Mrs. C. Newallo-Hosein: This is the Member for La Horquetta/Talparo. This is October 2012. [*Crosstalk*] I wanted to just jump really in the back where he continues:

“There are two problems with this study. The first is that it was conducted at the height of the gas boom, where both our level of traffic and the level of revenue which sustained it were unsustainable, and are not likely to be repeated in the near future.”

He continues:

“The second is that the feasibility study was done at a time when T&T enjoyed a fuel subsidy which would have distorted the transportation demands. By the time of the next elections, if one is to take the word of the Finance Minister, one suspects the fuel subsidy will be long gone.”

I think that the fuel subsidy was in fact reduced and, therefore, the MP—at the time publishing under—had concerns of the fuel subsidy being reduced and removed or being dismantled. And so, it begs the question: what made you change your mind to support the rapid rail now? You could put anything else—you could put mass transport, you could put any name in front of it, it is a concern as to what would change your mind, because you seemed very firm and very sure of why it will not work. You gave reasons why.

We have also the Minister indicating that La Horquetta, nothing much was done in it. As a matter of fact, it seems as though it is almost a sin to speak of the good work that has been accomplished in the constituency of La Horquetta/Talparo. If I may

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read from another article that was written by Julien Neaves—and this was Sunday, June 07, 2015—the headline says: “La Horquetta: From ‘hot spot’ to ‘model community’”. [*Desk thumping*] It says:

“The eastern community of La Horquetta, one of the country’s largest Housing Development Corporation...communities...”

Dr. Francis: What is the source? *The Voice*?

Mrs. C. Newallo-Hosein: Not at all. It is written by Julien Neaves. [*Crosstalk*]

Dr. Francis: What is the source? [*Crosstalk*]

Mrs. C. Newallo-Hosein: It is from—I would tell you after. I am not going to be distracted.

“...has long had a negative stigma of being a crime ‘hotspot’.”

I said it already.

“...But through increased police patrols, community policing, sports and community events, La Horquetta has thrown off the shroud of ‘hot spot’ for the preferred label of ‘model community’.”

Now, you will hear the source.

“Sunday Newsday spoke to a number of residents on the level of crime in the community. Rochel Thomas, in her early twenties and resident for 15 years, reported there was a lot of crime in the area, especially murders, and many perpetrators were well known. Once the sun went down and it started to get dark she would go into her house and lock up.

‘You don’t know what could happen and you can’t leave your door open,’ she said.

When she would tell people she is from La Horquetta they would respond ‘girl I not going inside there,’ Thomas noted, however”—once you hear “however” you know what comes after—“that sports and cultural events have changed the community positively and praised La Horquetta/Talparo Member of Parliament...” [*Desk thumping*]

There are a number of persons here, a number of persons in this article have praised the number of good things that happened in the constituency. You inherited a constituency that had risen to be a star that was neglected under the PNM administration. [*Desk thumping and crosstalk*] It matters not.

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I come back to my topic, Madam Speaker, and I cannot help but wonder, with the distortions—in terms of not recognizing that you have inherited a community that is now a rising star—that you could not recognize that you had indicated in an article that you had written yourself, stating that the rapid rail was of no use, irrelevant, over budgeted, will not work and yet you can support it now, it brings me to the point, so many things that have been said that have been distorted. Can we actually believe the figures that were brought here and say that this is the expenditure that we incurred? [*Desk thumping*]

In fact, I am of the opinion that information cannot be trusted simply because of the fact there is a history of what transpired, and that is there is a changing of the mind depending—I do not know what the depending is. I have no idea what the depending is, but I can say this, without a shadow of a doubt that when we came into Government we had expenditure incurred to the highest level from the former administration that we had to pay. So, if in fact that expenditure is there, I am sure it came back for you to settle it once more.

Madam Speaker, in many quarters of our society some felt that the budget lacked strategy. Some felt that the budget expenditure failed to create an economic transformation to reduce the country's reliance on oil and gas. And although I concur with those persons, Madam Speaker, I have found that in the 2015/2016 budget presentation, the PNM Government has shown that they have absolutely no measures in place so as to ensure that those less fortunate in society are not placed at a disadvantage. It also appears as though the budget was designed to punish the middle class [*Desk thumping*] as well as to create hardship for persons trying to make ends meet.

Hon. Member: Tell them! Tell them!

Mrs. C. Newallo-Hosein: Again, that fear factor. I am asking myself: is that fear for real?

Madam Speaker, the introduction of increased rates in business levy and the green fund levy, the business move from .3 per cent to .6 and the green levy from .1 to .3 per cent. This appears to be nominal, but this represents for business levy an increase of 100 per cent and for the Green Fund, 200 per cent.

Madam Speaker, I am not an economist, but I can tell you this. Even the man on the street understands that an increase in anything is a decrease in his pocket. [*Crosstalk*—a decrease in his pocket. [*Crosstalk*] This would obviously have a negative impact on goods and services. Just to make it clearer, maybe they do not understand on the other side, so I would explain.

A business person would have paid, based on sales of a company annually, a sum of \$90,000—this is for the green fund—and will now be paying \$270,000. These taxes are based on sales, Madam Speaker, and not profit and, obviously, these costs would be passed on to the customer.

Madam Speaker, to add insult to injury, with the removal of fuel subsidies on super gas and diesel and, in particular, diesel, distribution of goods and services will increase, again making a dent in the pockets of citizens. Just this week in a newspaper article, taxi drivers indicated a plan and a decision to increase their fares. Who will this impact? Everyone, everyone.

Madam Speaker, under the People's Partnership administration, 7,000 items of foodstuff were made non-VATable. [*Desk thumping*] The current Government has indicated that they would reduce VAT from 15 per cent to 12.5 per cent, and that luxury items will be targeted to add VAT thereby raising \$4 billion. I wanted to ask the Minister of Finance: what are these luxury items? What are these items that you would actually raise \$4 billion? But, more importantly, what initiatives are being executed to provide for the vulnerable and the indigent? And, again, that fear, that fear of: what will I do? How will I survive? And so, perhaps, that fear is justified, Madam Speaker.

But, Madam Speaker, I do not wish to pontificate, but it would be remiss of me if I did not remind the PNM Government that under the People's Partnership Government, the Ministry of the People and Social Development was created because we recognized that the social security net is of utmost importance and that the Ministry's core mandate and responsibilities were to serve the people, serve the people, serve the people, and to provide for the most vulnerable in our society, but not just to provide, but to help them become empowered and transformed.

1.55 p.m.

Madam Speaker, under Ministry of the People and Social Development, the People's Partnership implemented many programmes and I would name them, at least some. We changed the Senior Citizens' Grant to Old Age Pension. We increased the Old Age Pension not only once but twice during our tenure in government. [*Desk thumping*] We increased disability grant so as to help the differently abled in society to better meet their everyday needs. We introduced the baby grant [*Desk thumping*] so as to help single mothers to sustain their newborn children.

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Madam Speaker, I see that there is an item budgeted for it but there is no plan. I want to tell the Minister of Finance what the plan was so that perhaps he can look at continuing the programme. Madam Speaker, the baby grant has two components: one, a cash transfer component, and, two, an empowerment component. Madam Speaker, data extracted from the Population and Vital Statistics 2008, published by the CSO, suggested that the number of live birth in Trinidad and Tobago can be calculated as approximately 20,000 per annum. Utilizing proxy data from the survey of living conditions 2005, the Continuous Sample Survey of the Population 2013 and the database of the Ministry of the People and Social Development, it was estimated that 7,000 families were expected to access this grant.

Madam Speaker, the value of the cash transfer of \$500 would have provided financial assistance for one year only for any child born to underprivileged parents. This cash transfer would be used to purchase items of baby food and toiletries essential for infant development. Madam Speaker, the empowerment component, however, provided the recipient with additional critical services relevant to the development of the family, these include parenting workshops, family planning, financial literacy classes, and opportunities for employment and education.

It is the belief of governments worldwide, Madam Speaker, that investing and improving the health and nutrition of children from these households can lead to long-term economic improvement and assist in the reduction of poverty. Madam Speaker, I continue, under the People's Partnership we increased the public assistance grant so as to ensure that the most vulnerable in society are better able to meet the rising cost of living. We had the Targeted Conditional Cash Transfer Programme, a system to facilitate those in need of urgent attention, which what we did was worked it through the MPs, and there is no MP who was on this side, Madam Speaker, who did not call and ask for assistance.

There was not any MP that we ever refused any assistance for their constituents, and [*Desk thumping*] I found it disheartening, Madam Speaker, when we were being sworn in here and the Government said—the Government of Trinidad and Tobago who serves the people of Trinidad and Tobago sat on the other side and said to us—and they heard it on the television because people were asking what was that about—and this is what—“nothing for you, nothing for you, nothing for you, [*Desk thumping*] nothing for you”, and that is not a Government.

Madam Speaker, a Cabinet decision was taken to provide all, not some, but all Members of Parliament with a fixed amount of temporary food cards to assist with the most vulnerable in their constituency, as well as to provide the regional

offices because the Ministry has regional offices throughout Trinidad and Tobago. So that these offices can also assist with walk-in clients while they were being assessed for a permanent card. Madam Speaker, in light of the fact that a Cabinet Note has not been taken to rescind that decision I have advised my constituents to visit the regional office to seek assistance and, Madam Speaker, I was appalled to learn that the constituents have been told that they do not have any, and they have not received any, thereby rendering the regional offices impotent. Fear, again, fear has filled the hearts of the vulnerable and the indigent because they do not know what is going to happen.

Madam Speaker, what does that say for the vulnerable and the indigent? I ask the Minister of Finance to address these concerns as a matter of importance and help alleviate the fear that has been going through their hearts and their minds. What the Minister of Finance, Madam Speaker, fails to understand is that as the former Minister of the People and Social Development I have been on ground, anywhere. I attend not to only UNC or COP, or ILP, we served the people of Trinidad and Tobago, [*Desk thumping*] and as a result of it we had contact with the people on the ground and so they were able to say, "This is the problem. I am not getting help. How do I source help?", and that is why I directed them to the regional offices where they could not receive the help.

We implemented the book grant so as to help less fortunate parents to purchase school supplies for their children. We had distribution of flood grants for those adversely affected by flooding. Madam Speaker, when the People's Partnership administration took office we promised that none will be left behind, and we left none behind. [*Desk thumping*] Madam Speaker, in March 2008, the then government, through the Ageing Division under the Ministry of Social Development, conducted a needs assessment of the Toco Senior Citizens Home. It was recommended that a general and extensive upgrade of the home be undertaken in accordance with the specifications outlined in the Homes for Older Persons legislation.

Madam Speaker, I want to remind you that I said earlier that the needs assessment was done in March 2008, however, it was the People's Partnership administration that rebuilt the Toco home for the aged, and, just to tell you, I cannot help but reiterate that statement, "they talk but we deliver". [*Desk thumping*] The Ministry of the People and Social Development established a social services centre in the rural community of Cedros with a decision to establish other offices in Mayaro, Guayaguayare, as well as in Toco. Madam Speaker, the whole purpose of opening the Cedros social services centre was a

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part of our commitment to provide social equity and poverty reduction through the decentralization of the social services delivery system. Madam Speaker, poverty can be described as a general form of relative deprivation which is a result of unequal distribution of a country's resources. It points to a lack of the resources required to live a normal life.

Madam Speaker, with all due respect to the Minister of Finance, I have heard no plan for the vulnerable. The people that I speak with, the NGOs and the vulnerable, fear that this interim budget from this interim administration will only worsen. I have a part of the Minister's speech and it speaks here for Social Safety Net:

“Madam Speaker, our pursuit of a fair and inclusive society with social mobility and personal responsibility has long been an objective of various PNM Administrations.

By international standards, we have had outstanding success with our programmes and policies designed to protect the disadvantaged and the most vulnerable in our society. We wish to ensure that these programmes remain effective and relevant.”

What programmes? Sorry.

“We will review our social sector programmes in consultation with civil society to ensure that they are channelled to those who need them the most.”

But there is a databank in the Ministry already, they know. There is a policy in place, and so I thought, with everything coming here, that there was something in place, a policy in place, and so I am going to say that the Cedros social services centre, as a guide, is a one-stop integrated government service delivery network which will help fix the problem of unequal access faced in rural communities.

In many rural communities government services and resources are not readily available. Many residents are forced to travel long distances to get help and others are discouraged from even making the effort. We changed that, Madam Speaker. We brought people-centred development to Cedros. Madam Speaker, the exclusion of vulnerable and disadvantaged persons, who live in rural areas, from easy access to social safety nets is one of the main causes of persistent poverty. Indeed, the correlation between poverty and rural life is irrefutable.

Again, I go through the budget and it has a headline, “People with Disabilities”:

“Madam Speaker, people with disabilities are consistently constrained from participating in and benefiting from our growing economy. We will create a more inclusive society for persons with disabilities. They will enjoy equal opportunities through an empowered life with dignity. We will undertake substantive action to meet our obligations under the relevant conventions approved by the United Nations. In consultation with people with disabilities, we will immediately undertake a review of all projects and services directed to the community.”

Everything will be reviewed. What happens, in the meantime, of the projects being reviewed and the timely intervention on persons receiving help? What happens? Like right now, what happens with the Targeted Conditional Cash Transfer Programme?

I will continue, Madam Speaker, with the achievements. Madam Speaker, the People’s Partnership implemented the Biometric Smart Card system also known as the people’s card, which is an integrated multiple application card which provides us with the ability to capture biological information and convert it to digital form to facilitate identity recognition. This will ensure that we operate a social safety net that is comprehensive, yet tight and efficient. Madam Speaker, this integrated multiple application card with biometric features has several immediate benefits. It will, one, reduce administrative costs; it will remove any stress to clients from the collection of their social benefits, which continues to happen, by the way, since we are not in government; it will reduce, if not eliminate, fraud and prevent the abuse of State funds associated with persons who exploit the system by receiving multiple grants for which they do not qualify.

2.10 p.m.

Madam Speaker, might I add, in case I have forgotten, that the biometric card has been on the drawing board since 2005. Again, they talk, we deliver. [*Desk thumping*] The reason why I am saying that is because I want to draw attention to the Member for Tobago West who has indicated that we have dismantled programs. We have not dismantled anything. We have followed through with programmes if they brought benefit to the people of Trinidad and Tobago.

We established the National Enrichment Centre for persons with disabilities—it is for persons with disabilities. The purpose of the development centre is to provide diagnostic and rehabilitative services to persons with disabilities; offer vocational training and employment; facilitate independent life skills programmes and socially interactive activities. It is intended that the therapeutic services to be provided at the centre will support similar services offered at the various health facilities.

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This programme, before it came into being, we held extensive consultation with stakeholders. So I do not understand how you can bring a budget and decide to consult after the fact when you should have consulted before. But, so as it be. Again, another achievement: Trinidad and Tobago ratified the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities which provides for non-discrimination; full and effective participation and inclusion in society; respect for difference and acceptance of disability as part of human diversity and humanity; equality of opportunity as well as accessibility.

Madam Speaker, just to provide some background again, in September 2007, the Cabinet agreed to full and effective participation in inclusion in society, and as a result Trinidad and Tobago became a signatory to the convention on September 27, 2007, but that was it. Unless we had ratified, all that was just paper in the wind. Again, the signing of the convention served as an endorsement of the articles, and conferred the State's intention to introduce, enhance or develop mechanisms to give effect to provisions outlined therein.

So it was the People's Partnership who took into consideration persons living with disabilities, and implemented by ratifying with the United Nations Convention to ensure that Trinidad and Tobago provides a better way, a better life for them.

Madam Speaker, I just want to tell you some of the Articles. The convention consists of 50 Articles, each describing the obligations of State parties in specific areas. Some of these areas include accessibility, awareness raising, right to life, access to justice, education, health, work and employment.

I do not know if you heard quite clearly, Madam Speaker, but I said "access to justice". When the People's Partnership came into government, we created the Ministry of Justice which allowed for persons to have direct access to justice; we had a plan. That plan was not an ad hoc plan. We understood, we wanted to ratify. We understood, we had a timeline to do certain things. We understood there were certain things that we had to put things in place for. We had to put education in place, all inclusive, accessibility for roadways and for infrastructure, building codes, all these things. But more importantly, we had to have in place access to justice. Sadly, the PNM Government has effectively dismantled this avenue for justice to every single citizen of Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*] Again, the people have articulated that there is fear.

What will happen for persons who live with a disability? They are concerned. What will happen with their life? Will they have the accessibility? Will they have equal opportunity employment? Will they be able to go to a school like any other child or adult or will that stop for them? So I ask myself: Is that fear justified?

Regardless though, I continue. The People's Partnership Government established a working relationship with as many NGOs as possible. We recognized and saluted the role of NGOs as a primary source of expertise and as strong advocates of programmes and benefits for persons with disabilities. Our efforts to ensure that persons with disabilities enjoy a full life in mainstream Trinidad and Tobago will flounder without the training, awareness and sensitization provided by our NGOs.

We are fully aware—we on this side have indicated as much—of the global economic crisis and the adverse effects that it has on our own economy, given the recent fall in oil prices, among other factors. Contrary to the current Government's belief that these trying economic times call for cutbacks, we are of the view that such conditions place families in a vulnerable position and, as such, now more than ever the social security net needs to be strengthened. It can be seen in the 2015/2016 fiscal package's total lack of social initiatives, that the PNM Government simply does not care about the vulnerable in society and, as such, has not provided a plan.

The People's Partnership prepared the most vulnerable to be self-sufficient through programmes such as SEED, RISE-UP and training through ICT centres. The Member for Diego Martin North/East would remember I came into his constituency during one of those programmes.

Mr. Imbert: Thank you for visiting.

Mrs. C. Newallo-Hosein: You are welcome.

I will speak about the rural communities, and I come to my constituency. Madam Speaker, as you would be aware, Cumuto/Manzanilla is my constituency and it is predominantly a rural one. I wish to take a moment to delve into the Government's strategy, or rather lack of strategy, for the development of rural areas. It is clear that the PNM Government simply looked at Ghana's Ministry of Local Government and Rural Development, moved the name around so as to seem original, and thereby created the Ministry of Rural Development and Local Government, a Ministry with the sole purpose of making the PNM appear to care about the development of rural areas. While this may be sufficient to pull the wool over the eyes of their loyalists, any right-thinking citizen need only examine the 2015/2016 fiscal package to see that this Government does not have a clue and does not really care about rural development and, as such, has not provided a plan.

Madam Speaker, just look at the budgetary allocations. The budgetary allocations for the Sangre Grande Regional Corporation for recurrent funding was reduced by \$7 million, and PSIP was reduced by \$6.5 million, as compared to the 2014/2015 allocations for the said corporation. This means Sangre Grande and the

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surrounding rural communities now have less funding. This translates to less employment and less overall development. Yet the PNM Government has the audacity to say that they care about rural development.

I, as I stand here to give my contribution, am proud to say that under the People's Partnership Government there was equity—[*Desk thumping*] equity in every constituency. The Diego Martin Highway was not our project; that was their project. But guess who did it? They talk, we delivered. The Point Fortin Highway, that was not our project. That was a project how long? But what I am saying is that they talk, we delivered and we had equity in every, every constituency.

Madam Speaker, with this decreasing funding, what will become of the much-needed projects in the Sangre Grande municipality? What will happen to projects like the paving of Section Two Road; St. Ann's Road; Veronica Boulevard; Saddle Road and others? What will happen to projects like the development of Good Hope Recreation Ground; Clarke Trace Recreation Ground and Sangre Chiquito Recreation Ground? These are all in my constituency. What about the retrenchment of the casual workers? How will these workers sustain their families?

The PNM Government talks about more autonomy and more power, "I in charge here", but their 2015/2016 budget reflects less power for development, and rather than providing for the people, they have only taken from the people.

I go on to the Ministry of Works and Transport. The Government's lack of concern for the rural areas is not only apparent in the allocation to local government, but also in the allocations to the Ministry of Works and Transport. With the decrease in the Ministry of Works and Transport funding, as compared to the 2014/2015 fiscal package, what will happen to all the approved projects? Would the Gajadhar Road landslip, Plum Road wall and the Bon Air Road landslip all be shelved? Assurances were given to the people that are in Isidore Road, Markey Road and St. Marie Emmanuel Road, would all be completed. What will happen to these projects now? More importantly, my constituents are asking me about Manzan Road. What will happen to it? Will there be work? Will it be completed? What will happen to it? Again, there is that fear. What will happen to the constituencies with this cut in funding?

I continue with tourism. [*Interruption*]

Madam Speaker: Hon. Member for Cumuto/Manzanilla, your 45 minutes have expired. Do you intend to avail yourself of the further 10 minutes?

Mrs. C. Newallo-Hosein: Thank you.

One of the major points of focus in Cumuto/Manzanilla is the development of tourism. Perhaps you are unaware that this constituency boasts of a host of eco-tourism sites, such as the Fishing Pond Boardwalk, the Tamana bat cave and the Manzanilla Boardwalk, just to name a few. The Government, however, seems to be completely oblivious to this, since their 2015/2016 fiscal presentation contains no policies whatsoever regarding tourism. They have failed to implement any new measures for the development of tourism. There is no mention of any projects.

What is the status of these projects, because there was a feasibility study done already on the Fishing Pond Boardwalk and the proposal put forward. What will become of them? Will they be implemented? The constituents of Cumuto/Manzanilla are eagerly looking forward to the implementation of such projects since this will create sustainable employment for the people of these communities. They will also give a boost to the small businesses in the respective areas generally, improving the quality of life for the people of these rural communities.

2.25 p.m.

Agriculture: With the current expenditure of \$800 million for the Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries, Madam Speaker, there is little hope for farmers in this budget. My constituency is an agricultural community. The farmers are very well aware of the incentives provided including land tenure. As such, Madam Speaker, how deceptive, how deceptive to say that duties will be removed from sprays, equipment and feeds. It says how much attention the other side paid to the great strides that the People's Partnership Government made, and how much consultation was done with the farmers. I would think that they would have consulted with stakeholders or perhaps, the defeated Member of Parliament for Caroni Central, who would have known that duties on these items were already removed.

But, Madam Speaker, if agriculture is so important as stated by the Minister of Finance, my constituents at Marper Farm in Plum Road would like to know why they were sent home? If agriculture is so important, why was the farm shut down? If it is so important, if rural development is so important—and so my constituents have mandated me to ask these questions of you.

And crime—the worst is what the acting Commissioner of Police said—kidnapping, hijacking, murder. I am pleading with the Minister of National Security through you, Madam Speaker, please do not stop the Manzanilla Police Station that already has approval. Do not stop the Mathura Police Station. Do not stop the Matelot Police Station. And I am making a plea on behalf of the constituents of

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Toco/Sangre Grande because, Madam Speaker, it is the history of the PNM Government to neglect rural constituencies which the Member for Toco/Sangre Grande will soon regrettably learn. So, I hope that we would focus on community policing, and police youth clubs so as to strengthen the community

So in conclusion, Madam Speaker, the People's Partnership Government spoke specific to the mandate of the Ministry of the People and Social Development. It spoke to alleviating poverty, and so ultimately transform the lives of our less fortunate citizens. Our strategies gave life to this mandate.

The UNDP defines good governance as the exercise of economic, political and administrative authority to manage a country's affairs at all levels and that means promote social cohesion and integration and ensure the well-being of their population.

Madam Speaker, I want to end by saying it is critical that the financial resources meant for the poor and vulnerable are received by such persons and are not syphoned away by dishonest persons for their own use because right now there is a fear that has gone through the population as to what the future holds. I thank you. [*Desk thumping*]

The Minister of Social Development and Family Services (Hon. Cherrie-Ann Crichlow-Cockburn): [*Desk thumping*] Madam Speaker, I take this opportunity to congratulate you on your appointment to this most esteemed position in this honourable House, and to express my delight in being able to participate in this debate today. Let me also join my colleagues in congratulating the Minister of Finance on what can only be described as an excellent presentation consistent with the theme "Restoring Confidence and Rebuilding Trust: Let us do this together"

But, Madam Speaker, it was not only the style of presentation, but the content of it which represented a marked departure from what this nation has had to endure over the past five years. [*Desk thumping*] Madam Speaker, these sentiments also shared by a large majority of the citizenry of Trinidad and Tobago from all walks of life. As reflected in all segments of the media: the print, the electronic and of course the various social media channels.

I must also say that the budget and the public's reaction to it is consistent with the changed atmosphere and climate which has engulfed this nation since September 7, 2015. Needless to say, this new breath of fresh air is not only welcomed in Trinidad and Tobago, but also throughout the Caribbean and indeed the wider diaspora. [*Desk thumping*]

During my contribution I would want to spend much of my allotted time dealing with the plans and programmes of the Ministry of Social Development and Family Services. As you are no doubt aware, shortly after the victory of the People's National Movement at the recent general election the new Government adopted the party's 2015 election manifesto as the policy framework to be pursued over the next several years.

In this context, Madam Speaker, I will like to draw to the attention of the hon. Members and indeed the national community the vision that this Government has outlined for the people of Trinidad and Tobago with special reference to the activities which fall within the remit of social development and family services.

Madam Speaker, the People's National Movement, irrespective of its incarnation over the years or the era in history it has governed this country, has always demonstrated by deliberate and conscious prescriptions the posture of a caring government. This Government in like manner believes that the State has a role to play in protecting and enhancing the lives of women, children, the elderly, persons with disabilities and all other vulnerable groups in the society.

Madam Speaker, this is why our country's visionary leader, Hon. Dr. Keith Rowley, brought the key social service Ministries and agencies into alignment under one umbrella with the creation of the Ministry of Social Development and Family Services. This was a stroke of genius as it allows critical social issues like poverty reduction, persons with disabilities, children rights, the family and gender equality to be dealt with in a holistic and coordinated manner. It also presents an opportunity for us to finally get our social sector policies and service delivery right.

Madam Speaker, the hon. Member for Couva South expressed the concern that since there was no longer a Ministry of Gender Affairs there would be a lack of focus on gender issues—sorry—Couva North. I say to the hon. Member that she need not be unduly concerned. This present Government remains committed to full and equal participation of men and women in the development process and the promotion of gender equity and equality.

The Ministry of Social Development and Family Services will therefore continue to implement initiatives designed to promote gender, greater gender equity, empowerment and equality. These include a national commission for women empowerment to function as an advocate for greater levels of gender sensitivity and equity, and the central registry for domestic violence which will assist in addressing domestic violence by strengthening surveillance systems.

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Madam Speaker, the Opposition has also, by its inaction during the last five years, demonstrated that having a Ministry dedicated to gender affairs does not necessarily guarantee the required focus and positive action. For after five years in Government and having had access to two draft policies on gender documents, they have not either finalized or implemented a national policy on gender. [*Desk thumping*] This Government will however implement a national policy on gender and development.

Madam Speaker, the Ministry of Social Development and Family Services recognizes that although it has the primary responsibility for the protection and enhancement of social welfare parameters within in the country, it is also very conscious of the fact that it cannot achieve these noble objectives by operating on its own. Again, one of the features of the budget statement is the frequency with which the term consultation was stated. In this context, Madam Speaker, the Ministry of Social Development and Family Services acknowledges the tremendous contributions being made by non-governmental organizations, community-based organizations and faith-based organizations toward the enhancement of the quality of life of several disadvantaged groups in the society.

Accordingly, the Ministry will continue to partner with and incorporate civil society, especially at the community level, in the development of a new system of social justice and a more effective delivery of social services to the vulnerable, marginal and excluded groups in society.

Madam Speaker, the hon. Member for Cumuto/Manzanilla expressed concern about the NGOs and the possibility of their being sidelined. But I want to assure her that the Ministry currently partners with 83 NGOs and disbursed approximately \$124 million in annual subventions to them in fiscal 2015, and we have budgeted \$132 million for this period.

Another feature of the Ministry's programme administration philosophy is to ensure that in its execution phase it does not create, in the process, groups of clients who would become entrenched or dependent on the programme for an extended period. An enlightened approach, which would facilitate the graduation of our beneficiaries after a specified period, will therefore become an integral part of the programme execution policy going forward.

Madam Speaker, apart from the natural relationships which tend to emerge among providers within the social services network, the Ministry of Social Development and Family Services is also dependent on a host of services derived from other agencies of the state. In this context, I was heartened to hear the

Minister in his budget statement outline in some detail the Government's plans for the Central Statistical Office and in particular the establishment of the independent statistical institute.

Madam Speaker, those of us who operate in the social sector cannot overemphasize the need for timely and reliable qualitative and quantitative data. It is the only way that programmes and policies can be properly and adequately assessed. There is no substitute for reliable and trustworthy data. We at the Ministry of Social Development and Family Services therefore eagerly look forward to an upgraded provider of information on human behaviour. In this connection, Madam Speaker, let me, like the Minister of Finance, highlight the plight of one sector of the national community, that is people with disabilities. This Government recognizes that disability and poverty reinforce and perpetrate each other and must therefore both be addressed in a meaningful way.

Madam Speaker, although Trinidad and Tobago would have ratified the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities on June 22, 2015, we now have to implement the required substantive action required to remove the barriers to employment and full inclusion in all aspects of society. The Minister indicated in his budget that we will create a more inclusive society for persons with disabilities. They will enjoy equal opportunities through an empowered life with dignity. Madam Speaker, we all need to know more about the disabled in our community if we are to effectively do this.

Accordingly, the Ministry will be leading the national effort to determine, one, the scale and range of all programmes and services currently being directed to persons with disabilities; two, where there are gaps or deficiencies in the programmes; and three, the size of the population and its specific needs. To this end we will conduct a national census and develop a national register of persons with disabilities.

2.40 p.m.

Madam Speaker, implementation of these strategies will enable us to better deal with the issues affecting this segment of the population, allow persons with disabilities to fully integrate into society and ensure that Trinidad and Tobago either meets or surpasses the requirements imposed on ratifying countries by the UN. In the interim, the National Enrichment Centre for Persons with Disabilities was opened at Carlsen Field in July 2015. However, like many of the hastily opened projects, the centre is not fully operational. This Government will rectify the situation. We will be spending \$5.5 million to adequately outfit the centre, so that persons with disabilities could benefit from a range of services.

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Madam Speaker, I now focus my attention on poverty. I believe that each citizen should have the opportunity to attain a decent standard of living and that the most vulnerable among us should be protected. In order to achieve this and ensure that we remain a harmonious and stable society we must continue our efforts to reduce poverty and improve social justice. Preliminary data suggests that poverty has actually increased over the last five years. Some pockets in rural and semi-urban areas exist, and those persons live in abject poverty. I would have seen some of this first-hand when I would have walked my constituency.

Madam Speaker, our Ministry will embark on a programme to develop regional poverty profiles using GIS technology so as to enable holistic and targeted identification of the most vulnerable groups so that appropriate alleviation mechanisms can be implemented. Having said that, it should be noted that some programmes that were designed with the poor in mind will continue, but will be reviewed to ensure better targeted delivery so that the most vulnerable are in fact the ones served. Therefore, we will be looking to align several initiatives, some of which are already under way to develop wealth generating opportunities, enable self-sufficiency and break the generational cycle of poverty in Trinidad and Tobago. Although the Ministry had programmes that provided financial assistance, including training, to enable the most vulnerable to access microcredit, the programmes will now be more efficiently managed by doing careful client mentoring, and tracer studies to ensure that early successes which may have been evident do not erode over time. Follow-up counselling and feedback will also be built into our programmes.

Madam Speaker, we will also continue the implementation of the National Social Development Programme, NSDP, the beneficiaries of which receive services for house wiring, sanitary plumbing, minor house repairs, improved water supply and electrification. To this end, the Government has allotted \$33 million to implement this initiative. We will be partnering with other state agencies that provide similar services to ensure that there is an elimination of double dipping and we will also utilize our IT to ensure that a database is developed so that persons who access services by one agency will be known by other agencies providing similar-type services.

Madam Speaker, one of the issues we have had to contend with at the Ministry is whether the persons who are current recipients or beneficiaries of support are in fact the persons who really qualify for such support. We have had numerous reports of misallocation of these facilities to persons other than those in need. I want to advise the national community that a thorough investigation will

be taken to identify such instances and to determine whether state resources have been misallocated or abused. Simultaneously, I also want to give the national community the assurance that as we continue to roll out our programmes for this fiscal year and beyond, the social programmes will be better targeted such that those in need will be the eventual recipients of support.

Madam Speaker, this Government recognizes that the key to social stability is the nurturing of strong and stable families. The family unit however defined is the bedrock of any society. It is at the level of the family or the home that crucial personality formation and socialization traits are developed. The Ministry of Social Development and Family Services also recognizes that the rapidly changing fast-paced environment is taking a toll on some households, as parents in particular respond to a virtual expansion of their role. The Ministry will be developing and implementing appropriate parenting programmes, particularly for young parents so as to assist them in confronting the challenges occasioned by the demands of an increasingly modern and complex society. The family counselling services currently being offered by the Ministry will be reviewed and streamlined to ensure that they are appropriately tailored to meet the needs occasioned by the current environment.

Madam Speaker, the Trinidad and Tobago population and housing census 2011 indicated that the country had an ageing population, given that 13.4 per cent of our population were age 60 years and over. Recognizing that ageing is not lost to youth, but a new stage of opportunity and strength, the Ministry will continue to provide avenues and initiatives to address the needs of our ageing population. The Ministry currently oversees the Geriatric Adolescent Partnership Programme and the Retirees Adolescent Partnership Programme. These programmes impart knowledge and skills in elder care to young persons and tap the skills of retired persons to assist and supervise at-risk-of-underperforming students.

Madam Speaker, the Women's Institute for Alternative Development in today's *Newsday* would have indicated that the children and youth, not only in the realignment of the Ministry but in the allocations in the budget, they are expressing a fear that because of the realignment of the Ministries, the children would be lost. The article goes on to say that:

Children and families can have that much needed support. They are concerned about the inclusion of the protection of children, women and minorities from violence as well as the prevention of delinquency.

Madam Speaker, the Ministry of Social Development and Family Services is very much concerned and committed to the protection of the children in this country. In keeping with the UN Declaration on the Rights of the Child, the Government

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continues to recognize the vital role of children to national development. The Government is therefore committed to supporting the rights of children, creating the best opportunities for the achievement of their fullest potential and ensuring their overall protection.

The Children's Authority of Trinidad and Tobago became operational in 2015. The Authority is a specialized agency with the responsibility for the care and protection of children, especially those who are at risk or have been victims of abuse or neglect. But while the relevant legislation was partially proclaimed, the requisite infrastructure to support the law has not been put in place. We, therefore, now find ourselves having to answer the court because a child had to be placed in the women's prison as there are no appropriate rehab centres at present. We acknowledge that this is an untenable situation and we are currently taking action to have the necessary infrastructure in place as soon as possible.

Madam Speaker, this PNM administration is committed to ensuring the protection of our children. So, going forward, our initiatives for effective case management will include expansion of the child protection information system. This will improve oversight and tracking of children brought to the attention of the authority. It is noted that during this period we have budgeted approximately \$5.1 million to treat with issues related to children in our society and a further \$16.3 million for children homes and centres. This demonstrates clearly that this Government is very serious and committed to children in the society. To ensure that the Children's Authority is properly equipped to treat adequately with the issues of our children, we will establish three additional assessment centres—in south Trinidad, east Trinidad and in Tobago. These centres will allow for the multi-disciplinary assessment of children in a safe environment.

Madam Speaker, the issue of street dwelling is a global social problem which requires both an integrated and collaborative approach, involving a broad cross-section of key stakeholders including government agencies and civil society. Effectively, a reduction or elimination of street dwelling requires the provision of viable solutions to street dwelling. In this regard, the Ministry will continue to develop and implement strategies for the care of socially displaced persons, which will include establishment of assessment facilities, development of tailored support services, transitional or temporary independent living accommodation, and the development of an appropriate legislative framework.

Madam Speaker, the Ministry of Social Development and Family Services is responsible for the delivery of social services to the people of Trinidad and Tobago. During the fiscal period 2015, the biometric smart card was launched during the tenure of the previous Government. This system was intended to allow for rapid

processing of grants, enhanced identity verification and identity fraud reduction. While this system presents immense technical capabilities and potential, it has however proven to be very costly in its current form. Approximately \$49 million was spent during the start-up phase, \$35 million was spent to purchase the technology and an additional \$23.2 million must be spent annually for the associated maintenance, bank-loading fees and an opted SMS module. The programme is also labour intensive with 142 persons currently employed on this project, the larger percentage being employed to contact persons in receipt of the senior citizens pension and food cards, so that they can be brought onto the system.

Madam Speaker, I humbly submit that an advertisement in the print and electronic media would have been more cost effective, as it would have eliminated the need for over 100 of the 142 persons and would have resulted in all of the persons targeted either registered or removed from the system by now. But, again, it would seem that it would have proved beneficial to have had all those persons answering phones and making calls. So, Madam Speaker, after having spent over \$100 million exclusive of salaries, only 44,331 enrolments have been completed. This administration will not leave this situation unchecked. A comprehensive assessment and evaluation of this programme inclusive of a cost-benefit analysis will therefore be conducted and a decision made on the way forward.

And I come to the Targeted Conditional Cash Transfer Programme that the hon. Member for Cumuto/Manzanilla spoke about just now. Madam Speaker, in 2006 the Government introduced the—as it is commonly known—food card initiative as an aspect of its poverty reduction programme. This was to ensure that all citizens would have access to a nutritious meal. The present incarnation of this initiative is the Targeted Conditional Cash Transfer Programme. This programme, which cost taxpayers \$24 million per month, while introduced with noble intent, has become an avenue for less than noble persons to take what was intended for the poor, to fatten their pockets and those of their friends. It is noteworthy that whereas the 14 regional offices granted a total of 7,960 food cards over the last 12 months, 13,950 temporary food cards were distributed at the discretion of Members of Parliament. Madam Speaker, there is a haemorrhage taking place with respect to the food cards, and our information suggests that the food cards are not reaching those for whom they were intended.

2.55 p.m.

It should be noted, Madam Speaker, that approximately 80 per cent of the persons who received temporary food cards do not apply for the permanent card, as this would require the provision of all documents necessary to determine eligibility.

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This suggests, Madam Speaker, that the majority of those that comprise that 80 per cent were not eligible to receive assistance under this initiative in the first place.

Madam Speaker, let me assure you and the people of Trinidad and Tobago that there will be a comprehensive audit of this programme, “soonest”. This Government has also decided that food cards shall be granted and distributed only at the Ministry’s offices. This should substantially reduce opportunities for misallocation and fraud.

So, hon. Member for Cumuto/Manzanilla, these cards are supposed to be at the regional offices. Notwithstanding my recent appointment, I have discovered that most of the staff at the Ministry sees the Ministry as representing the soul of the nation because they believe that the quality of life pursued and enjoyed by the less fortunate in our society essentially represents who we are as a nation. As Minister, I too embrace this view.

With this thought in mind, therefore, I urge the national community to be more tolerant of those in society who, for whatever reason, may be differently-abled or specially circumstanced. Generally, they do not seek handouts or sympathy, but would appreciate respect and equity in treatment.

Madam Speaker, our Government recognizes that all citizens should have a decent standard of living based on equity and equality and that the most vulnerable among us should be protected. We are therefore committed to ensuring the creation of the harmonious and stable society by reducing poverty and ensuring social justice.

And before I close, Madam Speaker, I would like to treat with one issue. Yesterday the hon. Leader of the Opposition and a few Members on the opposite side would have indicated great concern with the fact that the PNM may send home members of staff. I was taken aback by those concerns and then I decided it has to be that some of them are suffering from selective amnesia. [*Desk thumping*] Because, as at 2014, they would have sent home between 8,000 and 10,000 persons. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker, I would have then looked at the staffing within the Ministry of Social Development and Family Services. And then I ask myself, is it that the concern arises from the fact that they may now have so many people stationed in all of the state enterprises, that is why they are worried?

Madam Speaker, in the Ministry of Social Development and Family Services, the approved established complement is 378. The approved contract, number of people on contract is now 129, but we have 549 people on short-term employment. And short-term does not mean here as it is supposed to, one week,

one month. These are people who have been recycled for periods exceeding three years. What this means is that they have found a way to circumvent the rules and regulations related to recruitment. Madam Speaker, there are projects that are totally staffed by these short-term people. You have 142 people on the biometric special project, 12 on the Inter-Agency Unit, 49 on the main People Issues Resolution Coordinating Unit, 62 on the National Poverty Reduction and Eradication Programmes Coordinating Unit, 25 in the Piparo Empowerment Centre, and it goes on.

Mr. Singh: You could fire all of them.

Miss Ramdial: Renew the contracts.

Hon. C. Crichlow-Cockburn: Madam Speaker, my concern is that the rules and regulations related to recruitment would have been circumvented. There are persons on these projects who have been employed under short-term who are heading units, who do not have the requisite qualifications and experience, [*Desk thumping*] so it is an area that we are going to look very closely into and address. So, Madam Speaker, I wanted to bring that to your attention, the attention of the House and the attention of the national community.

As I close, Madam Speaker, I say special thank you to the people of Lopinot/Bon Air West for electing me as their MP. I assure them that I will represent them to the best of my ability in this august House, in Cabinet and elsewhere and I will work assiduously to ensure at all times that we in Lopinot/Bon Air West achieve our vision of being a vibrant, cohesive and safe constituency where everyone has equal opportunity to be the best that they can be. I thank you, Madam Speaker. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Barry Padarath (*Princes Town*): Madam Speaker, I rise to contribute to the financial Appropriation Bill, 2016 in this august Chamber. I wish to congratulate those opposite together with those in the Opposition Benches for having attained the support of the Members of their constituency in terms of their election to the seats that they hold. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker, I wish to also congratulate colleagues on both sides of the House for their maiden contributions, in some instances, and having returned to the Parliament of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago. I am proud to be the youngest elected Member of Parliament [*Desk thumping*] in the Eleventh Parliament and a product of the best performing Government in the history of Trinidad and Tobago, [*Desk thumping*] the People's Partnership Government.

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[MR. PADARATH]

Madam Speaker, the financial Appropriation Bill is a road map of where we are and where we would like to go over the next financial year and beyond. You see, it is supposed to outline the policies and the plans of this Government, this Government who boasts about being elected into office almost one month ago.

Madam Speaker, it is a clear indication of where they are supposed to be going with respect to their goals, their aims, their objectives towards the holistic development of Trinidad and Tobago. Madam Speaker, instead, what we saw on Monday that was presented by the Minister of Finance was a misrepresentation of the truth. What we saw was a budget of vindictiveness, a budget of spite, a budget of bitterness, a budget of acrimony and, Madam Speaker, dare I say, we saw a man totally out of control. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker, it is said that a fish rots from the head, and after Monday's budget presentation we can see the common thread that binds this Cabinet together as they have all taken a page out of the book of their leader. To know where we are going and where we are, we must revisit the past. Today, without apology I pay tribute to the best performing Prime Minister in the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago, [*Desk thumping*] the Member of Parliament for Siparia.

Madam Speaker, you see I sat and listened attentively to the budget presentation on Monday and I knew fully well that being a first timer to this House there would be a lot of expectations and a lot of anticipation on the new Members in terms of their conduct, in terms of their presentations and, Madam Speaker, in terms of their knowledge of the issues at hand.

As a first timer to this House and as the youngest Member of Parliament in the Eleventh Parliament, I had the great hope for those on the other side, especially since they have been asking the country to give them a chance. Member for Diego Martin North/East you and I will both be sharing 10 years old because we both are the same height. [*Desk thumping and laughter*]

Hon. Member: Four feet, two.

Mr. B. Padarath: Madam Speaker, let me say on the onset [*Laughter*] that what I saw displayed here in the Parliament on the day that Members were sworn in and on budget day was a very far cry from the Prime Minister's words of being inclusive and being a Government for all.

[MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Mr. Deputy Speaker, when the Member for Lopinot/Bon Air West spoke, she spoke about, in reality, job cuts. Cuts here, there and everywhere. It is their Prime

Minister who came and said there will be no job cuts but they continue to speak from both sides of their mouths.

Madam Speaker—[*Interruption*]

Hon. Member: Deputy Speaker.

Mr. B. Padarath: Mr. Deputy Speaker, sorry. Mr. Deputy Speaker, I am the Member of Parliament as you know, for Princes Town and I am very proud to be standing on the shoulders of close to 13,000 constituents who voted for me. [*Desk thumping*] I will say on the onset that I will not be afraid, I will not be intimidated or silenced unjustifiably, as I seek to represent those that elected myself and Members on this People's Partnership Bench.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, the response to the 2016 fiscal package is a very good opportunity to inform the nation and also the population of the type of people that we are dealing with in this Government. In the build-up to the general election of 2015, the population was warned about the modus operandi of this PNM. Today, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I am deeply saddened to see that while the Government speaks on both sides of their mouths, they continue as they have done in previous administrations to do one thing and also do another, which is their modus operandi with respect to how they also speak.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, for me while I sat down, and I know this is a good one for the Member for Diego Martin North/East, because he and the political leader of the PNM, the Member for Diego Martin West, seem to be obsessed with my surname. And for the record of *Hansard*, my surname is Per-da-rath [*Phonetic*] [*Desk thumping and laughter*]

You see, Mr. Deputy Speaker, we may have to invest, and I will have to speak with the Minister of Education, the Member for Arima if he is awake, I see he has just recently gotten out of his recent snooze every five minutes, [*Laughter*] but we may have to speak with the Minister of Education to introduce Sanskrit Hindi in the schools for Diego Martin North/East and Diego Martin West.

Hon. Member: Them!? No way, no way.

Mr. B. Padarath: Mr. Deputy Speaker, while I waited for my name to be called to take the Oath of Office on September 23, 2015, to my great shock Members opposite said to Members of the Opposition Bench, "I will do for you". As I know, when we sit as Members of Parliament, we sit representing those who elected us. When our constituents elected us it was with the hope that we will

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ensure that we continue to deliver roads; that we continue to deliver box drains; that we continue to deliver schools; that we continue to deliver hospitals and basic amenities throughout their villages and their communities.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I was appalled to hear Members from the Government Bench marking former Government Ministers saying, “you gave me five roads now I am getting 25, none for you”.

Hon. Member: Never.

Mr. B. Padarath: I heard Members saying from the Government, “do not even bother to call me”. But the Member for Barataria/San Juan I saw you get special mention, you can call them, they will answer.

Dr. Khan: Thank you.

3.10 p.m.

Mr. B. Padarath: Mr. Deputy Speaker, the evidence is there. I did not make these things up. Members will tell you this is what they faced, and the reason I chose to raise this issue is that when the Government comes with a “physical” package of \$63 billion, it is that they intended, like what their Members said, to starve Opposition constituencies, which is their history, which is their past, which is their modus operandi while being in Government. [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. Member: Nothing else! Nothing else! Spite.

Mr. B. Padarath: Mr. Deputy Speaker, it is not the Opposition Members of Parliament that they would be starving for basic infrastructure and amenities, it is the constituents that we represent. I challenge the Members opposite to deny this happened and we will produce the evidence. So let me hear the Members for Diego Martin North/East and St. Joseph say, “No, it did not happen”. We will produce the evidence.

Now you can understand why I said—[*Crosstalk*] Mr. Deputy Speaker, now you can understand why I said this budget is about spite; it is about bitterness; it is about vindictiveness foisted on the people of Trinidad and Tobago. The PNM has never stood for equality, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and while the window dressing of fancy scarves and the three-piece suits may fool some of the people some of the time, it cannot fool all of the people all of the time. [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. Member: “Tell dem, tell dem!”

Mr. B. Padarath: Mr. Deputy Speaker, I wish to deal with another matter as I go into my contribution, and this is the chorus of Kamla's legacy that we heard from the Government as they misrepresented figures, projects and reports. For the benefit of those opposite, and especially the Member for Laventille West and the Member for Laventille East/Morvant, who did not even have the courtesy to come out on the second sitting of the budget to represent their constituents today, now having warmed the seat of Laventille East/Morvant [*Crosstalk*] or Laventille West, Mr. Speaker, I wish to deal with Kamla's legacy in the context of your \$63 billion budget.

The Member for Siparia, while she served as Prime Minister of Trinidad and Tobago, will always be remembered for the great strides she made in her first time as Prime Minister in the spheres of education—

Hon. Member: Yeah. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. B. Padarath:—in the spheres of health care, in the spheres of law, in the spheres of infrastructural development, in the spheres of agriculture, in the spheres of food production, in the spheres relating to children's issues and youth development. That is the legacy of the Member of Siparia.

Hon. Member: Yeah. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. B. Padarath: Mr. Deputy Speaker, the legacy of the Member for Siparia will always be the \$1.3 billion that was spent on the Couva Children's Hospital that would save the lives of our nation's children. [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. Member: And they would shut it down.

Mr. B. Padarath: Mr. Deputy Speaker, the legacy of the Member for Siparia will be the \$1 billion that was spent to build the National Aquatic Centre of Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*] Mr. Deputy Speaker, the legacy of the Member for Siparia will be the \$500 million that was spent to build 10 new police stations across the land. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Deputy Speaker, the legacy of the Member for Siparia will be the \$750 million that was spent on the San Fernando Teaching Hospital. [*Desk thumping*] The legacy of the Member of Parliament for Siparia will be the \$5.1 billion spent on the Point Fortin Highway. [*Desk thumping*] Mr. Deputy Speaker, the legacy of the Member of Parliament for Siparia will be the \$100 million spent on the Diego Martin Highway expansion. [*Desk thumping*] Mr. Deputy Speaker, the legacy of the Member of Parliament for Siparia will be the 100 schools we built and refurbished over the past five years, including the Point Cumana RC school—[*Interruption*]

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Mr. Imbert: Nah. Nah, nah, nah. No!

Mr. B. Padarath:—built in Diego Martin West at a cost of over \$13 million.

Hon. Member: Not at all. No!

Mr. B. Padarath: Mr. Deputy Speaker, the legacy of the Member for Siparia will be the 95,000 laptops distributed annually between 2010 and 2015. Mr. Deputy Speaker, the legacy for the Member for Siparia and former Prime Minister can be seen in the real tangible benefits that have affected ordinary citizens in all of Trinidad and Tobago, every man, every woman and every child. That is planning and that is performance.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, with the “physical” package of this PNM Government being \$63 billion, let us examine what has been their legacy or what can we expect in the future. Let us not forget that this current PNM administration includes members of past PNM regimes, including the very Minister of Finance and the very Prime Minister. The Minister of Finance and the Prime Minister sat in Cabinets of Trinidad and Tobago that approved the following: the Minister of Finance, the Member for Diego Martin North/East and the Prime Minister, the Member for Diego Martin West, sat in Cabinets that cost this country a flag for \$2 million. Mr. Deputy Speaker, they sat in a Cabinet that approved NAPA for over \$.6 billion that is structurally flawed. Mr. Deputy Speaker, they sat in a Cabinet that gave us—[*Brig. Gen. Antoine rises*]

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Member? Member?

Hon. Member: He is going to the washroom. [*Laughter*]

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Proceed.

Mr. B. Padarath: Mr. Deputy Speaker, they sat in a Cabinet that gave us Alturas for over \$160 million that today is the subject of a commission of enquiry. It is this very Minister of Finance that gave us the \$52 million MV *Su* that could not be sailed for one day due to structural and mechanical problems. Mr. Deputy Speaker, it is this Minister of Finance and this Government that has given us the return of Malcolm Jones and Prof. Ken Julien. [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. Member: Gas to liquids? [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. B. Padarath: Mr. Deputy Speaker, I look forward to the pounding that I am seeing on the benches of the Government opposite because in the *Guardian* today, published October 10, 2015, the *Guardian* says: “OWTU’s President

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General Ancil Roget describes Jones”—the same Jones that the PNM has returned—“as a poor manager”. And they further went on to say in that *Guardian* article that he “left a bitter taste in the mouths of workers” in Trinidad and Tobago.

But this is the Government that that very OWTU, who is speaking out of one side of their mouth and doing another, supported in the 2015 general election. Mr. Deputy Speaker, it is this very Minister of Finance and this very Prime Minister that sat in Cabinets that presided over the responsibility of SAUTT—the responsibility of SAUTT that illegally spied on our nation’s prominent citizens and even former Presidents of our Republic.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, it is this PNM Minister of Finance whose spouse received million-dollar government contracts under their administration. It is this PNM administration who changed their clothes and come back, who gave the family of their chairman over \$100 million in HDC contracts while this very Prime Minister served as the Minister of Housing.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I can go on and on about the waste, corruption—sounding familiar, Diego Martin North/East?—the waste, corruption, cronyism and nepotism under this PNM administration. Mr. Deputy Speaker, many of the players here are still the same and in the next five years or less under this PNM administration, we expect no different result. This is the stark difference between the legacy of the Member of Parliament for Siparia and the Member for Diego Martin West.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, in the first month of office, the Member for Siparia set up the Children’s Life Fund in this country. Let us not forget that. That is her legacy. The Member for Laventille West, through you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, you can jump high or you can jump low, that will always be the legacy of Prime Minister Kamla Persad-Bissessar. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I saw one of the local newspapers recently reported that Trinidad and Tobago is red, and at the end of September, 50 is dead. Mr. Deputy Speaker, through you, the Member for Diego Martin West can jump high or he can jump low, he can say this or he can say that, but his legacy, as history would record it, in the first month of becoming Prime Minister, saw the bloodiest month of murders in our nation’s history in a very long time. Mr. Deputy Speaker, this is, and will be the legacy of this Prime Minister and this Government in their first month of being in office. This is what they have presided over in coming into office. This is their first month’s legacy, the “red and ready” legacy.

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Mr. Deputy Speaker, in the 2010 general election the People's Partnership identified a very clear plan and vision in terms of where we wanted to be in sport and youth affairs. In 2010, the People's Partnership came into office with a comprehensive plan for the sporting industry in Trinidad and Tobago. The aim and objective was to position Trinidad and Tobago as the main tourist destination for sport in the region. The People's Partnership identified that there was a critical need for infrastructural development in the sport sector and looked at constructing world-class facilities across the landscape of Trinidad and Tobago.

There were three main flagship projects that became the thrust of sport tourism development in Trinidad and Tobago under the Persad-Bissessar administration. These projects are the National Cycling Centre, the National Tennis Centre and the National Aquatic Centre. These projects will create many opportunities, not only for sport enthusiasts in our nation, but also for the business sector.

The Government, in the budget presentation, specifically identified developing these areas and this is by no small coincidence, Mr. Deputy Speaker. It took the political will and the political leadership of the People's Partnership to move from just having these projects on paper to having them actualized and become a reality.

I am very happy today to know that these three flagship projects are almost completed and they will be utilized for the development of, especially the young people in our society. [*Desk thumping*] Mr. Deputy Speaker, it was the People's Partnership Government that had been advocating for youth development for the past five years. We did not only just talk the talk while we were there, we walked the walk. Today, Trinidad and Tobago and the youth of our nation would be in a more comfortable place having access to avenues through sport, to advance their interests and their careers should they choose sport as a medium to do so.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, we will not apologize for the investment we made in sport because we understood fully that sport was going to be one of the means by which we can get our young people involved in something more productive and something more meaningful. I understand that the investment in sport was going to be an avenue for which we could give the youth an opportunity to put down the guns and do something positive. This PNM administration has been known to pay lip service to the youth of Trinidad and Tobago and the sport industry.

3.25 p.m.

Let me remind all of Trinidad and Tobago that it was this very Minister of Finance, the Member for Diego Martin North/East, and this very Prime Minister, the Member for Diego Martin West, who sat in previous PNM administrations and

presided over the Brian Lara Stadium debacle. [*Desk thumping*] As members of the Cabinet that presided over the building of the Brian Lara Stadium for the Cricket World Cup 2007—and Cricket World Cup came, they were in office, never opened, 2006, 2007, 2008, 2009, 2010. Member for Diego Martin North/East, that is your legacy.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, we in the People's Partnership built legacy projects that our nation will be able to benefit through. [*Interruption*]

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Silence please. Silence please.

Mr. B. Padarath: These projects will be revenue earners for Trinidad and Tobago if this administration markets and provides for these institutions so it can seriously generate interest and funding through both private and public sector.

We have invested over \$1 billion in the National Aquatic Centre, and I take notice of the intentional misinformation in the public domain with respect to what we did for the young people in Trinidad and Tobago over the last five years in terms of where our nation's patrimony was spent.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, the mantra of the PNM over the last few months has been that they are "red and ready". We can once more see the great deception of the PNM being revealed and exposed. Mr. Deputy Speaker, I am sure you will agree with me that they might be red, but they are definitely not ready. [*Desk thumping*] By their own admissions, through their manifesto which by itself is the greatest hoax on this nation. Through their manifesto, through their Ministers of Government and through their "physical" package for 2016, they have identified no concrete plans especially when it comes to sport and youth development. The Minister of Finance has not spoken about any additional facilities to be constructed to add to the resource base of the sporting industry in Trinidad and Tobago.

You see, Mr. Deputy Speaker, instead, all we have been advised through this budget is that they will be looking at upgrading existing facilities, and they have used a broad-brush to paint existing programmes with the word "upgrade". Even their own Ministers have admitted that they do not have any concrete plans for their respective portfolios. The new Minister of Sport and Youth Affairs recently spoke about upgrading facilities with air-conditions and amenities. However, like the Minister of Finance and the Prime Minister, he too has failed to identify what is the short-term plan, what is the medium-term plan and what is the long-term plan for the sport industry in Trinidad and Tobago.

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Mr. Deputy Speaker, in our conversations with the electorate we were very clear about where we were as a government and where we wanted to be over the next five years. We clearly identified the plans and projects we wanted to achieve in the sporting arena. Among these plans were: we had planned to transform the Tarouba facility into the Tarouba sports academy and develop sport as an industry. While in office we resurfaced the Wallerfield motor racing circuit with a view to include motor sport in our tourism industry. [*Desk thumping*] These initiatives would have provided and transformed sport and the approach to sport in Trinidad and Tobago.

We, while in Government, have built and/or refurbished sport pavilions and lit 221 recreation grounds [*Desk thumping*] with 204 commissioned throughout the country. We did not look at what constituencies were PNM or UNC constituencies. We worked across the length and breadth of this country. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Deputy Speaker, we had planned to realign investments, evidence-based decisions to maximize impacts in the sporting industry. We were conducting a readiness assessment of the various disciplines to identify those that can be worked with to deliver more effectively. We were establishing greater sustainable opportunities within schools and community-based activities at all levels.

We were planning to transform the Tarouba facility into the Tarouba sports academy. This can support activities in the nearby aquatic centre and the cycling velodrome in Couva. The establishment of this academy can also be linked with activities at the Ato Bolton Stadium where running tracks would have been upgraded with the University of Trinidad and Tobago, which could have provided academic input in the sports academy. This would have encouraged our elite athletes to remain here and be home-grown, while achieving similar benefits that may have been afforded by going abroad.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, this could have also been a cost benefiting factor, allowing more athletes opportunities. A project of such magnitude, as the Tarouba sports academy, could have created an avenue to further develop sports tourism in Trinidad and Tobago. This is because of the availability of high performance facilities that will be attractive to athletes from around the region. Trinidad and Tobago can now serve as a venue to host international competitions, while also providing training facilities for regional and international athletes preparing for major championships in countries that surround us.

For instance, Mr. Deputy Speaker, you will take note that in 2016, Brazil will host the Summer Olympic Games, and Trinidad and Tobago was one of those countries identified by several nations, including the US swimming team, to come and

utilize the facilities here in Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*] Mr. Deputy Speaker, that is a testimony of the vision and the leadership of the Member for Siparia and the then Prime Minister.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, as a small country, Trinidad and Tobago has gained international renown for its sporting successes, the Olympics, World Cup, cricketing and swimming athletes, among others. As such, we would have developed a national framework to secure continuing sporting success. We would have established a motor sport facility via public/private partnership and deliver this support as an industry which strengthens our sports tourism thrust. This would have been a component with other related activities such as those that we would have developed around the new sporting facilities in Couva.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, those plans that I identified were plans in the manifesto of the People's Partnership. Those are the comprehensive and concrete plans that I referred to, that the People's Partnership had engaged in while being in office, building a strong foundation so that we could have built from 2015 to 2020. As we had advised the population, the PNM manifesto like their Government is devoid of any specific developmental plans for sport. Instead, it is mired in fluff and rhetoric.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, on a more optimistic note, I am at least happy to see that they have borrowed at least one of the People's Partnership ideas, and that is to establish a sports institute of Trinidad and Tobago. I would like to invite my friend, the Member for Diego Martin Central, the Minister of Sport and Youth Affairs, when you speak about equity or you speak about being a Government for all, we in Princes Town have a lot of available lands that you can utilize for that sport institute.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, this PNM-led administration has always been one to promise, plan, review, but never deliver. I am certain that it will take a People's Partnership Government to ensure that the establishment of the sports academy becomes a reality. [*Desk thumping*] This PNM-led administration might be red, but they are certainly not ready. They have called upon the population to "Let's do this", but up to this time they have not been able to identify what they wish to do. Instead, they have engaged in allegations and accusations that are unsubstantiated and untrue, while, at the same time, deceiving the population into believing that they had an alternative plan and programme ready to service the population.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, today I call their bluff. They can fool some of the people some of the time, but not all of the people all of the time. With \$.6 billion allocated to the Ministry of Sport and Youth Affairs we are still yet to hear from the Minister of Finance what concrete plans and programmes will benefit from this allocation. I am particularly flabbergasted by this approach this Government has taken

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towards dealing with the issues affecting the youth of our nation. Our nation's youth have been looking for comfort in knowing that the Government will not interfere with the arrangements concerning GATE. The arrangements announced by the Minister of Finance leave the population in a state of limbo, especially the young people, since the Minister announced that they will review and it will be accessible to those who need it the most.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, the Prime Minister then announced, following the budget, that the Government will look at charting a way forward in assessing those that are seeking funding through GATE. Mr. Deputy Speaker, let me remind you that there was a situation under this PNM Government—even though they changed their clothes and they come back, it was under this PNM Government where the players remained very much the same. When they came a few years ago, and now with a different incarnation, this Minister of Finance and this Prime Minister sat in a Cabinet that delivered secret scholarships. They delivered secret scholarships through a secret scholarship committee that determined who got Government scholarships with taxpayers' money, many of whom were persons sympathetic towards the PNM and their affiliates.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, are we going to see a return to that policy of a few select inside of the PNM determining who will get Government funding or not? I call on this Government to come clean with what exactly is the policy on GATE, and tell this nation what really are the criteria that is going to be used to access funding. To my greatest fear—but I know this has been the modus operandi of this PNM administration that we will see the might of the PNM party card returning and at work. [*Desk thumping*]

I wish to remind our national community that it was this People's Partnership administration that opened up the GATE Programme to include technical vocational areas. [*Desk thumping*] It was the People's Partnership administration that set up workforce assessment centres throughout this country which assessed and trained our young people and our not so young so that they would have been able to get certification in areas that were needed.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I believe that the Minister of Finance is a magician, since his presentation epitomizes what the children would call hocus-pocus. You see, he seems to have a good penchant for making things disappear. I reflected on the PNM manifesto when it comes to youth issues, especially since the PNM administration adopted it as Government policy. They indicated that these would be the plans for the youth. They would encourage the private sector through

“physical” incentives to increase its level of youth employment. They would develop a comprehensive youth employment policy which addresses the specific needs of unemployed youth including preparation for the job market and the varying needs of youths in diverse communities.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, in the People’s National Movement manifesto of 2015, they said that they would devote special emphasis to the rehabilitation of young offenders as well as a proper support system to assist in their reintegration into society. They said that they will encourage youths to become leaders in their communities by exposing them to training in civic responsibility.

3.40 p.m.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, they said that they would establish a youth leadership development institute that would provide training and interactive seminars on leadership. They said they would highlight the positive aspects of youth using young role models to assist in restructuring the perception of young people, and using that avenue to disseminate information on critical issues such as sexually transmitted diseases, HIV and AIDS.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, they said they would develop an annual youth expo and special radio and television programmes to allow youth to discuss the issues which affect them and focus on youth upliftment. They said they would encourage youth and young people to be more politically-minded and provide opportunities and facilities for dialogue on youth issues. They said they would create a forum for the youth arms of the national parties and independent young voices to debate and discuss issues. They said they would provide youth facilities in villages and regions of Trinidad and Tobago that will allow positive recreation and healthy lifestyles among the young, so as to give vulnerable youth a safe haven to socialize while receiving coaching, counselling and acquiring information on civic responsibility. None of this exists in the 2016 “physical” package.

Hon. Members: Fiscal. Fiscal.

Hon. Member: Fiscal, not physical package.

Mr. B. Padarath: They moved from “We care” in 2010 to “We are red and ready” in 2015. You will notice that none of the policies that I have mentioned from their manifesto was contained in this budget presentation. They can fool some of the people some of the time but they cannot fool all the people all of the time. I am certain the same youths that they pandered to and misled in 2015 will be ready for them when a general election bell is rung or a by-election bell is rung. But I assure you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, they will be ready but they will not be red.

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Through the People's Partnership, we found creative and innovative ways in which to create new jobs, and not just any jobs but sustainable jobs. In the budget presentation of 2015, we entitled it "Empowering Our People Through Sustained Economic Growth and Policy". Today, this nation is confronted with a Minister of Finance and a budget of spite, vindictiveness and deception. This has always been the hallmark of any PNM administration. They are no different from the years of PNM squandermania, PNM arrogance and PNM nepotism.

The population was hoping that when this Government said they were going to be a Government for all, they would have focused on developing all sectors of Trinidad and Tobago across the board. You see, never before have I seen the youth of this country in a more regressed situation than they are today under this PNM administration. Throughout the last five years, the People's Partnership Government focused on the development of young people in our nation through our thrust in education and developing small businesses.

The People's Partnership administration, through its Minister of Finance in the last fiscal package indicated that the University of the West Indies, Penal/Debe campus, was in an advanced stage of completion with dedicated faculties in law, science and technology, food and agriculture and social sciences. And to correct our friend from La Horquetta/Talparo, like the former President of the Republic, they too seem not to know south of the Caroni, because that very Debe campus is in the constituency of Oropouche East. The University of the West Indies Open Campus is currently being constructed in Chaguanas because of the People's Partnership administration. The College of Science, Technology and Applied Arts of Trinidad and Tobago expanded its nursing facility at El Dorado because of the People's Partnership administration. The MIC company has already established under the People's Partnership four technology centres in Trinidad and Tobago: in O'Meara, in Diego Martin, in Penal and of course, in Tobago as I mentioned.

We did and we provided a drilling academy that was established at St. Madeleine with an expanding facility at Forest Reserve to provide training in downstream activities such as production, refinery operation, environmental remediation and green technologies. We provided a technology campus at La Horquetta and the facilities at La Brea and Point Fortin are being expanded.

Hon. Member: La Horquetta? "Yuh sure?" Read that again.

Mr. B. Padarath: Let me read this again for the benefit of the Member for La Horquetta/Talparo. We provided a technology campus at La Horquetta and the facilities at La Brea and Point Fortin are being expanded. Mr. Deputy Speaker, an

automotive training institute, a workforce development centre and a centre of excellence in cosmetology are being established at Woodford Lodge because of the People's Partnership administration.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Hon. Member for Princes Town, your speaking time has expired. Do you desire an extension?

Mr. B. Padarath: Yes, Sir.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: You may proceed.

Mr. B. Padarath: Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. [*Desk thumping*] This People's Partnership Government has performed in every sector of Trinidad and Tobago, and the Ministry of Sport and also the Ministry of Gender, Youth and Child Development were no exceptions. You see, I listened very carefully to the Member for Laventille East/Morvant when he spoke and I was deeply saddened at this very pathetic response. You see, when the political leader of the People's Partnership and the Member for Siparia was choosing candidates, she chose persons based on their competence levels. Those that will be able to articulate a view, a plan, a vision, for the young people of Trinidad and Tobago. While we articulated plans and policies, Mr. Deputy Speaker, while we delivered and articulated—[*Interruption*]

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Members, please, let us hear the hon. Member for Princes Town. [*Continuous interruption*] I am on my feet.

Mr. Persad-Bissessar SC: Sorry, Sir.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Continue, hon. Member for Princes Town.

Mr. B. Padarath: Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. When the Member for Siparia was choosing candidates and she was looking for young people, you know I see so much window-dressing that the People's National Movement has brought, and you are seeing the quality of persons now standing here in this House, speaking before this Parliament and being positioned as senior Government Ministers, yet holding up a piece of paper, do not know what they are reading, if they are reading Dear diary, first entry today, or whether or not they are talking about herbal-like substances.

But, Mr. Deputy Speaker, being able to contribute to this august Chamber, one would have thought that the young people that they have positioned to articulate plans and articulate visions of their Government would have found greater respect and greater sources of information than standing up in your first maiden

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contribution, that the first words come out of your mouth is about herbal substances. That is the mark of this PNM administration and Members like that of Laventille East/Morvant.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, in 2010, the Calypso Monarch Kurt Allen sang a song called the PNM is “Too Bright”; that is why they “cyah run this country right”. They have removed the Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries to the facility that we were building for the Ministry of TEST, Tertiary Education and Skills Training in Chaguanas, and we spoke about diversifying and decentralizing. When I heard that song and I played it a few times this morning before I came here, and I heard Kurt Allen saying, “dey too bright, dey nah run this country right”, I am reminded that while they have left the Ministry of Rural Development and Local Government in Maraval, they have moved the Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries to Chaguanas. That is the modus operandi of this PNM administration.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I would like to turn to, for a few minutes, the area of culture and the arts. Let me say at this juncture that I would like to congratulate both yourself and the Speaker for having ascended to these very prestigious offices in the Parliament of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago. I am sure you will be able to convey to the Speaker this message, in that I will be shadowing the portfolio of the Ministry of Community Development, Culture and the Arts, and while I found it a very good step and a very progressive step and a very inclusive step, to include at the end of the prayer here in the parliamentary proceedings, I took notice she said, “Ameen”, “Amen” and “Namaste”.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I have noted that the word “Namaste”—and I myself being a practising Hindu—is a word that is used as a greeting and that the more appropriate word—and I mean this with no spite and no malice but the more appropriate word is Om Shanti. And when we seek to represent cultures and views of persons in various and diverse backgrounds, we must pay respect to knowing what their traditions and what their culture stands for. And that is why I will stand in this Parliament and tell them, day after day, “My name is Barry Padarath [*Phonetic Per-da-rath*] and not Pa-da-rat”. It seems as though the Members for St Joseph, San Fernando West and Diego Martin North/East are obsessed with the name or we will teach them some Sanskrit Hindi as we go along.

Let me remind you that it was this People’s Partnership Government that took the Carnival industry off the streets of Port of Spain when we came into office in 2010. Let me remind you that those that sit opposite us today, they were in the Cabinet that put Carnival on the streets of Port of Spain and ensured that there was no home

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for Carnival in 2010. But as Machel Montano would sing, “Let we thank the Government”,—and he meant the People’s Partnership Government— [*Desk thumping*] “for taking us off the pavement”.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, it seems as though we are presented with a fiscal package that will see the return of the rapid rail or the “racket rail”. We have seen in a different incarnation, this same Minister of Finance “talk about bus”, “talk about plane”, but now “he talking about train”. You know, someone sent me a little while ago, he said, “Is this not the same man with many memes surrounding ‘Boss, boss, this is the plane, this is the plane’”. Well, now he has changed it to “Boss, boss, look the train, look the train”. That is their legacy. So when they want to talk about short man syndrome, we have not forgotten what they have foisted on the people of Trinidad and Tobago over the past few decades that they have been in office.

You know, Mr. Deputy Speaker, as I wrap up my contribution to this debate, a constituent from the constituency of Siparia sent me a message and he said to me—he said “when the queen is under attack, ensure that the empire strikes back”. [*Laughter*] Mr. Deputy Speaker, they have tried time and time again to attack our leader and to attack our brand, [*Interruption*] and let me say, on this side, we have one leader; on this side, we have one leader and one brand and that is Kamla Persad-Bissessar. [*Desk thumping*] And you can jump high and you can jump low; you can say this, you can say that; that is not going to change, because in a short space of time, she will be returning to the corridors of power and bringing back good governance to the people of Trinidad and Tobago. With that, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I thank you. [*Desk thumping*]

3.55 p.m.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: I recognize the hon. Minister of Sport and Youth Affairs.

The Minister of Sport and Youth Affairs (Hon. Darryl Smith): Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. It is good to get some comic relief in the middle of the afternoon. [*Desk thumping*] So I want to thank—[*Interruption*]

Hon. Member: Better than Learie Joseph.

Hon. D. Smith: Because that is exactly what we just got, comic relief. The princess—the Member of Parliament for Princes Town—sorry, my apologies. I am humbled to get the opportunity to represent the people of Diego Martin Central, and by extension the people of Trinidad and Tobago in my capacity as Minister of Sport and Youth Affairs of Trinidad and Tobago.

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I would like to first thank the Almighty God, Jesus Christ, my family, the 27,000 residents from the Diego Martin Central constituency of which 13,000-plus voted for me [*Desk thumping*] and, of course, the Prime Minister for putting his trust in me to lead the people of Diego Martin Central and the youth and the athletes of the country.

In her absence, I would like to congratulate Madam Speaker on her ascendancy to the Speaker of the House. I would also like to congratulate the Deputy Speaker of the House, who is my colleague from local government who has also come up to be the Member of Parliament for Tunapuna. I think the people of Trinidad and Tobago are extremely pleased and happy with those two selections.

I would also like to congratulate all my colleagues this afternoon in this august House who have been selected to the Parliament of Trinidad and Tobago in both the Lower and Upper House. Most of all, I would also like to thank the staff of the Parliament who have made this transition very easy. I thank you all. [*Desk thumping*]

I would also like to give a special thanks to our Prime Minister. You would have heard the Member for Princes Town mention him being the youngest Member of Parliament. But you know, if you look at the diversity on our side, I have been told the average age on the Government's side is 45, while in the Opposition's side it is 55, or it could probably be more. But again, our Prime Minister has constantly been putting his faith in the young people of Trinidad and Tobago in various boards, in various key positions. I myself was given the opportunity to serve as the chairman—[*Interruption*]

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Members, please, let us hear the maiden contribution of the Member, please.

Hon. D. Smith: Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I myself was given the opportunity to be the youngest chairman in the Diego Martin region and the youngest out of all the mayors and chairmen. [*Desk thumping*] So it is not old talk. Our Prime Minister knows that the future of our country, both in Trinidad and Tobago, is with the young people of Trinidad and Tobago and he continues to show that.

Even the diversity in terms of on that side. On this side we have as much as eight females representing us. On the Opposition side we see they have five. We are also not sure about even the seating. [*Interruption*] Oh, my math might be a little off.

Miss Ramdial: Yes, where did you get five?

Hon. D. Smith: Okay, it is my maths, I think it is my maths. I would also like to talk about even the seating that we have here, where we also have 25 seats on this side and 16, because I know they are not sure about the Member of Parliament for Naparima and also the Member of Parliament for Mayaro but that is for a different place and a different time.

I would also like to thank the Minister of Finance and the Minister of Planning for doing such a fantastic job in such a short time, in three weeks to prepare such a fantastic budget. [*Desk thumping*] The country was angry when the now Opposition called an election in such a critical time, where a budget would have had to be done in such a short space of time. But I think with that challenge, with the focus of the Member of Parliament for Diego North/East and our planning Minister did a fantastic job in such a short space of time. The people of Trinidad and Tobago thank you both. We would also like to thank again all the members of the Ministry and, of course, planning as well.

When I was sworn in as the Minister of Sport, the thing about it is, I came today, my team at the Ministry gave me a huge file to come and discuss some of the ills that have been occurring in the Ministry of Sport. I just, again, want to let the Members on that side know that all the boasting and bragging they speak of sport and youth, the people of Trinidad and Tobago could safely say you all lost the election mainly for what you all did for the youth and sport in Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*] And I will get to it in a while. [*Desk thumping*] You all lost the election. That is just one of the many issues that you all lost the election on; one of the bigger ones, but we would talk about that later.

After I was sworn in as the Minister of Sport and Youth Affairs, I went straight down to the Ministry of Sport on Abercromby Street and I met with every staff member in the building on Abercromby Street, six floors. They said that was the first time a Minister has ever done that. I also went down to the Sport Company and also in this same building to the youth aspect of gender and youth affairs and I met every staff member and it was very, very sad to hear and see what I saw. Because it is serious business. After we come out from that comedy, it is serious business what has been occurring in the Ministry of Sport. It is not a joke at all.

I saw young people, shoulders shrugged, the air was thick, they were almost in tears, they were embarrassed. A couple of them even said when they come to work they actually take off their Ministry of Sport shirt to travel. Mr. Deputy Speaker, are you hearing what I am saying? They get teased because they work in the Ministry of Sport.

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When I got the portfolio as the Minister of Sport and Youth Affairs, I got calls from residents and friends and they said: Mr. Minister, that is the toughest Ministry that you have in Trinidad and Tobago right now. They have taken something that is supposed to be beautiful and fun. The Member of Parliament for Caroni East, when he had hair back in the day, he played cricket in his day, he knows the beauty that sport brings to people. He knows the comfort and the enjoyment that it brings, how it could build a nation, and it was totally crumbled. It was totally crumbled. It was such an embarrassment to hear.

I have been a Minister for a few weeks and I have had as much as 10 staff members coming to me in tears. Some of you all have been here 20 years, have you ever had any staff member coming to you in tears? In three weeks, 10. Death threats, afraid, frighten for their job. The things they have seen; it is embarrassing, but we will leave the stars to the astronomers. We are not on a witch hunt. The police are there, the AG is aware of what is going on and they will deal with that.

You know, some of them even talk about—the examples. Some of them came straight out of school, fresh from school and they say this is the example that they would set. They saw what was going at the top. Do you know what the sad thing is, Mr. Deputy Speaker? I have been in this House less than a month and I have been to three Cabinet meetings, three and there is absolutely no way, and I want Trinidad and Tobago to hear this, there is no way that things like that could occur and the Cabinet is not aware because in our Cabinet meeting, you have to cross all your t's, dot all your i's. That is the people who run this country who are in that Cabinet. To hear on the other side, while they are making jokes and laughing about young people and athletes and this and that, they all said they did not know. They all said they are waiting until the former Ministers resign with embarrassment.

And they talk about sport tourism? How could you even talk sport tourism with the issues that we had here in Trinidad and Tobago in sport with the young people? Some of the things that they spoke about—and it is all about sport.

I heard today, by the way it is his last day as the leader or Chairman of the ILP. Take care, he might be running for you all in your upcoming internal election, Mr. Warner. Today is his last day, we heard. They spoke about this. The young people spoke about the former chairman and acting Prime Minister, the issues that he had in FIFA. “All yuh want to talk about sport tourism?” You all have the gall to come here and stand and talk about sport? You all lost the election on sport.

What about the CFU under 16 team? One hundred pounds ago, I played football for Trinidad. I won that under 16 tournament as a 15-year-old in Cayman Islands and playing politics with sports they refused to give the young boys the money to go to the tournament. When I played football for Trinidad, countries like Haiti were not sure for the tournament because they did not have the funds. Just imagine Trinidad and Tobago, the richest country in the Caribbean, did not attend a tournament, which we won and were defending champions, because they did not get the funds—playing politics with sport and youth.

Do not talk about the women's football team. That is sport tourism. People had to send corned beef and Crix for our women team. That is tourism. That is what you want to come here and make joke about, because they are playing politics with the girls' football team, an embarrassment, total embarrassment. Countries like Haiti and other places sending food for Trinidad and Tobago women's team because they refused to give them the funds on time. Is serious business.

You want to talk about youth and development? One of your former Ministers, Nicki Minaj, X-rated. How much money was spent in that? And you want to talk about youth and developing youth?

Let us talk about a special advisor in the boxing board. I am trying to find out if that is even legal to have a special advisor in the boxing board. Millions of dollars in front of the Integrity Commission now, serious business. And these are things that the young people spoke to me about. This is not coming from me.

They want to know where the toys come from for Christmas for the young people. You all in Cabinet, you all are supposed to know everything. "Yuh doh know where the toys come from and yuh giving it to our youth? Suppose is from criminals? Suppose it have drugs in the toys." And your answer is you just do not know and we have to take that? Come on man, come on man.

"The worst one, a 17-year-old tell me this in D'Abadie, he have family in Haiti: what about the money that was supposed to go to Haiti for the earthquake? All yuh Deputy Prime Minister keep de money? Ah doh know. We still trying tuh find out. I mean, he make and he could break, eh." You all have internal election coming up. "Take care yuh find him back by you all."

What about the two pull video? These are young people from your constituencies telling me this you know. I am not making this up. "Yuh ask meh and ah answering yuh. Two pull video all yuh say all yuh doh know who it is."

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Members, Members, please let us ensure that we address the Chair, please. Please, ensure that we address the Chair when we are making our responses.

Hon. D. Smith: Sorry, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I am getting a little emotional from that comedy show that we just had there, but it is young people and I am very passionate when it comes to young people in Trinidad and Tobago.

Right in this building, Mr. Deputy Speaker, Cheryl Miller. “All yuh remember Cheryl Miller?” Cheryl Miller’s family came to me and talked to me. One million dollars of taxpayers’ money had to be paid right upstairs in this building. “All yuh want to talk about youth and people?” She worked in the youth department.

SOE, Mr. Deputy Speaker, SOE. How many youths were locked up? How many young people were locked up in this country, and in only one certain area? They want to talk about young people?

And, of course, the biggest one, LifeSport, but we will get to that a little later. We would get to that a little later, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

You know, in sport you want to break records and make records, well they have a quite few. People talk about how many Ministers of National Security we have had, Mr. Deputy Speaker. They speak about how many Ministers of Works and Infrastructure they had in their term.

Are the people aware in Trinidad and Tobago the facts and figures of the Ministry of Sport and Youth Affairs? It is a world record in the Commonwealth; four Ministers of Sport in over a year, including me; six CEOs in the Sport Company in five years; five Permanent Secretaries in five years. “Mary go round de bush and yuh know dey like bush”. Just changing senior people because of illegal activities. Three Chairmen of the Sport Company of Trinidad and Tobago.

“Doh talk the boxing board.” So how can you plan? How can you have anything concrete? How dare you stand up and talk here about what “you do and what you ain do”, Mr. Deputy Speaker? How can they do that?

It was instability and confusion. When I speak to the staff “dey say it have one plan here. In a few weeks dey ain sure if is a next plan there, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Things changing every week, every month, is something new and different.” They have no structure, no foundation for the young people, and they are watching. “If you see” how many young people, Mr. Deputy Speaker, working in the Ministry of Sport and Youth Affairs and they are confused. They are beaten. They are battered and that is one of the reasons why today I did not come and speak about some of the ills, because sports need a facelift. We need to clean up in the Ministry of Sport and Youth Affairs.

Do you know what the sad thing about it is, Mr. Deputy Speaker? When I look around this room here, half of them are gone. Half of them are gone. Where is Minister Roberts? Where is Minister Griffith? Where is Mr. Sancho? “Sanco”, sorry, to get it right. Where is Marlene Coudray? She was Minister with the youth. “All yuh forget dis? All yuh forget?” Where is Lisa Roopnarine?

Miss Ramdial: Lisa?

Hon. D. Smith: Stacy, sorry. Thanks for the correction. “I so forget her because she not here.” You are talking Member for Couva North? Mr. Deputy Speaker, she was in the jump-up. She was a Minister in the Ministry, the only one “that here” now, so she should know. You should have known what was going on, Mr. Deputy Speaker, in Cabinet and you sat down there and you allowed things to happen.

4.10 p.m.

Miss Ramdial: I was not in Cabinet, Sir.

Hon. D. Smith: I forgot. I know why now. I know why now.

Dr. Gopeesingh: “Wat yuh going to do about the budget?”

Hon. D. Smith: Well, I am getting to that. “Yuh getting lil antsy. He hot under de collar.”

I am very pleased with the budget. We got \$602 million and that is very, very noble despite the oil price not being set at \$80 a barrel. It is set at \$45 a barrel and we were very pleased to know that we even got more than last year, with the oil price being set. So I am very pleased with regard to that.

I have spoken to several of the different sporting organizations, the national governing bodies, and they are very pleased so far. Every day we have been trying to meet with at least two of them, to see what their plans are and how we could work with them. Again, our first focus will be cleaning up and putting proper systems in place again. Everything has broken down with regard to policy; with regard to procedure; with regard to accounting practices; with regard to tendering out for projects.

Just imagine, with the LifeSport, the budget was—they actually went out and borrowed as much as \$700 million more “to teef”, Mr. Deputy Speaker. *[Interruption]* Seven hundred million dollars more they went and borrow, right?—now we have the burden, with all the issues. The Member for Princes Town spoke about the three centres that were built, that was a PNM project under two or three former Ministers of Sport, right?—it occurred that it happened, and they built them.

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However, simple things like a maintenance contract—the building is about to be finished and there is no building or maintenance contract put in place. You cannot open a building without having a maintenance contract, but that was not what they were about. They were about trying to catch election and build it quickly so they could parade that.

So now the athletes are upset, and they are upset with them because they now realize that the construction company cannot hand over the three buildings because there is no maintenance contract in place. Well, we have to go out and tender because under the People's National Movement, we ensure that we do everything properly with transparency, and we will go out and have a tender out for that as well.

I just want to remind them on that side, they forgot about what we have built. We built the Hasely Crawford Stadium and the Jean Pierre Complex. We started the Elite Athletes Programme. We started a sports degree at the University of Trinidad and Tobago. We need to find a way, as you know supply always is behind demand in all parts of life. You never have enough to reach what you want.

We in the Ministry of Sport and Youth Affairs are trying to clean up the image of sport and youth in Trinidad and Tobago, so corporate Trinidad and Tobago could come back and start to invest in the young people in Trinidad and Tobago again.

In conversations that I have had with a number of organizations, both internationally and locally, where they have funds to give out as corporate citizens, they do not look at sport anymore. They look at green. They look at the disabled. They look at the elderly, projects like that. By the time they hear sport in Trinidad and Tobago, they run and that is because of the work, Mr. Deputy Speaker, of the Opposition today.

Those things will never happen under the People's National Movement; never. We will be focusing on—as they spoke about spike projects; the Brian Lara Stadium, they are quick to talk about that—sit there for five years and did absolutely nothing with it, and have the gall to come here, and speak about the Brian Lara Stadium. Trust me, in this term, in our year, we will find a proper situation where we could utilize that. We will consult with the right people, with the engineers and ensure that it is built, and whatever it may be, is the best situation for that.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, we speak of the sports institute, this is something that is needed in Trinidad and Tobago so all bodies in sport could consult with each other and make the right decisions. We will be working closely with all the NGBs to ensure that we have the proper structure for a sporting institute.

We talk about green parks, we want to ensure that Trinidad and Tobago continues its way on going green and, you are going to be seeing some of the recreational parks with solar, with broadband. As you know, we are looking at broadband throughout the country with hotspots. We are also going to be using the parks to ensure that families could enjoy the parks and so on.

Of course, most of all, we are going to have a proper maintenance schedule. This is something that has been lacking in Trinidad and Tobago in the parks and all the stadia that we have. The maintenance team at the Ministry was so happy to hear that we are going to be focusing on maintaining what we have, Mr. Deputy Speaker. What we did was we went on and built new stuff and we forgot what was there before. We are actually right now in the process of finalizing to get some proper software.

As you saw, we got a good allocation in the budget to ensure that we could maintain what we have, and ensure that anything that we build from now, would have a proper structure and a schedule to maintain. So we would not have to close down any of our facilities; simple things like preventative maintenance. You do not have to wait for a bulb or a track to be worn out. If a track has a six-year or 10-year life, why wait for 12 years? Change it in nine years. “Doh wait for de place to close down”, and that is what we plan to do, Mr. Deputy Speaker, to ensure that the young people could utilize their facilities and, of course, we can attract people from different countries to come and participate and utilize our facilities.

As you know, in the next few months will be the Olympics. As you know, we have a lot of great athletes in Trinidad and Tobago. We have done pretty good. Jamaica now sets the benchmark with regard to medalling in the Olympics—the Ministry of Sport and Youth Affairs, again, will be supporting. We met with the Trinidad and Tobago Olympic Committee and the NAAA and we will be working very closely to ensure that our athletes are prepared and have the support, not like what happened in the last five years where athletes had to be given Crix and corn beef in other countries, donated by people. We are going to ensure that they are comfortable. We are going to ensure that they are prepared, and we are going to ensure that the funds are there ready and available, once they are compliant with our standards with regard to receiving funds.

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We spoke about the World Cup. We saw the World Cup team drawn with Mexico twice in a few weeks. They beat Panama for the first time in 10 years, with the limited resources that they have, they have been doing a fantastic job. We are there. We saw in 2006 the glory, the love and the unifying that the World Cup team could do if they qualify for the World Cup. So again, we are going to be supporting and working with the World Cup, Trinidad and Tobago Football Association, again, ensuring that they are compliant and, of course, working with them and with corporate Trinidad and Tobago to ensure that they have the funds to prepare and again hopefully make it to a World Cup.

The Member for Princes Town also spoke about short-term and long-term plans. Well, I could tell you our short-term plan is to ensure that there is integrity and our long-term plan is to ensure that there is integrity. Those are the two main things that you need to hear that we will be cleaning up with regard to that.

We will also be—we already had conversations with a number of the other Ministries: Ministry of Education, which is very closely linked to youth; the Ministry of Community Development, Culture and the Arts. We will be doing a lot of cross work with these Ministries: the Ministry of Social Development and Family Services and of course, the Ministry of National Security. So you are going to be seeing a lot of programmes that we are working together with these Ministries to ensure that our young people and our athletes are well taken care of in Trinidad and Tobago.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, with regard to the budget how it affects my people, my residents that I represent and serve in Diego Martin Central, since being elected as the Member of Parliament. I have hit the ground running as always, and I have had a couple Member of Parliament public days, and I have been speaking to a number of the residents since the budget. I have been getting emails, WhatsApp, text messages and so on. So I am getting the feeling and the buzz from the people of Diego Martin Central.

One of the things that we plan to do for them is something that has been on the drawing board. In fact, I met with the former Minister of Sport on this project with regard to the Northern Recreation Ground. We are to finally have that up and going as soon as possible.

One of the things that the residents are very pleased about in terms of the budget, is the local government reform. They are very much looking forward to that, because a number the Members on the other side—I remember the Member for Chaguanas West, calling, writing several times when he was the Minister of

the Environment and Water Resources. We all know the issues that we have in Diego Martin, not just Diego Martin Central, but all Diego Martin with flooding and never got a response. I have all the WhatsApps on my phone, never got a response. We had to go and use our limited resources in local government to ensure that it does not, and did not flood in Diego Martin, but those days are over.

The Member for Tabaquite, we had to beg him when he was—I see he is not here again. He was the Minister of Works, we had to beg him to pave the Diego Martin Main Road, people’s cars were getting damaged; those days are done. I have already spoken to the Member of Parliament for Laventille West and we are going to be seeing a lot of work happening in the Diego Martin Central area.

The health centre in Diamond Vale—[*Interruption*]

Mr. Singh: I was responding to Amery Browne.

Hon. D. Smith: Okay, I was the chairman at the time, but you will respond to me now if you want anything done with sport in Chaguanas. I will answer you because that is how we move, Mr. Deputy Speaker, we respect everyone in Trinidad and Tobago who respond to issues. [*Desk thumping*] If the Member for Chaguanas West did not acknowledge the chairman for Diego Martin, if the chairman for Chaguanas calls me I would help anytime, because that is my brother and I respect him.

In terms of the health centre in Diamond Vale, we are looking at that as being earmarked for a while now, they are very excited about getting that done.

The elderly are very excited about the resolution of the Clico issue, so they could finally get their funds and so on.

Housing: Victoria Keys and Four Roads again, Mr. Deputy Speaker, they “lay-laid” and sat on that for five years. Victoria Keys and Four Roads—finally the people of Diego Martin and Diego Martin Central could get housing in their area.

We are going to be working with the elderly and disabled. The Minister of Social Development and Family Services and I have spoken on that, and you are going to be seeing a number of projects with regard to that.

They are also very excited, the young people, that they could finally use their laptops with the broadband Internet that they will have throughout Trinidad and Tobago; the young people are ecstatic about that.

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So in closing, Mr. Deputy Speaker, this is serious business. This is not a joke. This Government is serious. We are here to work for the people. We are here to work for the young people. We have already shown, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that we will be investing heavily in the young people of Trinidad and Tobago, and I am very proud and pleased to be part of that investment, to ensure that we clean up the act in the Ministry of Sport and Youth Affairs. That \$602 million under PNM will be stretched to a billion dollars, whereas with them it would probably have been cut down to \$100 million after we are done with it.

So, I thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, for my time. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Thank you. Members, it is now 4.21. The sitting is suspended for tea and we will return in 30 minutes time, thank you.

4.21 p.m.: *Sitting suspended.*

4.50 p.m.: *Sitting resumed.*

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Member for Tobago East, hon. MP, Minister, please proceed. [*Crosstalk*]

The Minister of State in the Office of the Prime Minister (Hon. Ayanna Webster-Roy): Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and congratulations on your appointment. [*Desk thumping*] First of all, let me congratulate all who presented before for their contributions to this debate. From what I have heard and seen thus far, I have a gut feeling that my tenure in this honourable House will be extremely exciting.

Today, just over one month since I have been elected as the parliamentary representative for Tobago East, I make my maiden contribution in this august House. I wish to thank my constituency for so graciously and overwhelmingly bestowing their confidence in me to represent their interest, and to be part of a larger team of eminently qualified men and women committed to serve in the national interest.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I wish to give my constituents the assurance that I will not betray the confidence and trust that they have placed in me. [*Desk thumping*] I also wish to extend my sincere gratitude to the hon. Prime Minister for giving me the opportunity to serve as Minister of State in the Office of the Prime Minister.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I wish to congratulate the Minister of Finance for putting the country on the path to economic stability in the presentation of the national budget 2015/2016. When we presented ourselves to the people of this great nation, we had a rallying call of "Let's do this". Mr. Deputy Speaker, our Hon. Minister of

Finance, he did it. [*Desk thumping*] He delivered a people's budget and a realistic framework for economic stability. I am indeed thankful for the opportunity to participate in this very important discourse in which the underlying elements include prudent fiscal management, social and economic development and stability, and the protection of the future of our children.

As Minister in the Office of the Prime Minister Tobago Affairs Unit and the hon. Member for Tobago East, I am particularly pleased to bring the Tobago perspective to the fore. Along with my other colleague, the hon. Member for Tobago West, we will finally give adequate and effective representation to the people of Tobago through our many contributions, this being one of many to come.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, the People's National Movement's manifesto which is now officially Government policy will strategically place us on the path to holistic national development that the past Government failed to achieve. This Government firmly believes that Tobagonians must be primarily responsible for the growth and development of the island of Tobago and its people.

The current constitutional and legislative arrangements between the central Government and the Tobago House of Assembly remains a significant constraint to Tobago's development. Internal self-government is something the people of Tobago are passionate about. The party of promise or the PP Government played games with the issue. The only time the matter became of importance was always on the crux of an election. They mamaguyed us just before the 2013 THA elections, and then they tried to mamaguy us again during the lead-up to the last general election. This is an issue which should transcend petty politics. Tobagonians have a clear idea of what they want and many indicated this on the campaign trail. Mr. Deputy Speaker, I look forward to legislation being brought before the Parliament to treat with the issue once and for all.

As a young Tobagonian, I would like to be part of history in seeing the call for internal self-government answered during my first term as Member of Parliament for Tobago East, and I am optimistically hopeful because the great party that forms this Government has agreed to internal self-government for Tobago, at all levels.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, in the budget statement laid by the hon. Minister of Finance, this Government clearly articulated the economic sustainable development of Tobago and the nation as a whole. I am of the firm view that the allocations to the Assembly are not only reasonable, given the current state of the

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national economy, but sensitive to Tobago's most pressing developmental needs. For fiscal 2016, the Assembly is allocated \$2.77 billion of which \$2.34 billion is for recurrent spending, \$404 million for development programme expenditure and \$23 million for the Unemployment Relief Programme.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, since the DRC ruling in 2001, the traditional practice has been to allocate funds to the Assembly on the basis of the barest minimum of 4.03 per cent of the national budget as stipulated in the DRC ruling. This year's allocation of 4.4 per cent of the national budget to the Assembly represents a significant improvement over previous years, and that is why I say the allocation to the Assembly is reasonable, given the prevailing economic circumstances under which the country finds itself at this time. Also, Mr. Deputy Speaker, the allocation for development projects in Tobago has crossed the \$400 million mark for the first time up from an average of under \$350 million over the last five years under the previous administration.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, beyond the direct allocation to the Tobago House of Assembly, the budget makes allocation for another \$1.13 billion to be spent in Tobago by central Government and state agencies. Significant amount of this allocation goes towards upgrade and the development of the security architecture in Tobago and projects by public utilities such as WASA and T&TEC in Tobago. Over the last five years, because the Assembly was not represented on the boards of these state agencies, the Assembly had little or no influence over the work programme of these agencies. As a consequence, many projects which the Assembly considers to be high priority projects in Tobago such as the desilting of the Hillsborough Dam and the supply of water to Hermitage in Charlotteville, were left unattended. Today, with Assembly representation on the boards of these entities, I have no doubt that there will be greater alignment of the work programme of these state agencies operating in Tobago with the priorities of the Assembly, and a greater responsiveness to the needs of Tobagonians.

As a matter of fact, Mr. Deputy Speaker, unlike those on the other side who promised water for all and only delivered water for some, I have the firm commitment of the hon. Minister that we will get our fair share of pipe-borne water, and the people of Hermitage in Charlotteville in my constituency is a priority. The residents of Hermitage have never had pipe-borne water despite promises of water for all by the previous administration. [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Deputy Speaker, the allocations to the Assembly are very sensitive to some of Tobago's most urgent developmental needs. Please permit me to examine some of them. It is now widely accepted and recognized that the tourism sector in Tobago has a critical role to play as part of our overall effort to diversify the national

economy, and reduce its dependence on the fortunes of the energy sector. I am heartened by the fact that the budgetary allocation to the Tobago House of Assembly provides meaningful support to the tourism sector in Tobago.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, the allocation to the Assembly for the development programme expenditure increased by about 69 per cent from about \$15.5 million in 2015 to about \$26.2 million in fiscal 2016, the current fiscal year.

5.05 p.m.

This allocation will provide substantially for the upgrades to tourism sites and attractions throughout Tobago, and assist in giving the island the competitive edge over its main competitors. I am also comforted by the plans in the budget for the construction of a new airport terminal at the ANR Robinson International Airport at Crown Point, [*Desk thumping*] as well as plans to resolve existing challenges on the inter-island air and sea ports. Mr. Deputy Speaker, tourism is too important to Tobago and the national economy for us to allow growth in the sector to be stymied by inadequate airport facilities and inefficiencies in the inter-island air transport system.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, even as we seek to enhance Tobago's tourism product there is also a need to develop and strengthen new forms of economic activity in Tobago. So that is why I am particularly heartened by the support in the budget for the ongoing entrepreneurial thrust of the Assembly. In this regard, the budgetary allocations for the Cove Eco-Industrial and Business Park, the Enterprise Assistance Loan Programme and grant programmes of the Assembly have been substantially increased. [*Desk thumping*] To illustrate, Mr. Deputy Speaker, the allocation in the development programme estimates of the Assembly support enterprise development in Tobago, increased by about 48 per cent from \$10.5 million in fiscal 2015 to about \$15.5 million in fiscal 2016. [*Desk thumping*] As a young person, I am particularly delighted to see the support for entrepreneurial development in Tobago in this budget. Thank you, Minister of Finance. [*Desk thumping*]

I am also excited by the support in the budget for the housing programme of the Tobago House of Assembly. Mr. Deputy Speaker, over the last five years the Assembly's efforts to supply public housing in Tobago have been significantly compromised by the lack of budgetary support from central government. As I speak, there are over 7,500 listed applicants—[*Interruption*]

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Members, Members, please, the little crosstalk, let us minimize it, please. Thank you.

Hon. A. Webster-Roy: Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. As I speak, there are over 7,500 listed applicants in Tobago seeking housing. In this budget the allocation for housing in the development programme estimates of the Assembly increased by about 85 per cent from about \$28 million [*Desk thumping*] in fiscal 2015 to about \$52 million in fiscal 2016. [*Desk thumping*] The increased provisions in the budget for housing will certainly go a long way to accelerate the Assembly's housing programme and address the significant gap between the demand and supply for public housing in Tobago.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I am particularly passionate about the issue of housing as this is one of the main areas of concern for my constituents. As I speak, I remember the countless number of young professionals and single parents I would have interacted with in the various communities in Tobago East, all demonstrating a burning desire to acquire their own home. Also related to the issue of housing in Tobago is the matter of land titles, Mr. Deputy Speaker, an issue that is very dear to the hearts of all Tobagonians is the regularization of land titles.

In keeping with Government's policy of facilitating the implementation of sustainable land reform measures in Tobago, we intend to ensure there is once again adequate collaboration with the assembly to formalize the land rights in Tobago as the prerequisite for improved security of land tenure and sustainable economic development. This Government has given its commitment to the residents of Tobago to assist in the regularization of land titles on the island. Data collected indicated that in Tobago over 80 per cent of persons are unable to access the equity in the property they own to gain access to funds from lending institutions as they do not have any proof of ownership for the land on which they live. In short, they have undisputed possession but no deed. This matter also affects the State's ability to lease property for Government business in Tobago since proper title is a prerequisite to such an engagement.

In addition, utility assistance, home repair and home improvement grants provided by the State require proof of ownership of the land or, to a minimum, a non-objection to use affidavit by the applicant from the title holder or holders. Where there is absolutely no title document access to these services is completely frustrated. Further, it should be noted that the lack of documentary evidence for the ownership of lands in Tobago often results in many land disputes. These disputes have created acrimony and conflict among family members and neighbours. Litigation has often resulted in the destruction of family units and it is a sustained source of community-based conflict.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, this is particularly important, family is important to Tobagonians so this matter must be resolved. It is also noted that the process to bring the lands under the Real Property Act, Chap. 56:02, is quite costly for most Tobagonians and significantly higher than in Trinidad. In this regard, it is proposed that the regularization of land titles in Tobago should follow the Land Adjudication and Registration Programme. This Government will give priority to this issue and, unlike the former administration, seek to bring the necessary legislative framework to the House in a reasonable time frame.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I am pleased for the support given in the budget to improve the security architecture in Tobago. In many budget presentations over the past five years there have been many broken promises to the people of Tobago regarding the construction of the new police stations at Old Grange and Roxborough. When the last PNM Government demitted office in 2010 the contracts for these two police stations were already awarded and construction was ready to begin; for five long years under the last administration absolutely nothing happened with these critical projects—was promise after promise in every budget presentation, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

So, I am particularly delighted to hear the hon. Finance Minister has given his commitment, not only to start the construction of the long-awaited Old Grange and Roxborough Police Stations but also the new fire service headquarters in Roxborough—my hometown, a village I dearly love. Mr. Deputy Speaker, as the representative for Tobago East, when I examine the range of projects funded in the budget under the development programme estimates of the Tobago House of Assembly I am extremely happy that some of the most urgent developmental needs in Tobago East were taken into consideration. In this context, I see projects for the development of housing in areas such as Belle Garden, Castara, Hope and Roxborough.

I also see support for many projects to improve tourism sites and attractions in Tobago East, such as upgrades to beach facilities in Charlotteville and Bloody Bay, and the construction of new beach facilities in Englishman's Bay. There are also projects to support the agricultural and fishing sector. In this context, an allocation of \$5 million is made for the development of agricultural access roads, particularly in Tobago East. Mr. Deputy Speaker, the proposal announced by the Minister of Finance to exempt duties and taxes from inputs into the agricultural sector, like approved chemicals, approved vehicles, and approved fishing vessels and equipment will also significantly benefit residents of Tobago East, many of whom make their livelihood from the agricultural and fishing sector. The

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allocations to the Assembly also provides for the decentralization of Government services in East Tobago. In this regard, an allocation of \$2 million is made to start work on the Roxborough plaza.

Provision is also made for the establishment of a social services complex in Mason Hall. The allocations to the Assembly also provides for the enhancement of the road infrastructure in Tobago East. Provision is made for work on the L'Anse Fourmi/Charlotteville Road, the Mount Saint George/Castara Road, the Northside Road and the Windward Road. In general, the allocations to the development programme of the Assembly treats in a very comprehensive way with some of the most urgent developmental needs of Tobago East, and for this I am extremely thankful.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, permit me to treat with an issue which is a source of personal disappointment for me, that is the execution of the Green Fund in Tobago. When I heard the Minister of Finance indicate in his budget presentation what has happened with the Green Fund I felt a personal sense of disappointment because of the way Tobago was treated over the last five years as it relates to this fund. In my former job as coordinator in the Division of Community Development and Culture, I was placed on a committee to provide a community development perspective on proposals submitted to the committee and provide investigative insight on the various organizations that attempted to access the Green Fund. Over the last five years, not one, not a single one of the proposals recommended by the Tobago committee received funding. Not one, I am not lying, I was on the committee, and there were many, many excellent proposals with great potential to positively impact the lives of Tobagonians. Even proposals from the Tobago House of Assembly's Department of Natural Resources and the Environment did not receive the nod from the final evaluating committee in Trinidad—none, not a nod, not a yes. We got nothing.

I sometimes wonder if allowing the Tobago executing committee to function was a matter of tokenism on the part of the past PP Government. As a matter of fact, I spent at least two long days serving on an interview panel to operationalize the Green Fund Unit in Tobago, and despite recommending a number of highly qualified persons, the unit was never operationalized. Every month they pay rent for a building that was fully furnished and never staffed. That made me vex, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

5.20 p.m.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I now wish to turn my attention to the issue of the former administration's operations in Tobago. The Central Administrative Services in May 2010 was renamed the Ministry of Tobago Development under the Sixth and Seventh Schedule responsible for the following services: the Weights and

Measures Inspectorate to enforce the Weights and Measures Ordinance; the meteorological services which provides 24-hour monitoring of weather conditions for aviation and climate purposes, and the collection, analysis and dissemination of crime information; the Registrar General's Department to manage civil registry services, company registry services and land registry services; the sub-Treasury Department to manage the encashment of government cheques and the sale of legal documents: *Trinidad and Tobago Gazette*, Acts of Trinidad and Tobago and legal notices; the coordination of matters related to Tobago through the delivery of central government services to Tobago, in collaboration with the Tobago House of Assembly and, finally, statutory boards and other bodies as it relates to the THA nominees, when the Tobago Regional Health Authority Board is appointed.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, despite its original mandate, the mischief Ministry, otherwise known as the Ministry of Tobago Development, was used as a political tool to duplicate and, in many instances, encroach on the work of the Tobago House of Assembly in what should have been a collaborative effort. For instance, over the past five years under the People's Partnership Government, there were many instances of encroachment by the then Ministry of Tobago Development under responsibilities of the Tobago House of Assembly. As a matter of fact, I am aware that the Chief Secretary wrote to then Prime Minister, the current Member for Siparia, identifying the areas of encroachment and duplication and requesting that central government take action. As of today, I am not aware if that letter was even acknowledged. Nothing, absolutely nothing, came of it.

Some projects undertaken by the then Ministry of Tobago Development—let me call it the “Mischief Ministry”—which comes directly under the Fifth Schedule include: functions provided by the Business Development Unit which was established within the Ministry carrying out similar functions of a unit already existing in a division of Finance in the Tobago House of Assembly; a Community Liaison Unit established within the Ministry which was mandated to function as an outreach body to the population in an effort to assess individual needs. All the functions provided by this unit were a direct duplication of the Community Development and Culture Division and social welfare, which falls under the Tobago House of Assembly.

A Non-governmental Organization Support Unit which was established within the Ministry to support and encourage the sustainable development of NGOs in Tobago, for their combined, social, economic, environmental and cultural benefits for the people of Tobago. Again, the work of this unit duplicated that of the

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Community Development and Culture Division, as outlined under the Fifth Schedule of the Tobago House of Assembly Act. Other examples of duplication and excesses include: the vertical farming project, dairy farm project, hydroponics set up project, all under the agricultural sector for which the Assembly has purview.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, to add further insult to injury, the Ministry of Tobago Development established a special purpose company to further frustrate the Tobago House of Assembly and legitimize some of its dirty work. The Human Capital Development Facilitation Company Limited was used to legitimize areas the Ministry wanted to violate under the Fifth Schedule of the THA Act. At present, the company is millions of dollars in debt and has entered into a number of lease agreements that defy rational thinking. Imagine on my first day on the job they wanted to try and get me to sign off on some \$12 million loan. I might be young but I am not “dotish”. [*Desk thumping*]

Buildings owned by activists leased by the company and some entity called “Best”—“ah still trying to wrap meh head around what is Best”; buildings leased with taxpayers’ dollars covering the expenses. In some cases, the buildings are constructed with taxpayers’ dollars, even while rent is paid to the owners of the property. That is your legacy in Tobago. I can give you one example, Mr. Deputy Speaker, the Ministry spent close to \$1 million renovating a building owned by a brother of one of my opponents for the Tobago East seat, and the Ministry is now renting the facility at a cost of \$42,000 per month. You—that is your legacy.

That company, and even the Ministry, was used to provide employment for friends and family of the TOP and Forward agents of the People’s Partnership Government in Tobago. As a matter of fact, within weeks of the last THA election, the losing candidates from the TOP received high-paying jobs—yes, high-paying jobs. Some of them getting in excess of \$15,000 per month to sit and “scratch their behind”. They got those jobs without interviews. Even the political leader of the TOP and member of the People’s Partnership spoke about the nepotism. [*Interruption*]

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Hon. Member for Tobago East, please find a different word; also expunge it from the record. Thank you.

Hon. A. Webster-Roy: They got jobs without interviews. Even the political leader of the TOP and member of the People’s Partnership, spoke about the political nepotism and cronyism at the Ministry of Tobago Development and the special purpose company during the recently concluded election campaign. One

small company recently established with 115 employees, and in many instances, husband, wife, brother, sister, son and daughter all employed in the company. Workers at that company, 70 years old and 80 years old calling down big salaries, while many young professionals in Tobago crying out for an opportunity. And Members on the other side want to talk about nepotism and cronyism.

Those on the other side are trying to disrespect this Government's attempt to create meaningful training opportunities for our nation's graduates. The Member for Caroni Central spoke about graduate employment programmes being an attempt to build up partisan political cadre, is a matter of "hot pot calling kettle black". That is exactly what they did at the Ministry of Tobago Development.

In the lead-up to the election, they engaged a host of people on short-term contracts, the majority of them young people. Unfortunately, those they wanted to protect, their friends and activists, they gave three-year contracts and placed them under the company. They protected their friends, but left the young and vulnerable out to dry with short-term contracts, and when their six months come to an end, they want to go and say "I fired them". Check the letters, "meh signature not dey". Unfortunately the situation exists.

When I hear those on the other side talk about political victimization at what was the Ministry of Tobago Development, it irks me. If someone was engaged for a period of six months and that term of engagement comes to an end, how could it be firing? How could it be victimization? Six-month contract, six months end, then you have to move on. How could that be a political victimization? [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Deputy Speaker, some of those who are out there protesting because of their short-term contract coming to an end, were receiving salary in excess of \$8,000 per month with only three subjects to their name. I know people in Tobago with degrees who now calling down a job for \$8,000. Some of them in short-term, three subjects, \$8,000 per month. I want the public to note that.

Many of them were political appointees placed in jobs without interviews and with nothing much to do. I am sure the Leader of the Opposition did not have a clue of the wanton "squandermania" taking place under her watch at the mischief Ministry they created to frustrate the Tobago House of Assembly. [*Crosstalk*] Some of the projects and programmes that the Cabinet approved then in operationalizing it, the then Minister did his own thing. You all need to have a better oversight of your Ministries.

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Mr. Deputy Speaker, this new Government is committed to respecting the Tobago House of Assembly and will engage in continuous meaningful consultation to the betterment of the people of Tobago, and will therefore work with the Tobago House of Assembly to right the wrongs that have taken place over the last five years. As a matter of fact, the collaboration has already started. There was a coordinated effort between the Office of the Prime Minister - Tobago Affairs Unit and various divisions and agencies of the Tobago House of Assembly, in the aftermath of what I will call a freak storm on Thursday. Affected residents were able to seek quick relief, through the collaborative approach that was undertaken.

The Office of the Prime Minister - Tobago Affairs Unit will be focusing its attention on collaborating with the Tobago House of Assembly to preserve, protect and defend its autonomy while advancing the rights and dignity of Tobagonians and creating the best opportunities for Tobago. In this regard, we are now guided by the precedent scheduled and it has been reverted to CAST. In collaboration with the Tobago House of Assembly, the Central Administrative Services Tobago will be reviewing some of the key initiatives under the former Ministry of Tobago Development and the Human Capital Development Facilitation Company Limited, to ensure that maximum benefit is achieved by all the people of Tobago and in a fair, collaborative and meaningful manner.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, we believe in order to reduce poverty, social support services, education and training and continued financial assistance for some of the programmes which were aligned to the Ministry of Tobago Development and the HCDF Company are imperative, but we also believe in value for money. Therefore, the Central Administrative Services Tobago is being restructured to prevent and avoid duplication and waste. I am happy to note that the restructuring process will not affect some of the signature projects already on the way. As such, the completion of the Meteorological Services Division building at Crown Point, and the completion of the CAST east administrative complex will remain priority projects.

In closing, I wish to reflect on a point made by the Member for Tabaquite. The Member noted that opposition is an integral part of government. Yes, this is, indeed, true. As such, all the Members of this House have a duty to serve without fear or favour. You on the other side, have a duty to support and acknowledge policy, especially when the wider public will benefit. We, the hon. Members on the Government Bench, we have a responsibility to develop policy in the best interest of all and not a few. Let us not repeat the mistakes of those in the recent

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past. We all will be called to give account by man and God. Let us work in this honourable House to honour God and serve man. [*Desk thumping*] So that when our day of reckoning comes, we will all find favour. The Member for Naparima said that God is not PNM, and that is true. But it is our God who sets up and takes down governments, and this time our God chose PNM. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I thank you for the opportunity afforded to me to address this House today, and I thank all of my colleagues for their support and attention.

Thank you.

ADJOURNMENT

Motion made and question proposed: That this House do now adjourn to Monday, October 12, 2015 at 10.00 a.m. [*Hon. C. Robinson-Regis*]

Question put and agreed to.

House adjourned accordingly.

Adjourned at 5.35 p.m.