

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES*Thursday, October 06, 2016*

The House met at 1.30 p.m.

PRAYERS[MADAM SPEAKER *in the Chair*]**PAPER LAID**

Social Sector Investment Programme 2017. [*The Minister of Finance (Hon. Colm Imbert)*]

APPROPRIATION (FINANCIAL YEAR 2017) BILL, 2016

[Second Day]

Question proposed.

Mrs. Kamla Persad-Bissessar SC (*Siparia*): [*Desk thumping*] Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, as I rise to begin the Opposition's response to the—[*Interruption*]

Madam Speaker: Members, please.

Mrs. K. Persad Bissessar SC: Thank you, Madam. As I rise to begin the Opposition's response to this 2017 budget, I would take a moment please to express gratitude to Opposition MPs and Senators, who have for the past several days held consultations with constituents of every constituency in Trinidad, in order to obtain feedback. So MPs and hon. Senators—[*Desk thumping*]

I also want to thank the experts and professionals who participated in these meetings, and basically we did this to try to get all-encompassing representation, because that is one of our hallmarks. We truly believe that we listen and then we lead. We have always been a party that holds firmly to

the credo of no taxation without representation, [*Desk thumping*] and that such representation can only come through consultation with the people.

Madam Speaker, I also want to thank all those persons who took time to make comments and suggestions, both from right here in Trinidad and Tobago as well as abroad. I want to thank them for the comments and suggestions they sent. So we got widespread feedback on this budget and that allows us really, myself and the others, to speak on behalf of those whom we represent. From the feedback there was a common denominator running through the expressions that were received, and it was one that exhibited grave concern, fears and in many cases outright alarm, over the measures announced in budget last Friday. If I were to sum up the general tone and messaging from that feedback, it would be this: that budget 2017 is a colossal failure. It is an exercise in superficiality, vagueness and at times deliberate obtuseness. [*Desk thumping*]

The budget is also riddled with miscalculations and misrepresentations, and just like last year, Madam Speaker, despite the many words coming from this side of the House that the Minister's calculations were wrong, that the Minister would not be able to receive the \$12 billion in VAT, he persisted that he would get \$12 billion. We see now that this year from the estimates, that he was wrong in his calculations. [*Desk thumping*] He was wrong then and we will see whether he will be wrong again in other areas.

So we see the budget, you know, in a way attempting to "bambooze" the population. A population that is still waiting to hear from the Finance Minister about tangible measures to adequately address security matters,

safety matters and the economic challenges we are facing in the country today. [*Desk thumping*] When I heard the presentation, I found myself really at a loss and wondering about the mindset of a Government, and more so that of a very seasoned politician, both from the Minister and from his boss, that they would deliver a budget which, in my respectful view, fails to acknowledge and address the reality of the position in Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*] Perhaps, you know, I heard some say and I may want to repeat that, some are saying that perhaps hon. Prime Minister, your concern and care should move from Whitehall to Mason Hall, in order to touch back roots with the people of Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*]

So I am reminded, Madam Speaker, of a very popular calypso, a song by the great calypsonian, David Rudder, when we look at the reality in Trinidad and Tobago today, and that song is called *The Madman's Rant, Tales from a Strange Land*. You may recall it if you are as young as I am. It is more than 20 years ago. Some of us may recall it. That song came to me because the more I wondered about what could possess a seasoned politician like the hon. Minister to present what is a very dysfunctional and wanting fiscal package, to the population at large. Then I say, well, this has to be coming from a distorted conception of the reality in Trinidad and Tobago, and that caused me to reflect even more because truly, it is like tales from a strange land indeed.

So in this strange land, the majority of ordinary citizens awake every day to newspaper headlines screaming literally, bloody murder, [*Desk thumping*] and this is not just weekly, but daily, and not just one murder a day, sometimes two, three, four and even five murders a day. Indeed, since

this Government has come into office, there have been—what is it?—about 400-plus murders from September to now. [*Desk thumping*] And in this strange, sad land—and incidentally this was not the case just a mere one and a half years ago.

We could turn on our TV sets and we see mothers crying every day, because their teenage sons have been wiped out in gang wars. We see nine-year old children gunned down in the streets in broad daylight when they go out to the parlour. As we say, they go to what?—“to run message” or to carry a message, “they gone on message” in the neighbourhood. We see a young woman, a mother of two, kidnapped in broad daylight. Her family weeping, begging that she could be returned. We see taxi drivers working to provide their families with food on their table gunned down. We see videos of unmasked gunmen attacking a car with a woman right up in this busy place here in St. James. We see it circulated online. We see people’s homes being broken into and they are not only being badly beaten, yes. It is not just they are only badly beaten and robbed, you know. They even go to, their autistic daughters are being suffocated to death in this strange land that has become Trinidad and Tobago.

Had it been my Government in office, Madam Speaker, initiatives to stem the rise in crime would have been up front in this budget, [*Desk thumping*] rather than appearing in the vacuous repeats at page 69 of the budget way down. [*Desk thumping*] Because you see, if you or your loved ones are dead, then nothing else in the budget matters, nothing else matters.

And in this strange, sad land, Madam Speaker, where the Health Minister seems clueless about the deadly Zika virus, hospitals remain closed,

mothers die in hospitals giving birth, people wait for hours at public institutions only to be told. “Look, we do not have the medications. We just do not have the medications.” Instead of getting relief from our hospitals, people are going there to die, that is what is happening. [*Desk thumping*] It was not like this a mere one and half years ago, and I say again, had it been my Government, initiatives to improve the health care sector would have been upfront in the budget, [*Desk thumping*] upfront, rather than way down at page 62 in this Budget Statement, several hours into the budget speech. So again, I say, if your loved ones are sick, if they are dying and, of course, if they are dead, for lack of proper health care, again, nothing else in this budget would matter.

In this strange land we are seeing independent office holders like the former Governor of the Central Bank, and we are seeing the highest most esteemed office in the land, that of the President, being attacked, being harassed, forced to engage in a war of words. While all of that is happening, no attention is being paid to the declining, depreciating value of the Trinidad and Tobago dollar, to the appalling state of the Judiciary and, of course, as I said, to rampant crime. [*Desk thumping*]

And there is, no one would deny, rampant crime and unemployment today. Women and children are being murdered in their homes. Girls are being assaulted and some are even disappearing, never to be found, and in the midst of all of this, there is a deafening silence from the Government and the authorities, as to what measures they intend to take to curb this rapid descent into tragedy and chaos. [*Desk thumping*]

But wait, you know, there is even more in this strange state of affairs

in this strange land. The hon. Prime Minister appears almost every week in some public forum on the media, prophesying doom and gloom, telling citizens that we are on the brink of bankruptcy, that the citizens must, to use his words, “wean themselves off the State” and that their tax dollars should no longer be used to build roads and schools and health centres and so on in effect. [*Desk thumping*]

Whilst we are being warned about the doom and the gloom and tightened belt, at the same time this Government is discontinues a case against a friend for wastage of billions of taxpayers’ dollars. [*Desk thumping*] At the same time this Government invests billions in constructing a stadium, the famous tsunami stadium, no tangible use at this time, and incidentally, that was mired in so much corruption, one of the biggest corruption scandals in the country, and we are still to get to the heart of the corruption at that Tarouba stadium. [*Desk thumping*]

We see the purchasing of millions of dollars in paintings, saying that this will ensure people of the country gain some form of culture, and some being accused of throwing—what is it?—pearls before swine. Well, look, I am no swine. I do not know who those people are and, therefore, I do not understand what that expression meant, but we have spent the money on it.

In this strange land, Madam Speaker, that same Prime Minister, telling us tighten the belt and no money and doom and gloom, appears on a political platform, tells public servants that if they accept their legally due back pay, they can lose their jobs, [*Desk thumping*] and at the same time, appears on another political platform doing a very strange dance, singing an equally odd song, in a voice that sounds, well, that sounds strange saying, “I

want my money”. “I want my money.” “I want my money.” [*Desk thumping*]

Let me point out the misrepresentation that is being made repeatedly in this House, that no Government, campaigning for re-election will deliberately lose an election, just to make and spite an incoming Government having to pay for the back pay. [*Desk thumping*] Nobody will do that, [*Desk thumping*] another misrepresentation from the other side, *The Madman’s Rant*.

1.45 p.m.

We knew how we were going to honour all that back pay because we made the provision for it. We knew where the moneys were coming from, and guess what? Post-election, the Minister hops up—we say you “huff” it or you “hops” it—the same money to use in expenditure after election. [*Desk thumping*]

This then is the Trinidad and Tobago we are living in now, a country of paradox where we do not have money to buy medicine for people, but we have enough for mega-construction projects, for luxury hotels, as I said before, for paintings, and we see single mothers, single mothers losing their URP and CEPEP jobs daily crying, praying for God to send them food for their children when the day comes.

And may I remind this honourable Chamber that almost 20,000 jobs have been lost in this country since that Government came into office; 20,000 jobs. [*Desk thumping*] I say again, had it been my Government in office, initiatives for workers and job creation, in addition to shoring up the social safety net, would have been up front in the Minister of Finance’s

budget instead of way down in a few pages down towards the end of that budget statement. [*Desk thumping*]

And so, tales from a strange land indeed, where the most important issues affecting people in this country—safety and security, health care, sustainable jobs—these are placed on the back burner whilst the Government focuses on, do you know what? On the arithmetic, on adding sums in a “vaille-que-vaille” manner [*Desk thumping*] demonstrating upside-down priorities, when the priorities should be—and we have always been focused on this side—people-centred.

We see the upside-down priorities on the dollars and the cents, counting the pennies, and the arithmetic of budgeting rather than the true purpose of a budget which is to serve to improve the quality of life. [*Desk thumping*] It is against this frightening scenario, the backdrop, the context within which the hon. Minister of Finance delivered this budget last week. And if the population expected to hear any tangible measure already taken over the past year to be taken in fiscal 2017 to address the economic, social, safety and security, well, look, we just had to remain disappointed. Perhaps in the debate, we may hear more of plans to deal with these issues.

And so, instead, what happened? Instead of giving us these tangible plans, giving the stewardship and accountability of what was done in fiscal 2016, almost \$60 billion spent and we have no accountability. None! [*Desk thumping*] None! No accountability of where that money was spent, and you cannot touch it and you cannot see it and you cannot feel it. You cannot see the projects on which \$60 billion was spent [*Desk thumping*] and you are still coming here to say, we are owing the contractors, we still have the back

pay. So where the money gone? [*Desk thumping*] I remember the hon. Member for San Fernando East, the late Member for San Fernando East, the former hon. Prime Minister, asking that very question in this House: where the money gone? [*Desk thumping*]

And so, the lack of consultation, the hon. Minister is on record publicly as saying that only two people knew what was in this budget, himself and the hon. Prime Minister. Only two people. And so the question really arises about consultation. Two things came to my attention this week which give me cause for pause. The first was the very strong reaction against the proposed 7 per cent online tax.

As we stand here today, there is an online petition being circulated on the World Wide Web that has garnered—the last time I checked—several thousands of votes. By now it would probably be more, as members of the public are seeking to have this online tax repealed. Earlier this week, AMCHAM was reported as calling on Government about the lack of consultation on this 7 per cent online tax, warning that the estimated benefits to the economy would be far outweighed by negative fallout to businesses and employees, and that glaring lack of consultation, that is the hallmark of those on the other side. So many of them. [*Desk thumping*]

I want to remind them of the words of his holiness, Pope Francis, who once said, and I quote:

“Every man, every women who has to take up the service of government, must ask themselves two questions: ‘Do I love my people in order to serve them better? Am I humble and do I listen to everybody, to diverse opinions in order to choose the best path?’ If you don’t ask those questions, your

governance will not be good.”

And so, we must listen and then lead. And so this glaring lack of consultation is serious cause for concern.

The other issue that caught my attention this week in prepping for this budget debate was, of course, the now highly controversial statements reported to have been made by the hon. Prime Minister last Saturday that people must not expect the Government to provide basic needs like roads, schools and health centres to be provided by the State. Now, perhaps, this is one of the most telling statements in maybe a most damaging Freudian slip to have come out of the mouth of the hon. Prime Minister. Then we may want to ask: was it really a Freudian slip as his press secretary would have us believe in the subsequent release?

You see, Madam Speaker, I wondered about the connection with reality and the connection the Government had when drawing up this budget, given the state of our country and their obvious oblivion to it. And so, I was prepared to dismiss these matters and see it as just another excursion by the hon. Minister, but when I heard the words of the hon. Prime Minister I just referred to, a realization slowly hit me. You see, I remember at some time during the election campaign last year, the hon. Prime Minister had complained about the number of schools we were building, a policy incidentally which placed Trinidad and Tobago to be among the first countries in the world to achieve universal early childhood education. [*Desk thumping*] Contrary to what the Minister said, that it was the PNM who made a major contribution to education, I just cannot let that pass and let him get away with it. Let me say it was the Panday administration, in which

I was the Minister of Education, [*Desk thumping*] when we achieved universal secondary education and built the “singlest” largest number of schools in one term, [*Desk thumping*] and to be matched in the term 2010 to 2015 by the Minister then, Minister Gopeesingh, the MP for Caroni West. [*Desk thumping*]

I remember again, referring backwards, that the hon. Prime Minister said we did not need so many schools. Let me remind you, you know, there is another misrepresentation that is perpetrated every time we come to this Chamber when Members on the other side always say that we neglected Port of Spain, we neglected the north of the country and keep saying, “Look, go back south. You go down south, you do not belong here.” We built schools also in Diego Martin, Madam Speaker, in his constituency. [*Desk thumping*] In the constituency of the Member for Diego Martin North/East as well, Point Cumana. Several of those RC schools were built by the Government then, our Government then—[*Crosstalk*]—Paramin, yes. In many of them, schools were built.

And, you know, I am wondering, that Biche High School that we had built, we went out of office—that is how the democracy works—and they never opened that school. It took us, what was it? Nearly 14 years later to come back to open that Biche High School, and I wonder if it is the same spite and malice that is operating that is preventing you from opening the Couva Children’s Hospital. [*Desk thumping*] But, you know, every rope has an end, and if you do not do it and you do not open it, we will come back into office and we will open it. [*Desk thumping*] We will open it.

And so, it hit me then: is there another motive behind this vague

budget and so on? What is it? What if this budget package is being deliberately left vague to ensure that the Government does not look too badly in the run-up to the local elections and the THA elections, only to come after the election—as they did last year, you know—to come with a mid-year review and then “drop the blows on you as they say, drop more taxes on you”. [*Desk thumping*] Is that what is happening here?

And there is another worrisome thing, given the controversial statements of the hon. Prime Minister. What if these measures are all signs and Freudian slips that they point to creating an ultra-elitist state in Trinidad and Tobago, [*Desk thumping*] creating an economy designed to serve the top 1 per cent of the population, to serve the million-dollar men? And I would come back to this in a little while. But when I hear those statements where the ordinary people are being told: “Wean yourself, get off my shoulder, the State cannot carry you anymore”, but then we see the policies and the projects and the programmes in here designed [*Desk thumping*] for that 1 per cent of the population. I have to ask whether it is a move to create a 1 per cent million-dollar-man state [*Desk thumping*] and we would see.

We have been hearing the Prime Minister talking about this topic of the dependency syndrome, and the need for you to go by his statements, the hon. Minister’s statements last week, about privatizing everything, to privatize roads. Well then, what would we do? Every road would have a toll you would have to pay. For hospitals, they talk about the Couva hospital. Do you know—will you now have to go and pay to go to the Couva Children’s Hospital? Even schools—I know it is hard to imagine how they would intend to make parents pay for their children’s education, but these are the

goods and services provided by any good working state—[*Desk thumping*]*—*health care, national security, schools. These are the things. Why do you pay taxes?

And so, while there was an attempt to retract that statement, I am saying here today with the greatest of respect, this country needs clarification on the Government's economic and social policy, and should not settle for anything but providing a proper, honest, transparent statement on this matter. [*Desk thumping*] How can you talk about weaning people off the State when, in fact, it was the Government of the father of the nation, Dr. Williams, who established the principles of democracy founded on social justice by which we are governed? [*Desk thumping*] That is where they came from. [*Desk thumping*] Or is it what we are actually seeing here? That system was adhered to and endorsed by every single PNM Government thereafter, all of which you were either a Member or a senior Cabinet Member.

Or, there is another question that comes with it. Is it that there is evidence of a battle between the economic development board chairman and senior advisor on the one hand and the friends and the trade union soulmates with whom they signed the MOU on the other hand? Is that the conflict we are seeing in the way that there is this diametrically opposed kind of policy that is being put forward in our country contrary to the principles of social justice enshrined in our Constitution?

And so, we are a very young developing democracy. We have not even seen 60. We have not gone six decades into independence, a young democracy. Our social and political and economic systems that have been

with us since independence cannot—cannot, I repeat—be expected to be overturned overnight. The people of this country are simply unprepared for any overnight weaning process of which they speak. And it is highly interesting that the hon. Prime Minister has only begun to talk about this after he won the elections, after elections. [*Desk thumping*]

Before elections, they were promising the citizens and the voters the world. Now, you say, “Look, doh come by me for every road, every school, every health centre, every this and that.” That is what we pay taxes for. [*Crosstalk*] Cane farmers, yes. Any attempt then to bamboozle the population cannot be allowed to continue and the Opposition, I pledge, will not facilitate this under any circumstances. [*Desk thumping*] We will descend into utter chaos and anarchy should we have to go through that process rapidly and overnight. We cannot privatize public systems which are guaranteed rights for citizens, because of the sake of some supra-elitist agenda seeking to benefit an elitist minority.

2.00 p.m.

And this then may be the true intention of this vague budget, an attempt to mislead the population but at the same time implementing significant economic and social changes coming like a thief in the night. [*Desk thumping*] I repeat, we will not be part of any clandestine effort to overturn our economic and social democratic system and transform it into a complete supra-elitist state without consultation and consensus that is required. We firmly believe there must be equality, equity and justice for all of the people of Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*]

We will not subscribe to the undermining of our Constitution, and in

the very words of our Constitution, which is the supreme law of the land, today we affirm:

“respect”—for—“the principles of social justice and”—the belief—
“that the operation of the economic system should result in the material resources of the community being so distributed as to subserve the common good,”—and—“there should be adequate means of livelihood for all, that labour should not be exploited”—and—
“there should be...opportunity for advancement on the basis of recognition of merit, ability and integrity;”

I have repeated these words from the Constitution because, as I am saying, we are seeing a movement away from those social justice principles to the creation of a supra-elitist million-dollar man state, which I will come back to. [*Desk thumping*]

But before I get there I want to speak about crime and national security, Madam Speaker. I mentioned this should be upfront in our thoughts. The most important issue in our country today is that of crime, and, of course, the corollary of that, security. The duty to protect every citizen, to provide a safe country within which we could all live in harmony must be paramount to any responsible Government which has the best interests of citizens as a priority. And why is it then that every single time there is a PNM Government in power it is always marked by a frightening increase in violent crimes and a blatant attempt by Government to destabilize some of our country’s most cherished and prestigious independent offices and institutions? [*Desk thumping*]

In the 1991—1995 administration they placed the House Speaker—

you all remember Occah Seepaul, house arrest? Fast forward a decade later and the PNM in Government engaged in one of the most unprecedented attacks on the sitting Chief Justice of Trinidad and Tobago, making commonwealth history in the process. And you know what, after that attack on that Chief Justice, the then Attorney General refused to appear before the Mustill Commission who were investigating the allegations made against the Chief Justice. The then magistrate refused to give evidence in the criminal box, the Chief Magistrate in the trial. Once he went in the witness box he refused but he had already “licked up”, as we say in local parlance, the sitting Chief Justice.

Fast forward now another decade, and here they are again, amid yet another uncontrollable crime wave and what are they doing?—attacking the highest office in the land, the Office of the President. [*Desk thumping*] Madam, I will not breach your Standing Orders, our Standing Orders, so I would leave it there, and I am saying, each to come back another decade later and we saw the “lick up” of the Governor of the Central Bank, and so on, independently. So is it then when there is this sort of destabilization happening from the top, can it be seen by bandits, the banditry, and the criminals, “this looks as a go-ahead you know, you all go ahead”. Like a blanket “go-ahead, go do, break the law, it is all right, don’t worry we busy up here fighting”. I do not know, I would hate to think that that is the situation.

In one year since this Government assumed office, we have experienced an unprecedented level of lawlessness and viciousness by the criminal element in our country. The rate of homicides since they came into

office is in excess of 400, quickly approaching 500. Serious crimes continue to rise, crimes against children and the elderly. Again, kidnapping has raised its ugly head, and during the budget presentation you know the Minister spent more time not dealing with that number one issue foremost in the minds of the people of this country, you know what, talking about Sandals than he spent talking about security in Trinidad and Tobago. Every day I too, I mentioned already bloodshed, theft, robbery, and so on.

You know yesterday in Tunapuna, from Tunapuna someone sent a message on the social media, it is like one of these things, [*Holds up an electronic device*] sent a message saying, no violent crime today, knock word, knock word. There is a sense of despair that hangs over our country. Under this Government we have seen a shuffling of portfolios, we have put three Ministers of National Security in charge. The country thought that the crime situation would improve, would get three times better, Madam speaker, but instead what happened, it got three and more times worse. [*Desk thumping*]

The Government gave national security priority in expenditure. Remember the boasting last year over \$10 billion, but they barely scratched the surface when it comes to reporting for value for that ten-point-what billion dollars. T&T has lost confidence in Government because they are losing the fight against crime. I say, respectfully, the Government needs to get down to work because every day the criminals are winning. It is every day we are losing sons and daughters in this country, [*Desk thumping*] wives are losing husbands, husbands are losing wives, we are losing loved ones, families losing loved ones.

The Minister complained that the Government I led spent \$25 billion on national security in five years, in that term of office. As I will explain, we were executing a plan which the Government, this Government has let fall by the wayside and we were able to bring serious crimes down to the lowest ever [*Desk thumping*] in 31 years. Yes, there were murders, every murder is one murder too many and that is why there must be the sustained plan and action to deal with crime. And so this Minister has allocated more than \$10.8 billion, as I said, to national security last year, this year \$7.6 billion, but there is very little to show for that money.

So more than \$18.4 billion would be spent over the two years, yes, after the next budget. You know, I am certain we will really have to ask whether the Government would get the job done and, therefore, in the two years they would have spent more money than we spent or almost spent in the five years, [*Desk thumping*] \$18.4 billion to \$25 billion we spent in the five years. But let us put the arithmetic aside eh, it appears the more this Government spends the more the crime rises, so something is very wrong, [*Desk thumping*] something is very wrong. You cannot fight crime if you cannot execute a plan, you cannot execute a plan if you have a vaille-que-vaille plan or no plan at all. [*Desk thumping*]

We have offered to help, and whether or not joint crime talks will bear fruit, that I want to say, clearly, is in the hands of the Government following upon those talks that we had recently. So what did we do? I am talking about what they did not do. What did we do? I would speak very quickly of a few of some of the initiatives where I think were amongst the more successful ones: we began to rework and revitalize our nation's anti-crime legislation.

You know we passed 26 pieces of law in Parliament? We passed more of course but these 26 dealing with the fight against crime legislatively related to kidnapping, illegal firearms, the FIU, bail, trafficking in persons, anti-terrorism, electronic monitoring, interception of communications, just to name a few, so legislatively [*Desk thumping*] we passed those. We were in a position, we were on a mission to upgrade the legislative framework to address the crime situation.

Fast forward now, in this first year in Parliament, in one year this Government, in one year you know, one year, has passed only one piece of anti-crime legislation—[*Interruption*]

Hon. Member: “Nah. Nah.”

Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: Yes, the SSA. And that SSA, guess what, up to when I checked online, has not been proclaimed. [*Desk thumping*] Came to this Parliament, bullied us, shouted at us, doom and gloom and they will kill us and “everybody dead if yuh doh pass this Bill”, and will not proclaim it, why? Is it proclaimed today?—because I did not check my Net today, but up to when I was preparing this, Madam, not proclaimed. Why? Why?

So we establish the National Operations Centre, the National Security Training Academy, all of which are still there. We also made law enforcement more visible by increasing anti-crime operations through the inter-agency joint patrol, so the visibility—the Highway Patrol Unit, the Community Comfort Patrol, the surveillance bays along the highways. We sought to reduce police response time by introducing the Rapid Response Unit, improving and upgrading the nation’s road network. We began to upgrade infrastructure needed to fight crime, approving purchase of body

scanners, cell phone jammers for the prisons, and so on, which the Government, I hope, will put into use one year later.

We expanded the fleets of the defence force, the police service, the fire service. More than 500 vehicles, we refurbished about 1,100 vehicles in the existing fleet. We built eight police stations. [*Desk thumping*] We relate it with respect to border security, we acquired the four coastal patrol vessels, two utility vessels, the purchase of the 12 Damen vessels, some of which are now in use, and I am reading very happily of the drug busts out on the oceans with those craft. [*Desk thumping*] It was the Government which I led who purchased vehicles for the coast guard after umpteen years, Madam Speaker, new vessels.

Under that, my Government, we made progress and now the systems that we were building and putting in place, some have fallen by the wayside and fallen into disarray. I want to take one moment to really thank those who served as Ministers of National Security, Brig. Sandy, especially Brig. Sandy, Minister Gary Griffith, Brig. Alfonso, of course, and he was there only for a short while; Minister Emmanuel George. So they have three all at one time; they have three all at one time, what it shows, “they laughing and they joking, but they better watch because the Prime Minister said the reshuffle coming after budget”. After budget; after budget. [*Desk thumping*] So I will see if you will be “skinning” and grinning in the same way you are today after budget. Yes, we had several, but what was the point of that? We tried, we were trying, and that was the priority, crime-fighting was a priority and it should remain, and it worked, brought crime down, serious crimes— [*Desk thumping*]

So what did this Government say they would do?—because we know and all know that a Government that cannot protect its people is a Government that does not deserve to be in office. Let me read the first paragraph of last year’s budget speech on the crime section, and I quote:

“...reduction in crime represents the foremost demand by our citizenry. Violent crime and criminality have hampered... economic”—process.

“Our institutions have been weakened. Our citizens have become disillusioned”—et cetera. “Our foreign direct investment flows have been affected.”

Yes, quotes from last year. Those were the words of the hon. Minister of Finance last year, and this year, after one year of their Government, I think we are far worse off than everyone of you suspect than before. [*Desk thumping*] Give me a time check, please, how much time has gone so far?

We have to know where we have been so we could chart a way forward. So perhaps we may want to consider the conduct of a performance audit of last year’s National Security budget to see why over \$10 billion went down into a black hole without any results coming forward. Do a performance audit “man”, that is very, very important—and increase crime, yes, increase crime rather than down. In this year’s budget speech the Minister failed to particularize the value for money achieved through the spending of that \$10 billion in fiscal 2016. When we review budget promises, the Government now, we have the budget promises, we have the Government’s 10-point plan when they were in Opposition, and we have the Government’s, when they were in Opposition, manifesto. It is very clear the

Government has failed to deliver on anti-crime initiatives since coming into Government. [*Desk thumping*] The manifesto boasted of a whole range, and what they call a whole Government approach to crime. That manifesto is now what?—government policy, right, a whole government approach to crime.

2.15 p.m.

But three National Security Ministers later and \$10 billion, of course, does not a whole-government approach make. Our review indicates that Government has completely abandoned their own crime-fighting plans and initiatives in favour of what?—a “vaille-que-vaille” approach which is simply not working. You see the \$10 billion fallen into the wasteland of this administration, money spent, results absent. [*Desk thumping*]

Prof. Ramesh Deosaran indicated in an *Express* article I read on October 4th of this year, “A criminal free for all”. I quote:

“Money should no longer be a big excuse for crime mismanagement or judicial...”—[*Interruption*]

Madam Speaker: Members, I would just wish to remind you all of Standing Order 53(1)(e), (f) and (g). There is a constant muttering in the Chamber, and I would ask Members to please observe the rules.

Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: Thank you very much, Madam. I can probably drop my voice a little now. I was quoting from the *Express* of October 04, 2016.

“Money should no longer be a big excuse for crime mismanagement and judicial inefficiency.”

And, this is echoed by the economist Marlene Attzs writing in

PricewaterhouseCoopers 2017 budget memo, “Navigating the tides to economic sustainability”, and I quote:

“Allocating the lion’s share of the ...budget to the Ministry of National Security doesn’t quite cut it.”—and, of course she continues on the point.

The point is basically money alone is not enough. So despite this massive spending last year, the Government achieved very little.

Let us look at last year’s budget, pages 19 to 20 of the 2016 Budget Statement. The Government promised in their 2016 budget speech, pages 19 to 20, the following: to establish a joint border protection agency. That was in their manifesto too, by the way. Status—not implemented, promised again now in 2017. [*Desk thumping*] Establish a police management agency to strengthen aspects of police service operations. Status to date—not implemented and it is not in the 2017 budget—abandoned. Appoint a Commissioner of Police—now they spent five years in Opposition talking about appointing a Commissioner of Police. After one year in government, guess what? They are still talking about appointing a Commissioner of Police—five years. Came to Parliament with defective unconstitutional legislation; after five years of planning, planning and talking, came here and had it struck down in the court.

And you know what they are saying now, the hon. Prime Minister himself? He is saying now that somebody somewhere is—what is the word, those of you who went with us?—“blocking it up” and stopping it from happening, and they have to find \$6 billion to pay for the RFPs and so on. I think they even said it was the DPA who was the person blocking it. Well,

perhaps the DPA just wants to get it right, to do it constitutionally in terms of the tendering processes. So: appoint commissioner of police, five years talk about it, one year come to do it and still not done.

Establish community safety partnerships between local government and police. Status—never happen, not implemented. [*Desk thumping*] It is promised again in 2017. It is very interesting. Before the hon. Minister read his budget here, a day or two before, guess what? Big meeting between the Minister of Local Government and the hon. Minister of National Security to do, what? To talk about municipal police in the local government body. So you could come and mamaguy the population and say, “Well, look we talking”. One year later, guess what? Still talking. That was in your manifesto; that was in your 10-point plan. One year later, still talking.

They promised to re-engineer the criminal justice system. I understand a team was put together, but so far there is no other apparent action. They promised to strengthen the prison management, focus on health service and rehab at the prisons. With respect to work for the prisons, it appears from all this “grand charge” talk in the budget, what has happened? The hon. Attorney General held one consultation in April 2016—one consultation. Remember he came to tell us how much it was costing you to keep one man in prison and all the rest of it anyway. So nowhere anywhere further one year later. That was the budget 2016.

So it is clear that Government meant to attack crime on the legislative front, and by increasing expenditure, because all these other projects I have mentioned are initiatives, nowhere off the ground. Legislatively, as I said before, one Bill addressing crime past, and not yet proclaimed. That is the

SSA Bill. The Government also attempted, as I said, the COP Order, I have already said what happened with that.

In this Budget Statement 2017, there are a number of national security achievements which were not mentioned anywhere in the 2016 budget speech. These include putting the SSA in charge of the National Operations Centre and the National Security Training Agency. All of this was done how?—by Cabinet Note. Okay? So those are matters, of course, we are researching and looking into. And, of course, Cabinet approving \$117 million; I think it is to buy more spy equipment for an SSA where the Bill is not yet proclaimed. Also done by Cabinet Note.

I felt a little happy when I read something, because this is something very close to me because in the budget that year I remember speaking to then Minister Howai, and I said, “I want you to put in that budget statement that any officer in the protective services who is killed in the line of duty we must give \$1 million”. It came from me, from my heart. Up to today not one has been paid. So, I saw a statement recently in the newspaper where it was saying that this Government now would pay the money. But it appears that really was a correction of a date that it was really correcting—well, you know, someone might have said it would be effective from 2014, persons who died from 2014, but really it is for the initial date of 2013.

So I again implore this Government to please, please, please, please pay the families of officers. [*Desk thumping*] One year later please do not blame my government. You said we left nothing in place, well you are in charge now, do it. [*Desk thumping*] I went so far to draft a Cabinet Note to send it. They told me right here in the Parliament when it was raised, I think

by the Member for Naparima, “What about the Cabinet Note?” They said, “That is irrelevant. It does not matter.” But guess what? Up to today not one family has benefited, not one. So I call on the Minister and the Government to take this matter seriously. These men and women in uniform put their lives on the line every single day, and then who would take care of their families, who? I ask you and plead with you to take this matter seriously. [*Desk thumping*]

I heard the hon. Prime Minister on a platform saying, “Well, you know when dey kant get through dey like courthouse and dey want to go to courthouse”, but if we cannot get justice through this process of parliamentary questions and through screaming and protesting and so on, what would we have to do? The world now is not about a fight in a jungle, of animals in a jungle fighting, it is civilized war and that happens where?—in the courthouse, in the courthouse. You go to court for justice. If this is not done, we will take this matter up, research is being done to go to court to get the money for the families of officers killed in the line of duty. [*Desk thumping*]

Then their tax achievements. You know, what a weird world—like I said before, in a strange land—what a weird world now, where the Minister is boasting about signing customs agreements and so on, and now they are being described and classified as crime-fighting legislation and crime-fighting initiatives and so on. I will come back to the FATCA matter, because I did not intend to speak of it, because I thought, Madam, you would rule me out of order, because it is on the Order Paper and I know there is a Standing Order about anticipation, not to speak about a Bill. But

the hon. Minister raised it, and I have a page or two and therefore I will speak on it. [*Desk thumping*] I will be speaking on it. I have called that now the “FATCA farce” or the “FATCA fraud”, as you were; a total set-up. I hope this time now the Joint Select Committee will be formed, we could get to work finalizing this legislation. [*Desk thumping*] I want to make it clear that a government cannot tax its way out of crime. A government cannot spend its way out of crime, because we see the money being spent and no money.

Now what is the Finance Minister saying? Having reviewed some of the broken promises and achievements of the last fiscal year, let us look at this year’s promises now, before I move on. I am spending a lot of time on security and safety. As I said, I believe it is the number one issue, because even today when you pick up this newspaper, look at these things. Can I just show it to you, Madam, the newspaper? [*Member displays newspapers*] These showing us, “Assault at dawn”. Look at these things. Are we living in Trinidad and Tobago? Is this the Wild Wild West or is this the Middle East or somewhere? Guns, guns, guns, Madam Speaker. This is terrifying to any right-thinking person in this country, on the two front pages. This is a very nice one, there is a miracle baby so we can look at that too. But this is where we were; this is where it is.

So let us look at the promises. Let us look at the conversation about the police inspectorate they promised. The Forensic Science Centre, Police Management Agency, manpower audits, prison reform, all that conversation talk just stopped. The Minister spoke about four items in his presentation, and I will just quickly go through those. One, during his presentation the

Minister said that for fiscal 2017 they will reorganize defence and national security strategy to address a wide range of current and new emerging threats to national security emanating from issues like terrorism, fraud, transnational organized crime, gang violence, cybercrime and illegal migration. What a mouthful it is, which says a lot but says nothing. I think this is a way of making it appear that there is a plan to address the threats that were there when we were in government.

Remember when I signed on behalf of Trinidad and Tobago—we signed, I should say, not me—we signed the UN resolution to deal with the threat of ISIS and the terrorists? Remember that, Madam Speaker? The then Leader of the Opposition was a dance and a song all over, that we are putting ourselves out for threats. We are exposing Trinidad and Tobago to threats. We are a small country, no ISIS. And what has been happening now, what is being reported? Yes, how many people from Trinidad and Tobago are out there with ISIS. Thank God we signed that UN resolution so we can now have the international cooperation that is necessary in the fight against international terrorism. So that is one strategy, and as I said, a lot of words without anything that you could really monitor and therefore evaluate. I stand to be corrected, but I would have thought Government would have a national security strategy after one year. I expected that the national strategy would have been a pillar around which budget 2017 would have been built.

The second item for 2017 is municipal constabularies. Again, re-introducing the concept of the municipal community police and so on. I mentioned already just days before the budget reading on September 29, 2016, Ministry of Local Government, a press release entitled “Reform

Coming Soon”. He may have put as well, “Stay tuned”. It has been coming from last 2016. It is still coming, it is still coming, it is still coming, “keep tuned to this station”. What it says? Coming to a movie theatre closest to you. Keep tuned, it will come. So the Government promised this, it has not happened, it has been promised again.

Interestingly, when the *Guardian* interviewed eight out of nine division heads in the August 27, 2016 edition, in the article:

Division Heads of Crime say we are trying our best.

Not a single division head mentioned this initiative. Which initiative? Not a single division head mentioned this initiative, hon. Minister. This indicates a zero reliance on Government’s approaches by the security service. You know which one was the initiative? The municipal constabularies. Not one head when interviewed. So big meeting on the 29th, and then when they interviewed these people, the divisional heads, not a single one. Eight out of nine, not a single one.

In the same article, Acting Senior Superintendent of the Eastern Division mentioned the need for a marine patrol, and that brings me now to the next item. The Minister again now brings in the Joint Border Protection Agency. Year after year, T&T is reported as a major transshipment point for trafficking and illegal narcotics and guns and so on.

2.30 p.m.

Being a transshipment point leads to more illegal guns, more homicides and so yes, it is clear, we must protect and lock down our borders. That is why when we were in Government we acquired the naval vessels. That is why we initiated interagency patrols, Madam Speaker, and the

Government's failure now on an initiative which they spoke of, and I say manifesto and in the last budget, is a good initiative for the joint border patrols, Joint Border Protection Agency. Where is it? Definitely not here one year later. Like the plan to appoint the Commissioner of Police, that idea floating around from Opposition days, it is still floating.

The Minister told us that Government is far—these are his words in this budget statement, this is what we are told one year later, and of course, all the promises from prior to that year. The Minister told us, Government is far and advanced in establishing the agency, but their own budget documents, as I say, indicate differently. Let us just see what these documents say. I have the whole pile here. All these big, yellow books.

And by the way, something very interesting happened you know, Madam Speaker. We did not get all these books in Parliament on Friday. I do not know why. Normally we are given all the budget books, the estimates. So over the weekend when I tried to do the research, I realised that some of them were missing and I do not know why. So we did not have the benefit of those documents. And even when we went up online, we were not able to find—I think one of them was the Social Sector Investment Programme. Anyway, let us not go off, but I think that is something that needs to be looked at as to why, for the first time, as far as in my memory, we did not get them.

So let us look at the actual estimates presented in all these draft estimates that we get every year. This whole pile. They will tell us the true picture as to this border protection agency.

Three million was allocated towards the project in fiscal 2016.

Right?—\$3,000,000. But when we look at the budget documents, not \$1 was spent for the entire fiscal year. Not one. You look at Head 22, the DP programme Multi-Sectoral and Other Services, Administrative Service, 056, in the estimates. You could look at the DP Programme, you could look at the Recurrent Expenditure Programme. Nowhere, not one cent spent in fiscal. Were you serious about doing it?—or maybe you are getting it free. If you are, tell us where you are getting it free if you do not have any expenditure on that item.

I asked last year and I ask again: where is the money for the Joint Border Protection Agency? Are you serious to implement this? Have you budgeted to get the work done or will you be back here next year to tell us that the agency is being reorganized, restructured, coming soon, like the entire national security? [*Desk thumping*] So we look to Government for the detailed explanation.

Another crime-fighting matter in the budget was something termed “decentralization of police forces”. A new measure which is not found in any of the Government’s or the former Opposition’s plans is this thing called “decentralization of police forces”. All we know is that this mystery item, what is happening with it when we read 2017 budget statement, it is and I quote:

“...in the planning or implementation stage.” According to the hon. Minister of Finance in his statement, planning. So we are still planning one year later, one year later, to this project of decentralizing forces. I wonder if any of those nine divisional heads know anything of this plan for decentralizing police services.

So, the same was said of the programme to build trust in the police service. The Minister provides no metrics or targets or delivery dates for anything that the Government is planning, and perhaps the hon. Minister of National Security or both Ministers, I think there are three of them, or the two that are in this House perhaps, would shed some light on this matter as we continue the debate. We expect Government to share those details. And so, that is the entirety of the Minister's presentation on the very burning issue of national security. Those three projects. That is the extent of it.

And then when we look at the expenditure numbers we get a hint at what Government is planning. We will have many questions; in the Finance Committee, we will do that, but here are a few questions, preliminary. One million was allocated for development of a prison management policy. Again, allocated for the budget for the whole year and guess what?—not a cent was spent. This was one of your manifesto promises where you got people to vote for you on that promise and others. Have you abandoned that promise that you gave?

One million was allocated in last year's budget for the development of a disaster risk management policy. Again, the year come and gone, not a cent spent. It has gone back where?—into the Consolidated Fund. Have you abandoned that as well? And I say we have been very fortunate and we really must, you know, give praise and thanks to the Lord that hurricane Matthew did not make landfall in Trinidad and Tobago. We have been very blessed in that regard. So what is the plan as we go forward?

Three million was allocated last year to construction of a Point Fortin fire station. Hon. Minister of National Security is the MP for where?—Point

Fortin. Three million allocated, inside of these you had \$3 million. Guess what? How much spent? Not one cent. So on the one hand the cry is, “We doh have money.” “You all tief out all the money. Yuh spend out de money”. You squander out the money. Yes? All the money gone. That is the one cry. And yet when moneys are, in fact, allocated, these are just some of the items, eh, allocated, guess what? They are not spending a single cent. [*Desk thumping*]

We see a project for redevelopment of a water distribution system. And look, for any one of these I have the page numbers, eh. So if you need to see where it is, I can tell you, the page numbers in the books. There is a project here, moneys allocated for a water distribution system for the fire service and so on, \$2 million allocated. Can you tell us what this means? What will happen? When it will happen? There is \$8 million allocated to what?—coast guard, marine shop, safety and port facilities unit. What happened? Not a cent spent. Is it no longer a priority of the Government? We need those answers.

So, here we are, crime spiralling out of control. All we got from the budget statement and all these books before us is what we have come to expect now after this one year. Cheap talk, big spending on spy equipment, but no apparent results, no apparent effect whatsoever for the safety and security of the people of Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*]

Our plan, if I could be so bold as to respectfully suggest—the maladministration of justice is ever present. We are seeing the rapid decline back to extreme criminality we faced when we came into Government in 2010. Clearly, rising crime is one of the largest challenges facing

Government and, you know, we would have continued in improving the infrastructure, making the visibility of the officers felt, providing tools to get the job done, making the legislative adjustments where they would have the most impact. These are some of the things, and of course, our manifesto 2015 identifies many other ideas and suggestions. Other Members, I am sure, would pick up in the debate and share on these matters. So that is on the issue of crime and national security, hon. Madam Speaker.

I have sat in this Parliament as you have and many others and it is a repeat like a recurring decimal from the other side. Yes?—that this Government when we were in Government “tief out de money, spend out de money, squandermania out de money”. Yes? And that is the misrepresentation and distortion. [*Desk thumping*] Maybe because I have a little more time, I want to spend a little of that time to put to rest those representations, in fact, outright falsehoods. [*Desk thumping*] I know I cannot talk to say, it is lies in the Parliament so I would not go there, but I think we need to correct the record. We need to do it.

And so, Madam Speaker, let us examine the facts. First, did you know that under the Government I led we had the largest ever number of persons with jobs in the history of this country? [*Desk thumping*] Not just for that five-year period, but from Independence to now, under the Partnership, the largest ever number of persons with jobs in the history of Trinidad and Tobago. The numbers are in all the books, in their numbers.

Madam Speaker, enter the “red and ready”, and what happens? Massive job losses, more and more people being sent on the breadline and the numbers in the estimates show it, they are their numbers.

Did you know that under our tenure we had the lowest ever unemployment rate in history of Trinidad and Tobago? [*Desk thumping*] In the history from Independence, lowest. And once again enter the “red and ready”, guess what is happening? —Unemployment rate up, going up, going up again, going up again, 20,000 and counting.

And I want to, as I go into the economic performance indicators, to really debunk that idea that has been perpetrated here repeatedly. I want to pay tribute to two brilliant Ministers of Finance who served, Minister Winston Dookeran [*Desk thumping*] and Minister Larry Howai. [*Desk thumping*] Our track record of job growth, Madam Speaker, is in stark contrast to what is happening under this administration in just one year.

It has been a very miserable year for labour and for trade unions. Some unions have suffered large-scale membership declines—yes?—bordering almost on wipe-out of those unions. I am proud to say that we led the most labour-friendly Government, [*Desk thumping*] post-Independence Trinidad and Tobago. And I do not make this statement lightly because the numbers do not lie, they are their numbers as well, they come from the Government, they come from the civil servants and public servants, but these were presented by the Government.

In comparison, I have seen this Government sit idly back allowing thousands to go on the breadline. Who in this country can forget that the Minister of Labour and Small Enterprise Development was so busy doing nothing, could not find time to meet with management of ArcelorMittal? Do you remember that? Could not meet, could not meet with the management of the Tube City to save jobs of over 1,000 workers? The Minister of Labour

and Small Enterprise Development could not find the time to save the jobs of over 200 workers at Centrin. They could not find the time to save the jobs of over 800 workers at OAS, 600 workers at WASA, 67 workers at Lands and Surveys, 200 workers at the Ministry of Tobago Development, 100 workers at Ministry of Social Development and Family Services. Most recently 72 workers attached to the security office of the Office of the Prime Minister. [*Desk thumping*].

These are just some of the examples, I am sure you can name more. Because you see for everyone who works for a big company and is registered where the Minister of Labour and Small and Micro Enterprise Development could say, oh under the Retrenchment Act they are registered, once you fire more than five people you have to register and things like that. Ordinary normal people there, going home. No jobs. You have not paid the contractors, the workers for contractors gone. They do not record on your system that the jobs, lost. In so many sectors, job losses, massive job losses. These are some of the examples, hon. Madam Speaker, and the Minister of Labour and Small Enterprise Development as I say and her Ministry has miserably failed to provide Parliament and the nation with an exact figure as to the number of workers, but you will find them everywhere; workers have lost their jobs.

They have not found time in spite of all the talk, all the talk to bring labour legislation to Parliament to protect and upgrade workers. [*Desk thumping*]. One year later, one year later, all the talk of labour law reform, we have not had a single policy document or draft Bill before us this year. What is the time?

Mr. Singh: Just 10 minutes into your second hour.

Madam Speaker: Member for Siparia. [*Cell phone rings*]

Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: Yes, Madam, thank you. The phones seem very busy today, here and there.

I am saying, there was a lot of talk of labour law reform, but not a single policy document or a draft Bill we have seen for this one year. Now one year is a short time, but before you know it, one year is one-fifth of what is a normal term, eh, and before you know it you—you are already entering into second year. So that time goes very fast. We are proud, Madam Speaker, in contrast to say, we have created, we created over 47,000 new jobs.

2.45 p.m.

We concluded negotiations, signed over 100 collective agreements with workers in this country, and the hon. Minister in an attempt to “diss” that—well, first of all, he is not paying them. The hon. Minister has come this far, may pay back-pay to police officers. Well, I mentioned there are police people that I know who did not even get the 50 per cent half back-pay that you promised them in June. They were promised in June, you know there are people who still did not get that half of back-pay. [*Desk thumping*]

So, Minister you cannot do it, you just cannot do it, so what you do, you backslap and comes into this Parliament to say, well, they boast about they settled 100 agreements, well, you cannot take away that fact. The fact is the fact, is the fact, we did settle. [*Desk thumping*] And then hon. Minister says and they did not settle these, they did not settle this one, they did not settle NP or some of the others. Well, one of the Members here will speak on

labour matters. I think the Member of Parliament for Couva will go into the details about those and as to the reasons why those were not settled, because it is not that we refused to settle them, but there were circumstances.

And so, Madam Speaker, they want to tell me Trinmar and NP—I know who they are, and we will answer them. [*Interruption*]

Madam Speaker: Members, again I rise to warn Members with respect to conversing noisily. The Speaker as well as the general public would like to hear the contribution of the Member for Siparia. Member, please.

Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: Thank you again, Madam Speaker. [*Interruption*] Madam Speaker, can we?

[*Madam Speaker nods head*]

Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: Thank you. Okay, so we have talked about jobs and collective agreements, in fact all the Members on this side will be prepared and willing to contribute, and will go into details on certain other matters as the debate unfolds.

Madam Speaker, I was talking about the falsehoods and the misrepresentations that we did nothing and “tief” all the money, and waste out all the money, and so on. I wonder how many people know that during our last year in office, even though the prices for energy, same prices we are crying about now—had already started to fall, were already falling, did you know that we generated in 2015, our last year in office, the second highest ever revenue in the history of our nation? [*Desk thumping*] I know you will not resist asking which is the highest year? Well, the highest ever revenue raised in this country in the history of Trinidad and Tobago as a nation was in 2014 under the Partnership. [*Desk thumping*]

In our five years in office, 2010—2015, we generated for that five years the highest ever revenue in our history, \$62.4 billion in 2014, and again the draft estimates, the books they gave us, it is shown in there. And what is most instructive, I think, is that we were able to raise the highest revenue in the history of Trinidad and Tobago and we did that without rising a single new tax—[*Continuous desk thumping*] not one tax, not one. In fact, Madam Speaker, we reduced taxes. Hon. Minister of Finance, we reduced taxes. So, no new tax 2010, 2011; no new tax 2012, 2013; no new tax 2014; no new tax 2015; but we raised the highest level of revenue, it was not from increased taxes. But enter the “red and ready” in 2015 and is tax on this, and is tax on that, and more may be coming. [*Desk thumping*]

So whilst we raised the highest revenue, what is also very important is that we grew the total non-tax revenue, non-tax—that is not taxes on people—we grew that from \$6.5 billion in 2010 to 9.9, almost \$10 billion in 2015; a growth of 53 per cent. And, as I said, we did that in spite of falling oil and gas prices. [*Desk thumping*] They may wish to point out if they have taken the time to read these, I am sure they will see that in their revised estimates of non-tax revenue, they will say it is about \$11.8 billion in 2016, but, let us be very clear, that is an aberration, because it was caused by what? The TGU one-off payment of \$2.7 million that we negotiated. [*Desk thumping*] Without that one-off payment the non-tax revenue in 2016 would reflect the collapse that is happening under the Government, we would see a figure of \$9.2 billion, a drop of so much money in one year in the revenue numbers. So, you have to look at the revenue earning from the energy sector and the non-energy sector. So, to cry that oh, oil prices and so on falling,

yes, we would come to that in a minute, but then there is also the non-energy sector where revenue is earned.

Let us look at tax revenue again. The Minister has introduced tax upon tax in his last budget. Right? And again, you know this is really the third budget, it is not two, you know. So, we had the first budget, then we had the mini mid-year budget, and now this is really a third budget in one year. Basically, just about a year from the Government. So, what has been the effect on revenue? All these taxes you are putting on people's necks, putting it on their shoulder for them to bear as it were. What is the result?

Tax revenues: in 2015 total tax revenues was about \$41 billion. After additional tax burdens, this hon. Minister and this Government placed on individuals and business, total taxes, revenue from tax, you know what happened? It did not go up, you know. What happened? It fell by 31 per cent in one year. [*Desk thumping*] So, the answer is not in tax upon tax upon tax. You know it is the typical modus operandi of previous PNM administrations.

Hon. Member: Borrow.

Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: Yes, borrow and tax. Borrow and tax and spend. Borrow, tax and spend. Spend, borrow and tax, and where else? What else? What other revenue raising measures in this budget? Did we read of anything to diversify this economy to gain revenue from other sources? And I will come to that, because I do have, with due respect, some suggestions in that regard. [*Desk thumping*]

So, tax revenues, all these additional taxes, but the revenue from it going down. You really have to ask, with the greatest of respect, whether the

Minister blight. [*Laughter*] You cannot be doing all this hard work, and I know the hon. Member works exceedingly hard. I know he works really hard. In fact, I think he is one of the hardest working Members on the other side.

Mr. Singh: The only one working.

Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: Perhaps the one running the Government, as it would seem, the de facto Prime Minister, but the Member works exceedingly hard, but he is not getting the revenue where we and the country are not getting the revenue.

So, on the one hand the small man—remember I talked to you earlier hon. Madam, about the super-elitist state, which I said I am going to come back to in a very short time. Ordinary man it is hard, you know for every dollar you take out of an ordinary man's pocket, the impact is so much greater than when you take a dollar out of someone with a higher tax bracket. So, pauperizing with these taxes, impoverishing people who are already on the brink of the poverty line and so on.

I want to compare now some of what happened when we were in Government. Again I ask, you know Madam when I was doing this research, I knew these things I am raising today, like one at a time when it happened and did not happen. But when I am doing this research and I put it altogether, it is amazing. Many people do not know, and if I say I was Prime Minister then, I did not remember, in every economic area we record at the top at the highest level in the country since our history. And so, did you know that we recorded the highest ever GDP in the history of our country under the Partnership? [*Desk thumping*] When we left office in the face of

two consistent years of contraction because of the falling oil prices, the GDP was still \$10 billion higher than the last year of the previous regime? [*Desk thumping*]

What was instructive in all of this is that the economy remained stable and the output from the non-petroleum sector continued to grow every year under the Government that I led, and you would find the numbers here again in this *Review of the Economy* which they gave to us. Again, it is not mine. So, we remained stable and the non-energy, the petroleum sector, continued to grow. And one year, Madam, enter the “red and ready” crew, and the GDP from the non-petroleum sector—I know we were expecting the petroleum sector to drop—the GDP from the non-petroleum sector fell by \$221 million, and overall GDP plunged by more than \$4 billion in one year. One year, one year. [*Desk thumping*] And I am not yet done on economic indicators.

Did you know, Madam and Members, that during the tenure of the Government I led, we recorded the highest ever foreign direct investment? [*Desk thumping*] I have all the numbers here, total 2011—2015, about \$10.3 billion, the numbers are on my table, which I will not go to, but all the numbers are in the estimates.

So I want to ask the hon. Minister to tell us, or the Members of the Government, what is the value of the Foreign Direct Investment they have been able to attract in the last year? Now, when you pick up the budget statement, the Minister does it in a very nice way, it is a kind of gloss, he glosses it about FDI and blur, blur, blur, blur. You know you pass it off from the Mitsubishi. Well, look, please do not speak to us about Mitsubishi FDI.

You must be honest and real. You did not wake up in the morning and suddenly signing FDI. [*Interruption*] It is the same way you did not wake up in the morning and suddenly signing FATCA IGAs. These things take time. And we had completed those negotiations for the respective time. [*Desk thumping*] So, be honest. Be honest, carry on the project, nothing is wrong, but be honest, and tell us, yes, the Mitsubishi plant is bringing it, but be honest, do not claim it. Do not claim it. And you know that these projects were started before your time. You know, it is the same I see, Ministers opening, what? The aquatic centre. [*Laughter*] I believe there is a big plaque there now. Nothing is wrong with that. But I am told all they did was to fill the swimming pool with water, because it was complete. It was complete. [*Desk thumping*] Maybe added some chlorine in the pool too. [*Crosstalk*]

Madam, I spoke of the FDI and I now want to speak about foreign reserves. You see, it is every single economic indicator, you know. I will come to the hardware and the software after. These are the raw economic data coming out of the books given to us. Did you know that the Government I led generated the highest ever foreign reserve in US dollars? [*Desk thumping*] And I know there is a question will be burning in a lot of people's mind, and I will ask that question at the end and attempt to answer it. The highest ever foreign US dollars in the history of our country, and again I have the numbers here, taken out of the foreign reserves, taken out from the estimates. Again, enter the "red and ready" and what happened? Reserves collapsing. [*Desk thumping*]

The Heritage and Stabilisation Fund, despite some difficult times we were able to add to the HSF, we left the HSF obviously at the highest ever

level since its inception. [*Desk thumping*] Most important, even though there might have been cause, we never put our hands in the cookie jar, we never raided the HSF. [*Desk thumping*] And again, we are doing all of this, remember, without raising a single new tax. Please remember. [*Desk thumping*]

I turn now to expenditure, so that is the money being made on our tenure, and they say that expenditure does not mean you spend out, is spent out, let us look at expenditure patterns now. I turn now to expenditure. Again, the Minister and the Government has repeatedly misrepresented and distorted expenditure under the Partnership. And again, let us look at the facts as shown in the estimates of expenditure. But before I do that, I do have a question for the hon. Minister of Finance, and perhaps any one of the Members may be able to answer it. Now, it has to do with the expenditure numbers in the budget statement and in the estimates. Now, I do not intend to cast any aspersions on the Minister's competence as Minister of Finance. I believe that his failure to accomplish his goals and the benchmarks set in the 2016 budget, they speak for themselves, so I do not need to cast aspersions.

3.00 p.m.

However, in reviewing the financial information presented in the various documents I found what appears to be, differences, between what the hon. Minister said and what is actually found in the estimates laid in Parliament. Now, I would not want to say the Minister fudged the numbers, I would not want to do that at all and I will wait to hear the answers to this question.

In page 80 of the budget speech the Minister said very clearly, page

80, and I quote:

“Total expenditure for FY 2017 has been budgeted at”—and can we take note, quoting from here—“has been budgeted at \$53.4 billion...” Quoted from page 80. The Minister is clear, he will spend \$53.4 billion in fiscal 2017. Well he proposes to in 2017.

Now, I want to refer you to pages x and xi of the Draft Estimates of Expenditure for the Financial Year 2017. So we have this one, then we have the Draft Estimates Development Programme for the Financial Year 2017 and we have the Draft Estimates, Draft Estimates of Recurrent Expenditure for the Financial Year 2017. So if we go through these, we look at x and xi of Draft Estimates of Expenditure. The table titled: “Abstract of Estimated Expenditure for the Financial Year”, 2016—2017, what it does is to disaggregate Government’s proposed expenditure by Sub-Head, which is Personnel Expenditure, Goods, Services, Development Programme. In this tabling the estimates, and that page I mentioned, the Government tells us that the grand total of proposed expenditure for fiscal year 2017, is \$56.6 billion. Well, first of all, it is \$56,571,398,031. So it is right here, in the estimates. And then on the footnote it says \$56.6 billion does not include \$2.6 billion for the IDF, Infrastructure Development Fund.

So when we total the \$56 billion, this is what it is saying, eh, total expenditure and at the footnote two point whatever, when you put all those together, expenditure estimated for fiscal 2017 is \$59.29 billion.

Hon. Member: Wow.

Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: So which one is correct? Which number is correct? And what it then means, it is almost \$6 billion more than what the

hon. Minister said in the budget speech, \$6 billion more. Is this the true figure or is it the one in the speech or the one in the estimates, which one is right? Which of the figures is wrong, which one is right?

I am sure the hon. Minister would be able to ask his IMF advisors and his spin doctors and they could tell him what to say, but I look forward to that response because it is of great importance. It is not just that the budget is going to be \$6 billion more in projected expenditure, but then it means that the deficit will be doubled and will not be \$6 billion but \$12 billion. [*Desk thumping*] And in the Draft Estimates of Revenue it does not say anywhere where you are going to find that additional financing for that extra \$6 billion. It tells us where you are going to find the \$6 billion you said would be the deficit, it does not say where you would find the money, if these numbers in these estimates of expenditure are correct.

So you are going to get in, spend, but where is the money coming from? You know what, budget next year, mid-term review, whatever, whatever, more tax, more tax, more tax, more fire sales; sell out, sell out, sell out; borrow, borrow, borrow. As I come to that there is a very serious point that we raise as we move on. So I am saying it is a great concern to know which one is correct. Which number is correct, the 53 point something in the budget speech or the 59 point two in the estimates.

We move on, debt, that brings us to debt, because where you are going to get the money. Already you are going to finance the deficit that you mentioned of six, now you might have 12. Public debt right now is the highest ever. Now, I am talking about revenue highest ever, I am talking about all the other things we have done, GDP, foreign reserves, it is the

Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar SC

highest ever, but under now, with this Government, public debt is the highest ever in the history of our country. You owing, you owing, okay, about 60 per cent debt to GDP. Can I ask you, I was very shocked, I know I have been reading the newspapers and I am seeing, the Minister went on what he has called, a very successful road show. So we know he borrowed US \$1 billion. We know on the local market we read somewhere Republic Bank, he asked Republic Bank, which I understand is not the normal process eh. He actually went or sent emissaries to the bank to ask for the local borrowing, so we got some money on the local market.

Mr. Imbert: Not true.

Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: Well if it is not true, fine. So what is not true is he did not ask them, they just gave it to him.

Mr. Imbert: That is not true.

Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: From Republic Bank, they just gave it to the hon. Minister and to the Government. So domestic borrowing. So you have external borrowing—[*Crosstalk*—the Minister will have his chance to reply, you know, hon. Madam Speaker, whether it is true or not true, I will be very happy to hear which one is the truth, because you cannot have two numbers, you have to tell us which is the truth. For borrowings, it is very clear here, internal borrowing, external borrowings is all set up in the Draft Estimates.

So, the Minister borrowed on the road show, \$1 billion, the Minister borrowed a few billions, but did you know when we got these books, I do not think the majority of people in this country know that in fiscal 2016 this Government in their first year in office borrowed \$14 billion. [*Desk*

thumping] Did you know that? I will come back to that in a minute. Borrowing \$14 billion and then you say you do not have money to pay the public servants; you do not have money to pay the contractors; you do not have money to fix the schools, that school, this health centre, that road. Where has the 59 point almost 60 billion gone? [*Desk thumping*] Where has it gone? And this revenue, the borrowings, you can find it on page v, very clear, borrowing \$14.2 billion in fiscal 2016.

And then you got some more money. In addition to that \$14 billion, guess what? You raided the HSF or what is called an extraordinary receipt for \$2.4 billion. So this Government got financing of 14 and two, \$18 billion in fiscal 2016. Fiscal 2016. [*Interruption*] Fourteen and two is 16, I am sorry; 14 and two is 16. And then from capital revenue, capital receipts, Government got an additional \$3 billion from capital revenue or capital receipts. And then of course the tax revenue and non-tax revenue. I think the capital receipts is probably the TGU one-off payment and so on, or one of those other one-off payments.

Okay, so here we are, the Government borrowed \$14 billion, took from the HSF another \$2 billion. So the net public sector debt today is \$88.96 billion. Again *Review of the Economy*, the highest that it has ever been in the history of Trinidad and Tobago. That means the per capita debt, every man, woman and child in Trinidad and Tobago, you know what you have on your shoulder? You know what you have on your shoulder? That \$88.96 billion works down to \$65,710 that you are owing.

Then the Government wants to tell you that you have to wean off, they cannot carry you on their shoulder, what are you doing— [*Desk*

thumping] Are you planning to borrow more in 2017? Are you borrowing more? Yes, of course, more will be borrowed, because we still have to get an explanation, where is the money coming from, from this secret \$6 billion more in expenditure.

2010 to 2015, what did we spend the money on? You said we spent it, we thief it, “blah, blah”, et cetera, et cetera, et cetera, waste it. What was it? Waste, corruption and mismanagement. Listen, listen, listen.

Through you, Madam Speaker, I want to share some statistics again provided by the hon. Minister, right here in this Parliament. I refer to the *Review of the Economy*, please take a look at page 89 of the blue one, Ganga, the *Review of the Economy*. Thank you, page 89, you can take a look at this, give it to me. According to these stats, when we were in Government we spent a total, about \$285.3 billion. So they say we spent \$500 billion, we spent \$400 billion, we spent all kinds of billions, the numbers are in your own book. [*Desk thumping*] Page 89, \$285.3 billion. And what did we spend this money on, Madam? What did we spend it on?

First of all, we spent \$42.3 billion on paying wages and salaries for workers. Eleven—100 negotiations, all the public servants, \$43 billion. By the time we left office, \$10 billion out of the \$60 billion for that year was spent on Government employees; that is more money in the hands of workers, and public servants and public sector workers than ever before in the history of this country. And I want to say you want to tell us and to ask you now, is that waste, corruption and mismanagement when we are paying the public servants and the workers and you know what, paying all of us sitting down in this Parliament too, eh, by the way? Wages and salaries,

paying everybody, everybody sitting here. That is what we did in five years. And then, of course, well some people want their money.

We spent \$148 billion on what—transfers and subsidies. What are transfers and subsidies? These are the grants for schools and NGOs, money for children homes, homes for the aged, disability grants, food cards, Children's Authority, you name it, the social safety net, the social safety platform. [*Desk thumping*] That is what we put up because you know why, you know why? We believe in the words of our Constitution that we must be guided always by social justice principles, that is equality for all and to take care of those in need. That was the social safety net, the social safety infrastructure, the platform that was developed under the Partnership Government. That is where we spent \$148 billion. That is the grants, transfers—there are far more, there is much more again, anybody really want to find out, it is in this book which is called *Draft Estimates of Recurrent Expenditure* and it lists every item of expenditure, which school, which home, which NGO, accounted for.

Okay, let us move on. Where else did we spend money? Now, so what I am saying, it is more than half of the annual budget spent on these critical components of the social safety net. We should be noting now that this hon. Minister is presiding over the slashing of expenditure under this Head, for the social safety net, from \$30 billion in 2015 to \$27 billion and a further \$22 billion in fiscal 2017.

So the slashing of that social safety net, you know, and this is where I talked about, you cannot be weaning people off the government's revenue, those who cannot help themselves and their families, but I will show you in

a moment where you are going for the “elitist supra-looping” in this country to create more multibillion dollar men in this country. I will show it and it is right here in this book. I cannot believe that they would be so brave or so reckless to put it in the Minister’s budget statement, but they did not think that we would go to find—and I thank God in this country for the Internet. I thank God that we give laptops in schools to make children computer literate. [*Desk thumping*] So you can sit at home and you can search the stock exchange and see who are directors of companies; you would see who are shareholders; you can search the World-Wide Web and you can find directors, shareholders of public stock exchange companies but also of private companies. I will come to it, I will come to that as we seek to serve the patrimony and heritage of this country. I will come to it. I will come to that in a short moment.

So we are talking about expenditure, where we spent the money. I will come to that. We spent \$37 billion on goods and services. These are things like, travelling and subsistence for public officers, repairs and maintenance, computer training, those are the things falling under that Head of goods. So this is where the expenditure went what is known as the recurrent expenditure and I will come to the development programme in a moment. So this is where the money went. Did we waste that money to pay wages and salaries, goods and services, transfers and subsidies? Look, it was not us who built Las Alturas, you know. It was not us at all you know. [*Desk thumping*] And I will tell you what we built with the capital development project. It was not us who paid billions for a GTL Scrap Metal Plant. Remember that? Malcolm Jones freed on the stroke of a pen, just write-off,

withdrawn from the courts.

And so that is the legacy we will remember. When we come to expenditure under the capital development programme it is broken down into two areas. It is broken into something called the Consolidated Fund Development Programme and something called the IDF, the Infrastructure Development Fund. Both of those estimates are found in here, this same book, Development Programme.

3.15 p.m.

So under the Development Programme, Madam, as separate from what I have just spoken, we spent, when we were in Government, \$17.6 billion under the PSIP—that is from the Consolidated Fund moneys—and then we spent \$20 billion in the five years—I am sorry. We spent \$20.7 billion from the Infrastructure Development Fund. What was this money used for? I can see it; I can touch it; you can travel any part of this country, you will see the capital development; [*Desk thumping*] you can touch the capital development, and it is not hidden behind closed doors in secret. You can see it. You know it, and all your children—the over 100,000 children—they could have seen, felt and used the laptops we gave them. That was under the Capital Development Fund. [*Desk thumping*]

You would see it in the hospital that we built and the others we had started to build, the one in San Fernando, the Couva Children's Hospital. You could see it. You could actually see it. You will see it in the over 100 schools built by Dr. Tim Gopeesingh through his ministry. [*Desk thumping*] You could see it in the police—eight police stations and the fire stations. [*Desk thumping*] You could see it in the highways; you could see it in the

roads, in the drains. [*Desk thumping*] You could see it in the dredged water courses. Today, people come into Port of Spain—total flood out in—[*Desk thumping*] And you know what she said? “Oh, oh, the PNM is back.” That is what MP Ramona told me. She had to turn back and get a different route—on the bus route.

We can see the Development Programme. Money is spent on access roads; we can see it in the same aquatic centre, in the cycling track, the velodrome, the tennis centre. We could see it in that northeast one in Grande, the regional complex. You can see them: the COSTAATT campuses, the NESC centres, the YTEPP centres, the MIC centres. Minister Fazal, as he was then—Karim—all those. You could see it in the Aviation campus; you could see them; you could touch them. After one year and \$60 billion. Let me see it; let me touch it. [*Desk thumping*] So that is where the money went.

Hon. Member: Where the money gone?

Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: I can show you. I have gone through it. This is where the money went. And I have to sit here to repeat, repeat, repeat, recurring nightmare—decimal—to tell me I “tief de money. Kamla tief de money.”

Hon. Member: Nonsense! Nonsense!

Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: “Partnership tief de money.” This is where the money from the budget went for five years: recurrent expenditure for salaries, goods and services, transfers and subsidies, the development project for schools, for highways, for roads, for buses. Thirteen buses you are driving with Internet—those 13 buses too.

Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar SC

Okay. Let us move on. And you know, again, you come here and say “you all spend out de money. It doh ha no money.” Right?

Hon. Member: And people believe it, “yuh know”.

Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: Yes, people believe it. But they repeat it, so we must repeat, repeat, repeat. [*Desk thumping*] And, you know, I am seeing in this Budget Estimate, you know where? I see a new project, moneys allocated for \$500,000, to do what? To build a house—the construction of a Tobago residence for the Prime Minister.

Hon. Member: Nuuuh! Insane! [*Crosstalk*]

Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: Did you know that? And one of the Members on the other side know that. “We doh have money! Wean yourself! Doh come and ask the Government for school, and road and health centre, man.” Five hundred thousand dollars allocated—

Hon. Member: Shame!

Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar SC:—for a residence, and the oncology centre cannot get complete, cannot go.

Hon. Member: Cancer, diabetes.

Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: For a house. Hon. Prime Minister, with the greatest of respect, yes, I am sure you could find a lodging in Tobago. Let us take that \$500,000 and let us put it to help some of those children for the Children’s Life Fund. [*Desk thumping*] Let us put it for the oncology centre. Let us use it for the benefit of the people—

Hon. Member: Medicine.

Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar SC:—for medication. The hon. Minister of Health crying always that he does not have enough money to buy the scarce

medication. Let us put it there. Let us put it there.

Hon. Member: Lord, have mercy.

Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: So that is how we spent the money, Madam. We spent the money to develop the intellectual and physical capital of this country. [*Desk thumping*] And you know why? Because that is how you build a country. That is how you build a nation. That is how you generate industry and sustainable jobs. That is how you develop people. That is how you raise the standard of living of the citizens of your country. Madam Speaker, that is a government working for you and not against you. [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. Member: “Yuh preaching.”

Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: And now I turn to energy which is the topic—worldwide topic all over the world and we could speak on that for a long, long time, but I just want to raise a few points very quickly. Energy, Vision and Policy: I think what would be recorded—it may not be recorded now because, you know, the holy text, the *Bible*, tells us all the time, a prophet is not scorned but in his own hand. It is only after “yuh dead and gone”, in other words, that people remember the things that you did. But I think one of the most unheralded legacy items that would be left by the People’s Partnership administration would be the vision and policy agenda articulated in the “Propelling our Energy Future”. [*Desk thumping*]

We supported programme agenda with political will and energy diplomacy, unsurpassed for many years. Now, the bright energy future, the hon. Minister’s budget statement again, in here—gave us a bright energy future, the Minister of Finance so excited—with due respect has nothing to

do with what he did within the last year. It is the result of hard work of several key policymakers within the last government. The energy rebound expectations of the Minister of Finance, at least those parts that have to do with increased production from the fields mentioned: Angostura Phase 3, Sercan, DeNovo, Angelin and of course, Juniper, they had nothing to do with what happened—with this Government in the past year.

And these fields will bring in added natural gas production because under the People's Partnership, and especially the hard work of Minister Kevin Ramnarine and Minister Bhoë Tewarie—[*Desk thumping*]*—*that we had the foresight to do what was required to create the conditions for the very risky business of drilling, and that is what will now bear fruit. It is bearing fruit and will, in the future. So for a decade, Madam Speaker, before 2012, there was no drilling taking place in the energy sector because there was not an appropriate incentive system in place. Right? And so we make no apologies for incentivizing the sector, because today we can boast of a new horizon for providing the incentives which led to the threshold of great fortunes.

We are clear that the drop in prices is an external shock—we appreciate that—which remains out of our control. We know that. The price dropping is an external shock. We cannot control that, but there is something we can do something about. If your prices are dropping, there are two things you can do. You can try to do things to change the price, but we have no control. The world is too large, global levels. The other thing we can do is increase your production. So if you have more to sell, then you will get more money. This Government has done absolutely nothing in the past year to

increase the production. [*Desk thumping*] Nothing, nothing in that area, nothing.

So action is needed, through exploration, production and foreign direct investment. And what is needed, Madam Speaker, as well, an energy policy and also needed, we must pursue and generate renewable energy. Now, you know, Madam Speaker, not everything needs money. The energy policy, worked together with the Caricom and so on, those things are there. You do not need to go and spend billions to complete that work and to have that policy going forward.

Pursuing and generating renewable energy—a lot of that work is sitting there to be taken forward and work started. The work with exploration production and FDI, that can be done. But you have to do something. And, again, it does not need money in the sense of billions of dollars. You have done nothing in the year. After one year we come to the budget statement and you are just repeating again the promises made last year, which you have not implemented. And if you tell us this energy sector is so vital; it is the mainstay of the economy for the revenue of this country, for the development, for the jobs, for the livelihood, why are we not growing the revenue from this sector?

Yes, we must diversify—and I am going to come to that—but you know there is something—I remember going to one of these conferences. I remember a woman from the United States saying—she said, “You know, people are saying you all must diversify, diversify, diversify”. She says, “That is all well and good”—and she agrees with it—“but at the same time, if you have a competitive advantage in an industry, you must exploit that

industry to the fullest.” [*Desk thumping*] So we do not throw our hands up in the air and say, well, we have to diversify and that takes forever and we cannot. There are two things we can do. We can deal with increasing the production in the energy sector and at the same time we go off into creating the formulas and the programmes for diversification which I will come to.

And what is one of the things that is totally necessary? Last year the Minister recognized what he needed to do—what they needed to do—to help grow the energy sector from production levels. This is what he said at page 13 in the Budget Speech, and I quote:

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

Fast forward one year later, there has been absolutely no change in the fiscal regime—none whatsoever. What we are told this year, again, we could look at pages 36 to 37 in the budget 2017—the hon. Minister tells us—he has gone to his favourite advisors, the IMF and they have made recommendations. And what is happening with those recommendations, Madam? They are under “active consideration”—one year later. Everything is “active consideration”. One year later, nothing being done to grow in that sector. And what is needed is that fiscal regime. That regime for oil and gas is not cast in stone; it is organic. It must adapt with the changing international environment.

When we were in office we made changes to that fiscal regime and we did it as early as in 2010, because when we went in there we saw the

production was down. Oil barrels per day was very down and we knew we had to grow. The rigs were not drilling and so on. We had to grow the sector. And thus far, the hon. Minister of Finance has read, as I said, three budgets and there has been no change. So while Rome is burning, the small lease operators and farm-out companies operating in constituencies like La Brea—that for the hon. Minister of Energy in La Brea—in other places as well, they are facing bankruptcy. As Point Fortin, Minister of—they are facing bankruptcy and closure.

It means loss of jobs, loss of work for all the subcontractors, all the service providers. They have asked only that they want relief from the SPT—the supplemental petroleum tax—and that relief, 13 months later, just not coming. It is still talk and more talk and more talk. Now we hear the Minister has it under “active consideration”—some recommendations from the IMF. Now, I have no brief for the IMF and I have no brief against the IMF, but in my limited experience and knowledge, I do not know of the IMF having any particular expertise.

Mr. Imbert: They have a whole unit.

Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: Yes. So the hon. Minister will tell us about the whole unit that deals with oil and gas, those recommendations. We will listen to him. You know, there is no point “steupsing” across the floor, you know. This “steupsing” thing got one of your Ministers in trouble already, you know. Be careful, you know. Be careful. That is not the place and not the time—in the Parliament.

Okay. So the fiscal regime, no change—“under active consideration”. Now, this fiscal regime, as I said, we made changes in 2010. We made in

2014, and that is what is helping in the sector now. The results show that while in 2010 our country recorded 1,132 rig days, by the time we left in 2015 we were able to get 2,765 rig days, which is double. [*Desk thumping*] Still, the production level of barrels per day still needs more work.

The data shows while in 2010 petroleum-related FDI was US \$501 million—2010 eh—by 2015 FDI from the energy sector, US \$1.459 billion. [*Desk thumping*] And that was because of the fiscal regime we had put in place and the incentives and so on, over the period. That is what allowed this investment to come, which will reap profits and benefits down the road.

Now, the data shows also, for the five-year period, '11 to '15, petroleum-related FDI was US \$9 billion compared to \$3.3 billion for the period '06 to '10, for the previous five-year period. [*Desk thumping*] So, again, it is a doubling of it; more than doubling, it is tripling that FDI.

3.30 p.m.

When the Acting PS of the Ministry of Energy and Energy Industries sent a report there were 22 exploration wells to be drilled in 2016—2018. You know, we have to ask how that happened. Obviously, it did not happen suddenly. You wake up overnight in September 2015 and decided to start exploration. It was all the groundwork that had gone in before.

[*Cell phone rings*]

Madam Speaker: Member, whose device is interrupting the proceedings, please leave the room and shut it down please. Continue please Member for Siparia.

Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: Thank you very much, Madam. Let us go. Exploration wells, and these wells went forward. All right. Now we have to

always remember and I think I am sure the hon. Minister does, that exploration is not like building a box drain. It takes the investor years to plan, years to negotiate, mobilize and drill and the risk is tremendous because you may invest all that money down there for exploration and come up with a dry well, or you could hit black hole and come up with lot of gas and oil. So the progress we will welcome in 2017 and beyond is the result of those policies pursued in the energy sector over the past several years.

In fact, what have they done for the one year? I am saying with the greatest respect, in the energy sector I see nothing being done and Minister is here and Minister will tell us what Minister has done to allow it. Where is the master gas plan? Have we lost that in the way we lost some other report? Some fishing report? Where is the master gas plan? What is wrong with it? It was completed. I understand they have taken it and called back the consultant. The consultant is so happy because they are paying him more to go back and do what was done before. I mean, wasting time. Review, review, review. Audit and review and the whole country is on standstill. For real! Autopilot. Okay. So these new discoveries and so on will come on stream. Great. I am happy for all of us and the whole country.

They started as I said before, and in the same way now to set the tone to go down the road in the same way you have to do it—[*Interruption*] I am sorry, Madam—you have to set that down now. You know, there is a great Native American tribe, Iroquois—they call themselves Iroquois—and they talk about in framing the laws and what they do. I have the quotation here. They talk about thinking for seven generations. So we do not just think of today. The price is down today.

You know, it is a very dangerous thing we doing, you know. We are looking like we are putting everything on hold because we know what, we are praying and we are getting people to pray that the price of oil will go up. Yes. Now, I want you to seriously remember, you know, that God helps those who help themselves. [*Desk thumping*] So going down and praying and bringing people in a day of prayer to pray to carry up your price of gas is very good, and I am also praying too because I have children. I have to live here, I want the prices to go up, but that is not enough and that is where you put in the fiscal regime. Put that fiscal regime in now, deal with the SPT. Deal with that supplemental petroleum tax. Do with that now because then you have to plan for seven generations. We have to do it now.

“...the current Gas Master Plan deliberations must result in clear policy decisions regarding matters...”

Now I want to quote Mr. Norman Christie. I am sure the hon. Minister is nodding her head so she knows what Mr. Christie is saying. This is not Kamla, this is not Opposition. Mr. Norman Christie. BP’s Regional President, this is what he says and I quote and it is important:

“...the current Gas Master Plan deliberations must result in clear policy decisions regarding matters such as gas allocation and price and must incentivize upstream investments in an increasingly competitive environment.”

And hear this:

“Failure to bring clarity to these matters quickly will result in”—a sharp decline in—“investments”—which will lead to—“a repeat of the circumstances...”—

Madam, please. May I please?

Madam Speaker: Members! Member for San Fernando West, Member for Diego Martin North/East and Member for Diego Martin West, could we please have some silence so that the hon. Member for Siparia could continue with her contribution. Continue please.

Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: Thank you very much. I was speaking on the words of Mr. Norman Christie where he is warning, and I continue the quotation.

“Failure to bring clarity to these matters quickly will result in”—a sharp decline—“in investments—which will lead to—“a repeat of the circumstances that have materially contributed to the natural gas supply and demand imbalance...we are currently experiencing; only it will be worse.”

Mr. Norman Christie.

The private sector is saying that if Government does not get its act together as it relates to clarity of policy there will be a drying-up of investments by bp in Trinidad and Tobago. This is very frightening. So get your act together because the work for tomorrow, to drill tomorrow to get greater things, those incentives have to go in now. [*Desk thumping*] You have to get it now to put in place now. And this praying that the price of oil will go up and down to suit you, wonderful if it happens, but help yourself and put the fiscal regime in place.

I turn now to Petrotrin because the Minister’s song and dance about Petrotrin owing all this money. The records at the Ministry of Energy and Energy Industries will show us that all drilling has stopped at Petrotrin.

Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar SC

Minister, tell us if that is true. That is my information. There is no drilling on land by Petrotrin and there is no drilling in Trinmar. So no production is coming. The last time there was no drilling in Trinmar was in 2009. Who was in Government?

Hon. Members: PNM

Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: Why has Petrotrin stopped drilling, Madam?

The Prime Minister speaks about increasing our production, but that cannot be achieved if you are not drilling. You have to drill. If you do not drill, production will drop. There are also issues about the recruitment of the President of Petrotrin. I do not get into these human resource matters. Minister, kindly look into it. There is a report by the *Trinidad Guardian* published July 16, 2016 that was based on documents received from Petrotrin—[*Interruption*—Madam, you know, these two guys never stop talking. Not you. Members for Diego Martin North/East, Port of Spain and San Fernando West.

Madam Speaker: Members, this is going to be the last time that I will draw attention to the Standing Orders.

Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: Okay. Thank you, Madam. [*Crosstalk*] Madam Speaker, there is crosstalk. Somebody is suggesting you have a crush on them. I do not know.

Madam Speaker: Please leave me out of this. [*Laughter*] Continue please, Member for Siparia.

Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: Thank you very much. I do not know about these backroom things really. Just for a light moment in this long three hours, Madam.

As I move on, a report published in the *Guardian*, July 16, 2016, based on documents received from Petrotrin indicates that a Mr. Fitzroy Harewood, who is now President of Petrotrin, never applied for the position when it was advertised. The documents in the *Guardian* newspaper—I do not think he will sue the *Guardian* for defaming him. So please let us see and get the truth behind this. His name also appeared on the list of persons shortlisted but he never applied.

Hon. Member: Never.

Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: Oh, sorry. His name never appeared on the short list of persons. How then does he become President of Petrotrin when he never applied for the job? [*Desk thumping*] Serious matter. Minister, ask the Government to investigate. Should the allegations have basis and fact, then the board should immediately resign. That Petrotrin board. Again, you always have trouble in Petrotrin with the PNM, you know, when they are in power.

We have also been told Petrotrin is saddled with a debt of \$20 billion and the heart of this debt is a US \$850 million bond for which a bullet payment is due, and I think I heard the hon. Prime Minister talking about renegotiating and so on because this is a very deadly repayment that has to be made. What the Government did not tell us is how Petrotrin came to be burdened with so much debt in the first place. [*Desk thumping*] The Prime Minister admitted in his address on September 11th, this year, that that debt cannot be serviced unless the Government intervenes. How did it come? The facts show that it was under the administration of MJ—not Michael Jackson—Malcolm Jones and Andrew Jupiter that Petrotrin debt went out of

control. It was under the administration of these two people and others—and that is the same Mr. MJ that Petrotrin mysteriously decided to discontinue civil action suit against. The more things change, Madam Speaker, the more they remain the same, and that debt that is how it came.

I have a little piece that I would like to talk about on compressed natural gas, but let me just summarize it by saying every single initiative mentioned in this budget on CNG was initiated by the People's Partnership Government [*Desk thumping*] and we are therefore very happy that the Government is continuing with that initiative. It is well done! Well done, Minister of Energy and Energy Industries. Please continue because it is going to be a very good initiative. I know a lot of the public sector vehicles are already outfitted for CNG—PTSC, WASA and so on. Three Js: Jones, Jupiter and Julien. There are a lot of jokers in the pack.

Divestment of energy. I really want to move on to that because this is where I cannot believe, as I said, people would be so reckless. So let us deal with sale of assets. I will come to sale of assets. Just before I do that, TTNGL, this is the Phoenix Park shares, I will come back to that in a moment. Let me just go quickly. The Minister has indicated that he is going to sell—I do not know what. It was a very vague thing about Lake Asphalt, a partial divestment. No details are given and so on, partial divestment in Lake Asphalt—in LATT. That is the acronym, LATT. [*Crosstalk*] Not that one at all. This is the one with the famous Pitch Lake, Madam. So it is a very vague statement. It is very serious. Procurement legislation passed so long. It took us five years to get it through the last Parliament. Now passed by this Parliament and not proclaimed. All these divestments of projects are going

to be taking place, you have not proclaimed the procurement legislation. What is the process? What is the process of divesting partially in Lake Asphalt and so on? That is something others will go into.

So you have divestment for TGU I believe, but that one is by competitive bidding. So we will see how it unfolds when the details come. But the ones that I have a problem with is the TTNGL and the First Citizens Holdings, and I will come to those in a moment.

Mr. Lee: FCHL.

Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: FCHL. What is the way forward with the energy sector? I will pass my notes to others to deal with it because I now want to come to the sale of assets and I dub it as being the sale of some of the crown jewels of Trinidad and Tobago. This matter for me, and I am sure for others when we share the information, involves a very serious matter which appears to be a financial transaction designed by a few to benefit a few at the expense of honest law-abiding taxpaying citizens. I expect that this matter will be developed further in legal action which we are researching, the legal action, as we speak.

Now, I am reminded when I saw these transactions on TTNGL and First Citizens Holdings (FCHL) of these words from Walter Scott in his very epic poem.

“Oh what a tangled web we weave, When first we practise to deceive!”

“Oh what a tangled web we weave, When first we practise to deceive!”

You know, my father used to say—God rest his soul, he is gone—if it

walks like a duck, it quacks like a duck, it looks like a duck, the chances are that it is a duck. And so, let us look at what is happening with TTNGL and the First Citizens.

As MP and former Prime Minister, I acted on every substantiated allegation of corruption brought before me where there existed reasonable doubt. It is history that I removed several Ministers from office when their conduct was called into question and I referred several other cases to relevant authorities for action. The current Prime Minister, to his credit, acted when he apparently received information about one of his Ministers and I think also a Mayor and a Senator. They were also changed as a result of apparent misconduct—a Senator and a Mayor. So to his credit the hon. Prime Minister so acted.

I am not sure whether he has refused to act in the face of clear misconduct by other Members, but he has told us to wait till after the budget. So we shall see. I am asking the hon. Prime Minister, through you, to deal with this matter transparently and do not let us go behind the rhetoric and allow it to go away along the lines of Malcolm Jones.

3.45 p.m.

The instant case threatens to be bigger than all of them. It involves billions of dollars in state assets and what appears to be a network of wheeling and dealing which goes on in the boardrooms of high-rolling friends and financiers. You know, it is a strange thing. They always had names for UNC financiers but you never hear about a PNM financier but they are there. Believe me, they are there. And this wheeling and dealing going on in boardrooms of high-rolling friends, financiers and which may

reach right inside the Cabinet of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*]

The Minister, in his budget presentation, in the space of a little over 200 words—200 words you know—glibly, smoothly, glossed over plans to sell billions of dollars of state assets. [*Interruption*] I have warned this population that they have to look beyond the rhetoric of the Minister and his Prime Minister. We must see what is being hidden in the back. That is why I talked about deceptive budget and so on and we must look at why we are being distracted as a population because I know we cannot trust this Government. We cannot. [*Desk thumping*]

I make it clear at the outset, I am not convinced that this apparent fire sale of the state assets at this same time is necessary despite the Minister's demonstrated fiscal incompetence and despite running up billions of dollars of debt with nothing to show but I believe the—[*Interruption*—because you did not collect the revenue. Anyhow, I am not going to engage across the floor; not going there. I am very concerned about the expenditure pattern of the Minister and his Government of revolving debt by borrowing to pay for consumption expenditure as opposed to getting true revenue-generating initiatives. I will deal with these and my colleagues will further deal with them.

Let us get to the sale of TTNGL and FCHL. First of all, it is not an IPO. Do you know what the word "IPO" means?—initial public offering—so scratch. Pick up your book, pass that. It is not an initial public offering. The Minister said he is going to have an IPO into TTNGL and FCHL, not an IPO, okay? Understanding of the normal English language, this one is

normal. So let us make that—to use some of the Minister’s words—indubitably, pellucid, that there can be only one initial public offering and this has passed with respect to both entities. Perhaps his friend from the economic development board can advise him of the difference of the two. I am concerned about the timing of the sale of these shares and I will ask the Minister to give us an explanation as to the timing. So I do not “dis” that completely, we will hear his response.

The Minister said with respect to the sale of shares for these two companies, each one separately, on the Budget Statement 2017, page 90, it is all in here. His own words which I quote. He said that he:

“...will put in place special arrangements for existing shareholders to access the IPO...”

And then said:

“...this is similar to a rights issue.”

So in other words, the Minister is going to put special arrangements in place to sell the shares in TTNGL—which was the Phoenix Park thing—and to sell the shares in First Citizens Holdings Limited to “existing”. So you know what—I said you know what, why? Who are these ghosts behind the posts?

Now, it is not easy to find them, you know. You have to go on that website. It took me a long time and this morning when I am really getting into the stock exchange to see some of the companies, the Net shut down. But we will get the rest of the names, I have some of them now which I will share with you and invite you to go up for yourselves and look at it. Here we are. The Minister wants to put special arrangements to sell to existing shareholders. First of all, there is no obligation in law or otherwise to sell to

any existing shareholders. [*Desk thumping*] If there is, I ask the Minister to provide the legal document which says he must sell to existing shareholders. But as far as we understand the IPO and the way it was done, that was the real IPO, no such obligation.

Secondly, with the Minister, this is like a rights issue. So that is why you think okay, well this must be something in law and so on. A rights issue occurs when a company offers existing shareholders a right to buy additional new shares in the company. That is not the case here at all. The usual approach is to offer shareholders a specific number of shares at a specific price. The company will also set a time limit to such shareholders to take up the company's shares. In order to encourage existing shareholders to take up the offer to buy additional shares, the company may even offer its shares at a discounted price. So is the Minister referring to offering a discounted price for the shares in relation to the value now currently being traded? Simply put, is he offering the shares at a lower value to these shareholders than the market value? And if so, if that is the case, why? These are unarguably highlyvaluable shares which have been demonstrated by the high demand witnessed when the first two IPOs were done where they were oversubscribed—and the Minister did say that in his statement—when we had launched them before.

When there are rights issues to be made, pricing of shares must be carefully considered and there are two conflicting factors and these are:

1. The price has to be cheap enough to encourage maximum interest from existing shareholders but it must be high enough to raise the cash the Government projects to raise from the sale.

Minister of Finance has stated, therefore, that the sale of the shares will support the national budget in fiscal 2017. So right away, you are selling these for budget support, deficit financing and so on. Therefore, the revenue to be raised is part of Government's expected revenue stream. Rights issues tend to be invoked when markets are rising and with the greatest of respect, I am not of the view that markets are, at the moment, rising for you to go back to rights issues. The Minister can convince us otherwise.

To the contrary, market conditions have changed dramatically and in particular, the excess liquidity in the system that existed at the time of the earlier IPOs, they have long since evaporated. So why then is Government proposing to sell these shares in this manner through to the same shareholders—existing? I say this and raise these in the context that they have not yet proclaimed the procurement legislation because that could have assisted for the transparency and the accountability and to make sure there is no waste, corruption and mismanagement in that process.

Now, I recall the very same Minister of Finance, in another incarnation, he called that procurement legislation—*Hansard* sitting of July 04, 2014—he called it “a farce” and “a pretence”. Same legislation. The same Minister, in presenting his 2017 Budget Statement says and I quote:

“...end of March 2017...if not before, all public bodies...will be required to carry out public procurement and the disposal of public property in a manner...consistent with the...Act.”

Great, well done. I am saying, hon. Madam Speaker, and hon. Minister and Government, that these assets should not be sold until the procurement legislation comes into place. [*Desk thumping*]

The Minister went on to state an expectation by eliminating bid-rigging, collusion, manipulation, overpricing and so on, and Government will be pursuing interest of our taxpayers. Now, I wonder why the Minister and various Ministers of Government have been rushing to announce to start projects including these shares to be sold without the oversight benefit. And I come back to my point of ignoring the average citizen. [*Crosstalk*] Madam Speaker, please, the time is of the essence right now and I would appreciate your assistance.

Madam Speaker: Members, could we please afford the Chamber the respect it deserves? I would not like to be rising on my legs again; I intend to enforce the Standing Orders hereafter. Member for Siparia.

Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: Thank you very much, Madam. Ignoring the average citizen. So the Minister seeks to sell these very profitable assets, not to John Public, not to the general population, but has no intention of selling to John Public to have an opportunity to own shares in very profitable companies. He is seeking to sell them only to the existing shareholders, nothing for the average man. TGU is to be sold to institutional investors. Okay? So to the big business, he offers high-yielding profitable things in TTNGL and the other First Citizens. Why are we limiting the sale to these two companies to existing shareholders and why are we leaving out John Public? And do not forget “Dhularie” from wherever, John Public and “Dhularie public”, they need to buy too.

So how we did it. When we put out the IPOs in 2012, at the time when the market was rising, we insisted the IPO to be opened to all citizens. There was an allocation policy used that was taken from NEL from their offering

in 2001. It promoted the widest possible participation in share ownership and so employees of enterprises were given a percentage, 15; individual investors, these are normal individuals, nationals, 15 per cent; NIB, 10 per cent; registered mutual funds, UTC, 25 per cent; pensions and other funds, credit unions, co-ops, 25 per cent; companies registered in Trinidad and Tobago another 10 per cent; so there was a spread. Institutional buyers and of course, ordinary John Public and “Dhularie” public as the case may be. The total offering, we know, was oversubscribed and so on. So why is the Minister so gung-ho to limiting access to these very lucrative business? Okay?

Individual investors who were citizens of Trinidad and Tobago applied for 43,976 shares and there were only 7.2 million shares and you got 43 million people wanting these shares. Totally, totally oversubscribed. So very lucrative. And since then, the prices have gone up. If you check right now on the stock market, you will see the prices up. Do the by-laws of the bank require shares to be sold to existing people? And I am told no but I ask the Minister, tell us. I can see no good policy considerations to support selling what is now—it is not an IPO but the secondary offerings of shares in First Citizens and TTNGL to the present shareholders.

So let us find out who they are before the time runs out on us. There are conflicts here and I am sure that we will pursue these further. According to the annual report of TTNGL Limited 25, the main shareholders of TTNGL are: NGC, NIB—fine—Unit Trust, National Enterprises Limited, Tatil Life Assurance ACC, Tatil Life Assurance Limited, Deposit Insurance Corporation, Republic Bank Limited, Michael and Helen Moses and

Anthony N. Sabga. Four of the five directors of TTNGL, who would have been appointed by this Government, hold nominal accounts, amounts of shares as well so they are also shareholders, and these persons are: Mr. Gerry Brooks, Andrew Jupiter, Anand Ragbir and Ashmeed Mohammed.

Now, very interesting revelations emerge when you search the directors of the companies now who are shareholders for the TTNGL, and that is why—what?—a web you weave when first you practise to deceive. They are all interlocking directorates and persons going on here linked to high officials in the Government. And here we are now, very interesting revelations. I could not believe that such a small circle of people are involved in the ownership of this very valuable piece of financial capital. Here is one example.

Soon after the elections last year, Mr. Gerry Brooks retired as the Chief Operations Officer of one of the largest conglomerates in Trinidad and Tobago. At the time of his retirement, Mr. Brooks was a member of the board of the parent company of the very said conglomerate. He also served previously as a director of Tatil. Remember that name? Shareholder. One of the companies listed as a shareholding. In fact, TTNGL's annual report 2015 reveals that five of the 10 shareholders of TTNGL are companies or individuals who are part of the conglomerate of which Mr. Brooks was the COO.

4.00 p.m.

Those entities as per the 2015 annual report, they hold 5.64 per cent shares of TTNGL. The NGC, at all material times, was and is the single largest shareholder of TTNGL. Who is the Chairman of NGC? Who is the

Chairman of NGC, appointed by that Government? [*Desk thumping*] Gerry Brooks.

Soon after his retirement he was appointed, by the Government, Chairman of NGC and Chairman of TTNGL and he still holds these positions. Thanks to this Government Mr. Gerry Brooks, within days went from being an associate with five entities holding shares in TTNGL to being Chairman of the largest shareholder, that is NGC, of TTNGL and the Chairman of TTNGL as well. So from being associated with the five entities holding the shares now he becomes the boss, the chairman of those two.

So now, instead of controlling 5.6 per cent of this lucrative corporate asset as a direct result of his appointment by this Government to NGC and TTNGL, Mr. Brooks and his associates now control, control, 57.6 per cent of TTNGL. Hon. Prime Minister, you have shown that you are willing to act, please investigate this matter. Please investigate this matter for conflict of interest in action. In one moment in time the control of this multi-billion dollar enterprise shifted. Does this sound right? Does this sound right?

And it gets worse. The Government, apparently, are not yet satisfied. The Minister of Finance has now come to Parliament and disclosed that Government will divest TTNGL for shares but they only want to sell to whom? Existing shareholders. The plan to divest 51 per cent shareholding of the lucrative TTNGL, place it in the hands of existing shareholders and as I already told you, five of the 10 main shareholders, Mr. Brooks himself, are all associated with the same conglomerate. What did I tell you about supra-elitist? What did I tell you about policies for the 1 per cent? And you are suffering the small man, raised diesel three times, pay property taxes.

And the light at the end of the tunnel, I said: wait that sounded good, this T&TEC rebate thing. You know it sounded good. I said: hey this is the light. It is looking like they are giving the small man something; light at the end of the tunnel. You know when you examine it, it is like a train wreck coming straight in your face. It is a train at the end of the tunnel to wreck you. Because we had started that assistance programme where you would get the entire bill off, not a rebate for just \$300, you know. [*Desk thumping*] Old-aged pensioners, people on food cards, poor people grant, assistance grants, disabled. We gave it free up to, just over \$1,000 you got the whole thing off. You want to say you are giving a little, “How we say it in local, cacada? Is that the word? A little, little something nah, pass a little bligh”, when in fact you will lose more should that go into effect where you would have gained more as an old-aged pensioner with the \$1,000 you could have gotten your bill up to that. And how much it works out to per day? Twenty-five per cent of a \$300 bill, guys help me, works out to what? Seventy-five dollars for two months. And how much? Three dollars a day. No, I think it is about three dollars a day. [*Interruption and crosstalk*]

Madam Speaker: Order please.

Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: It is \$75, Madam. Twenty-five per cent is \$75 but that is spread, not monthly as the hon. Minister said but it is spread bi-monthly. The bills come every two months. So if we were to calculate that per day, the dollars that you will get in your rebate you cannot buy a doubles, you cannot have bake and shark. “Well doh even talk about ah roti, you cannot get it.” So, the programme, I will ask MP Christine to deal with the further details of that.

Let us get back to the shares in TTNGL. So, we are going to sell the shares to existing persons. They plan to divest 51 per cent and so on. And that is not all to be discovered. Around the same time Government appointed Mr. Brooks last year, they also appointed to the Economic Development Board, Dr. Terrence Farrell. He chairs the board, I believe. They also appointed Ms. Allison Lewis, a former Permanent Secretary in the Ministry of Finance and many others. Interestingly, Dr. Farrell, speaking to the *Newsday* two days before the budget, distanced himself from the budget that the Minister presented. In the *Newsday* of 29th September he said, he grudgingly disclosed that the EDB advises Government on macro-management and he said we have given various notice on various aspects of diversification, so we have put things to the Government so it is for the Government to take those or not take them. It is not unreasonable to conclude that such an important board may have also provided advice on divestment of shares. So we would want to ask whether Dr. Farrell already had knowledge of the contents with respect to divestment of shares.

According to the article, Dr. Farrell said the Minister of Finance, Mr. Imbert will present the budget tomorrow, will say all kinds of things but if people look behind the budget of what money is being spent on they will see what Government's real priorities are; real priorities are. I think we are seeing more than their real priorities. We are seeing who their real priorities are. [*Desk thumping*] And it is not the real citizens and average citizens of this country.

A search of the Companies Registry reveals that, one, Dr. Terrence W. Farrell is listed as a principal consultant and director of one shareholder

of TTNGL, namely Tatil Life Assurance Limited. It is a total interlocking directorate, selling assets to the existing shareholders. Why do you not sell it to anyone? Offer it to John Public and open it. Why do you want to put special rights issue? Why do you want special rights issue for persons who are appointees? [*Electronic device goes off in Chamber*]

Madam Speaker: Please, that device is disturbing this Chamber. Could the Member please switch off their device?

Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: Thank you, Madam. Okay, Madam. About a half hour Madam, if I may ask you? About half an hour left, Madam?

Madam Speaker: Your time would have been up at 4.34 p.m.

Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: You would certainly balance a budget, would you not? Thank you very much. Twenty-eight minutes? Twenty-seven as we count. Thank you, Madam.

So, is this principal consultant and director of TTNGL, namely Tatil Life Assurance, Dr. Farrell, is he the same person who is sitting on this Economic Development Board? Was he party to the decision that only existing shareholders are to benefit from the sale of these shares? Was there or is there a conflict of interest? These are questions that the Government must answer. And it does not end there.

Another of the Government's appointees to the Economic Development Board, Ms. Allison Lewis, sits on the board of Republic Bank Limited and Republic Bank Limited is also a shareholder of TTNGL. What are the odds of two individuals employed to provide advice to Government also miraculously managed to be in a position to benefit significantly from a decision by the very Government who placed them in that position in the

first place, a decision they could possibly have had a hand in? [*Desk thumping*] This is no small matter. It involves the transfer of shares worth billions. This involves the need for transparency in divestment of our national patrimony and an attempt by Government to offer these highly valuable shares to existing shareholders, only a few, is totally unacceptable.

Speaking in this very House on April 24, 2015, the effervescent, ever-talkative Member for Diego Martin North/East said, and I quote:

“There is a lot of room in \$2 billion for a lot of friends, families and financiers to make millions of dollars through insider trading, and that is why the crime of insider trading is so serious.” [*Desk thumping*]

There is a lot more room, it would appear, in this \$4.1 billion disposal of assets for friends and financiers of the Government.

Today I have shared some concerns about TTNGL, but Madam, the concerns are also with First Citizens Holdings Limited, but we will continue to do the searches and bring them to the public light. Many of the same shareholders are also involved in First Citizens and I am certain there would be issues of concern there as well. So it is interlocking with First Citizens Holdings, with NGC. It is really, really—it is really, really disgraceful and cause for concern. [*Desk thumping*] I am reminded again of the words of Sir Walter Scott when he said:

“Oh what a tangled web we weave,
When first we practise to deceive!” [*Desk thumping*]

In the few moments left to me, on the FATCA issue I did say, Madam, I will speak on it and I will have to give it to one of my colleagues on FATCA because the Minister of Finance raised this matter. There are

issues relating to housing and urban development. There are matters relating to infrastructure development, sport, culture, education, health. The Members of the Opposition Bench will engage in the debate because given the three hours that I am restricted to, the Members have—[*Interruption*]

Madam Speaker: Members, please.

Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: Thank you very much. Madam, what I have tried to do in this contribution is to concentrate on the areas I feel that are of grave concern, that is with respect to jobs and the economy, with respect to national security and crime certainly, with respect to energy, what appears to be the interlocking directorates with respect to the sale of shares.

I will now just want to spend the last moments left to me on some other matters. What is the way forward? How do we go forward? Let me just talk one moment on that children's hospital. I notice we have taken out the "children" from the Couva Children's Hospital. The Minister and others on the other side, it is now called the Couva Hospital. Put back the "children" in the Couva Hospital. [*Desk thumping*]

The design was for a paediatric hospital. There are major obstetric design/build equipment and pathways. The ICU and the HCU design is for paediatrics. There is a unit due for children safety, cross infections for children, nursing skill mix for adults versus children. While, no doubt, there is a link into a larger hospital is required, its main focus, equipment and design, as Dr. Khan would tell you, and Dr. Moonilal, was for paediatrics and for children. And, therefore, we call upon the Minister and we will raise, through our shadow person for health, what appears to be now the privatization of the Couva Children's Hospital.

And I would like to ask, through you Madam, I do not have a boat or a yacht. I do not know if there is anybody here who owns one. I do not know. And so I will ask them to be very careful and to make sure to declare their interest. I do not have one and I do not know anybody here who has one. No?

But I want to ask, why did you zero-rate the yachties or yachters or whatever? Why did you zero-rate them for VAT instead of—no why did you exempt them instead of zero-rating them? Why? Would you kindly explain? Because if you zero-rate them, then certain things happen, and if you exempt them certain things do not happen. And so let me just say, the persons who work and earn these moneys, and so on, it means that they do not declare their income. So the suppliers of the goods and services for the boat repairs, they will have a problem. It is just the big man who owns the boat exempt, does not pay the VAT. So the others in the chain of VAT, value-added, they would have a problem. So, perhaps, Minister can explain how that works at the end of the day.

Hon. Minister, I look forward to all your ranting and raving and jumping up in your seat. Please tell us why did you exempt them instead of zero-rate them, as we have done for other matters, with respect to VAT.

Education, the first Minister of Education will let us know as well as tertiary education. Those matters will be dealt with in due course.

Madam Speaker, in the rest of time, in this time now, I would just spend a few moments on governance style under the PNM and then we would move on to the close of our contribution today.

4.15 p.m.

While the current regime could not fault us or match us as far as delivery of good and services, Madam Speaker, they try to fault us as I said with misrepresentations, lies, half-truths, innuendos and so on. In passing, I took note that the Prime Minister had to employ spin doctors to get out of a situation, making statements and he is quoted as saying: “Yuh better begin to get weaned off the Government, because the Government’s shoulder cannot carry the weight any more.” The *Trinidad Guardian* newspaper published Sunday, October 2nd said—that is carried there. Madam Speaker, it appears that one year ago—so now the hon. Prime Minister is telling us, “shoulder cyar carry again”. One year ago in campaigning to get the votes of this country, it was: “Let us do this together”. Now is, you do it alone. [*Desk thumping*] I have already made points that it is taxpayers’ dollars, and taxpayers are entitled to have certain goods and services to come from them.

Then we move on for scarce resources, we have seen the assault on key independent institutions of the State. Early in their first year, they ended unceremoniously, hunted out and threw out the Governor of Central Bank, and guess when?—Christmas Eve. What a Christmas gift, hunted him out of office on Christmas Eve, waited until the substantive President of the country was out of the country, and guess what happened? When he was out, to put their political appointee to sign the letter to fire the Governor of the Central Bank.

Then we move on, we see where in March 2016, they did what some would think is the unthinkable, and in some way, some say, I may not repeat it for myself, but people are saying that they conspired to the set Malcolm Jones free of all and any liabilities arising from the disaster call World GTL,

[*Desk thumping*] that saw over 10 billion in taxpayers' dollars squandered. True to form, Madam Speaker, the Prime Minister said it was a bad deal, described it as a bad deal, gave a national award to one of the architects of that bad deal; remember that? [*Desk thumping*]*—*for independence. That could only happen in Trinidad. Today—[*Interruption*]

Hon. Members: “Under ah PNM. Under de PNM.”

Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: “Under de PNM.” The debt they sing about, Minister crying here, Petrotrin owing all this money. That debt as I told you before, was not caused by my administration. That debt, that will be a debt to unborn generations in this country, was under the PNM and under Malcolm Jones. [*Desk thumping*]

In March the Prime Minister declares he has no confidence in the State bank, First Citizens Bank, in the aftermath of a write on. I do not know, if is a write on or lieutenant refusal and/or failure to declare monies deposited in cash in that bank; no confidence in FCB, leaking information. I do not know.

In July, the Minister of Finance threatened to repeal the Statutory Authorities Service Commission Act, [*Desk thumping*] abolish the SASC because it failed to fire or suspend two NLCB managers on leave. I am talking about governance under the PNM, governance PNM style. The Prime Minister not wanting to be left out, attacked the Integrity Commission at a conference in March at the Trinidad Hilton, where he expressed no confidence in that institution. I think with the greatest of respect, this is unacceptable for a head of Government to undermine the credibility of independent State institutions. [*Desk thumping*] Maybe those institutions

were not fooled by faked emails, Madam Speaker. [*Desk thumping*]

By September they were attacking the Commission of Enquiry into Las Alturas, because they did not like the findings of that Commission of Enquiry. Again, unprecedented in our history, the Prime Minister said he predicted the results and he called it a witch hunt; Las Alturas. We have had Commissions of Enquiry that accused citizens of drug trafficking. Yet, that commission never got the condemnation as the one that dealt with Las Alturas. To bring this sordid chapter—it is currently a debacle.

The Government is on the verge of triggering a constitutional crisis by their incompetent mishandling of security matters, in relation to the Commander in Chief, and I will never bring him into the debate today. Suffice it to say that the embattled Minister of National Security, took 10 days before he could find his Prime Minister to brief him about what was a meeting with the highest office of the land. [*Desk thumping*] They could not talk by phone or Skype. They could not text or email, because maybe they know something we do not know, that all those things are—

Hon. Member: Monitored.

Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: —bugged. Maybe they know that, so they could not talk on the phone. They could not talk on all these things we talk on all the time. What you call them? WhatsApp and text and Facebook and Gmail and email, and Twitter, there are so many things now. They could not talk on that; 10 days. The hon. Minister of National Security could not find his leader, maybe he could have gone to the eighth hole or the ninth hole on the golf course, maybe he might have found him there, [*Desk thumping*] and propelled a crisis while acting like keystone cops.

We also—that very confidential legal advice given to the Government, by Senior Counsel Martin Daly, somehow walks into the news rooms in Port of Spain. Many observers believe that this is a man-made disaster, calculated to take action against high office holders for their own—*[Desk thumping]* I say no more on this matter, suffice it to remind the national community, it was the previous regimes which included the Member for Diego Martin West, which placed a House Speaker under house arrest, who wired an Attorney General, wired with a—what you call this thing?

Hon. Member: Microphone.

Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: — microphone. Wired an AG to set up a sitting Chief Justice for impeachment proceedings. So beware after budget, you do not know if you are being wired. You do not know what has been happening, and remember always, we cannot trust this Government. *[Desk thumping]*

So having given an overview of our critical observations in the budget, Madam, it will be left to my able colleagues to continue to analyze the budget in great detail, with surgical precision, sector by sector.

Now, in terms of what is the way forward. Yes, we agree that there has been a drop in—we agree. The UNC agrees that there is a challenge with the drop in the oil and gas revenue. We will not be ostriches and hide our heads in the sand, but we do believe that if you put the fiscal regime into place and the other measures, to increase our production in the oil and gas sector, one, whilst at the same time we seek to diversify. But, you know, we cannot go this traditional way of the tourism and so on all over again. So we

need to look for diversification in addition to tourism. I am not saying you abandon tourism. In addition to tourism, we need to go the way of the Fourth Industrial Revolution. [*Desk thumping*] So we diversify, yes, tourism and ship building all these other things, but we must look for space, and in the tourism sector, look, we are out classed in many of the islands for sea, sun and sand; not true? I mean great, Tobago is beautiful, great for tourists and so on, but we have the competition right here in our own sector.

So we must go into spaces that will create jobs in industrial spaces, in sustainable development, and this is where I respectfully suggest that we go to the Fourth Industrial Revolution, and that is why those laptops were in the book bags—[*Desk thumping*] That is why we put the laptops in the book bags of the children, so that from the time they could even move their fingers, they have the World Wide Web, the digital technology at their fingertips, [*Desk thumping*] home or in school, that is where we need to go.

So we are on the brink of a technological revolution. It will fundamentally alter the way we work, and this I am reading here from January 2016, eh. So this is not like old stuff that we have been talking about, Internet and so on all this time. It will fundamentally alter the way we live, we work and relate to one another, in its scale, scope and complexity. It will transform our entire existence. The world leaders met in Davos recently to deal with this very issue of the Fourth Industrial Revolution. I will have more to say on this on another occasion.

So the overview and the way forward for this country, yes, we cannot continue to tax and spend and borrow; borrow, tax and spend. It is not going to cut it. It is not going create the kind of revenue we need to keep our

standard of living. That is not going to work.

Yes, we have advocated in our manifesto and I still do advocate that, areas for diversification, the blue economy, the green economy and the silver economy. These are opening up areas of space for creation of revenue, [*Desk thumping*] for creation of jobs, sustainable jobs. And in addition to that, I am advocating we take serious time out and deal with this Fourth Industrial Revolution which is, in fact, revolutionising the entire of the world. [*Desk thumping*] That is the place, there we can go to really create the kind of diversification we need. So that is the overview.

My colleagues, as I say, they will probably shred this budget statement to pieces or to shred it to shreds, they will shred it to pieces. I am tempted to say that may very well be what an Opposition dream is, you know, but it could be a nightmare. So I will not pursue down that line.

Very little has been proposed to redound to improving the quality of life for citizens. They have embarked on a tax and blame approach. Madam Speaker, it was the famous Sir Winston Churchill, I always like to quote him on many things. I think, he really had—he was a politician as well as so many other things. He said, and I quote:

“I contend that for a nation to try to tax itself into prosperity is like a man standing in a bucket...trying to lift himself up...”

[*Desk thumping*]

“...for a nation to try to tax itself into prosperity is like a man standing in a bucket and trying to lift himself up...”

It would not work. You cannot tax yourself into prosperity. So perhaps we may wean ourselves, one fed up voter wrote on the social media yesterday, a

post, and it is as follows:

Dear Prime Minister, far too long the Government has been dependent on money deducted from my salary, my shoulders cannot bear this burden any longer. The Government needs to wean itself off my salary. [*Desk thumping*]

What is unbelievable, that the Prime Minister caused the citizens to be less dependent on the State for services and goods, and as I said, allocates the money to put up this residence and so on in Tobago. This is the start, of course, there will be variations as move on.

Madam Speaker, after one year in office, they cannot blame my Government, past Government, strategy I think that expired, lapsed months ago. [*Desk thumping*] Citizens already want us to get up in the morning and they cannot get food and somebody killing off their family, loved ones, or they do not have hospital and medication—they do not want to get up and say I hate Kamla. She did all that. I blame her, stole all the money, waste all—no, no, no. They are saying, “Listen, Kamla gone yuh know. You in charge now.” I want you to deal with it. [*Desk thumping*]

I am reminded when I took the oath of office as Prime Minister, the former administration left us with the Clico hole of \$22 billion, a World GTL and GOP debt at Petrotrin for \$12 billion, outstanding payments to contractors and VAT refunds, \$6 billion. Not to mention over 100 unsettled wage negotiations. Did we cry? Did we get up and cry? Did we go on a rampage blaming? No. We fixed it. We built and we governed. [*Desk thumping*]

We make a final plea to the Government on behalf of the ordinary

people in this country, the under privileged, the poverty stricken. I plead with you to retain the social safety net, and ensure that they are protected for the vagaries of the international economic impact and dysfunctional domestic policies.

The Opposition remains available at a moment's notice to work with Government, but it has to be, Madam, in a transparent manner. [*Desk thumping*] There will be no back-room deals, no secret meetings and no front room "gallerying". [*Desk thumping*]

4.30 p.m.

And remember, Madam Speaker, in closing, may I remind all my colleagues that there could be no more chilling and timely reminder of the reason we are here in this House today than page 5 in the *Express* with blaring headlines: "I lost all around, says slain cop's mom", I lost all around. And the widow of the officer killed in police station: "I got nothing but a token".

The noble profession of politics places upon us a duty to reach out to these needy and grieving to protect, provide and empathize. The tears of a forsaken mother, the cries of a distraught wife shall fall on those on the other side, and those are the reasons we are here. That is why we are here, to deal with the blood and the crime. Yes, Madam.

Madam Speaker: Hon. Member, it is 4.30. Are you likely to be much longer?

Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: Well, I think I just have two minutes. I can wrap it in two minutes; two or three.

Madam Speaker: So could I ask the Members if it meets their concurrence

for the Member to continue and then we will take the suspension?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

Madam Speaker: Please continue.

Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: I thank you very much. That is why we are here, it is like for these: I lost all around, the slain cop's mom. These are the people. That is why we are here. I do not think anyone of us really wants to sit in this Parliament—and we might be here till very late tonight—but that is why we are here. It is for the ordinary people of this country and, therefore, the policies and programmes we make, that is why we are here.

I close, Madam Speaker, to remind the Government, of course, with that, I plea again, pay the people, the families the million dollars. Pay them, just pay them, pay them. You know, it is only about five or six of them. It is not a lot of money, you know. It is 500 or whatever it is going into the House in Tobago, so take it and pay the families. It is seven? People will love you for it and thank you forever. No backroom deals in that.

I close finally. Remember, if the problems you have this year are the same problems you had last year, then you are not a leader. You are rather a problem on your own and you must be solved. I thank you very much. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker: Hon Members, this House is now suspended. We will resume at 5.05 p.m.

4.34 p.m.: *Sitting suspended.*

5.05 p.m.: *Sitting resumed.*

[MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Mr. Deputy Speaker: As we resume the budget debate, I recognize the hon.

Member for Moruga/Tableland. [*Desk thumping*]

The Minister of State in the Ministry of Education (Hon. Dr. Lovell Francis): Good afternoon, Mr. Deputy Speaker, good afternoon to Members of the House of both sides. It is, of course, a privilege and a pleasure to, in a sense, lead off the Government's side in terms of this budget debate 2016.

[*Desk thumping*]

I had planned to do something that I have never done before and, perhaps, will never do again in my time in this House, which was to commend at least two Members on the opposing side, in this case, the Member for Caroni Central and the Member for Caroni East in absentia, because of the colour of their ties, but they are not even here to get the compliment. [*Desk thumping*]
I notice that they chose to wear red today. I am wondering if it is some kind of awakening, mental or, for all you know, otherwise, but I am supposing they are hearing me on the television right now, so I would extend the compliment to them for that and, of course, nothing else.

As for my immediate response to the three-hour presentation of the hon. Member for Siparia, Siparia—I am from south, I really should pronounce that differently—for the second time in my short time in this House, she has left me in a state of shock and awe. I am having a very peculiar and very particular déjà vu experience, because I am not from that generation that would have gone to secondary school and have been taught Latin, but I have some Latin. There are some terms I know, so I know what a non sequitur is. I think I had just heard the greatest example of a three-hour non sequitur in my life. [*Desk thumping*]

It must clearly be the case that the budget presentation presented by

the hon. Minister of Finance this year must be the most brilliant budget ever presented in this House, because it must be the first time in the history of this House that a Leader of the Opposition has presented a response to the budget without even mentioning one note on the budget itself. [*Desk thumping*] I am amazed by the fact that she talked about everything else.

Now, the hon. Leader of the Opposition is a very seasoned politician. In fact, she referred to the Minister of Finance as a seasoned politician, but she, of course, falls into that category. But we just listened to a three-hour tirade that was just full of anecdote, innuendo, insinuations, aspersions, no facts, no figures, no analysis, no critical thought of any kind, just three hours of whimsy and airy-fairy discourse. [*Desk thumping*] In fact, I might want to term it the “Alice in Wonderland budget review”. It was simply amazing. And the disturbing thing about that, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and the disturbing thing about a number of the Members on the opposing side is that—I would go back to her statement—they are seasoned politicians.

Last year, during the first session of this House, the hon. Member for Oropouche East, very ungraciously referred to our win of the Government side as a kindergarten. Now, it is something we have embraced. We all understand that—I mean many of us on this side lack years or decades, I mean of experience in politics, much less experience in Government, but it is quite clear that what we lack in experience we make up for in work ethic [*Desk thumping*] and desire to work hard for the improvement of our society. In fact, I mean, I have been taught the anecdote since I have been a child that, you know, experience and wisdom go hand-in-hand but, apparently, the Member of Siparia is trying to undermine that anecdote altogether.

Now, I understand that even in giving the first response of the Government to the discourse, to use a polite word, of the hon. Member, that I should not really go down the rabbit hole with her and, basically, go toe-to-toe in terms of trying to discredit everything she said or did not say. That would be fallacious because I have other important tasks to fulfil. I have to account for, and project for, a year as a Member of Parliament. I have to account for and project for a year as a Minister in the Ministry of Education, and these tasks, of course, will take some time, but there are one or two things said by the Leader of the Opposition that I cannot let pass, because we live in a time where it is no longer as easy to obfuscate as it once was.

We live in a time where if you are the type who tends to be evasive with the truth or dodgy with the truth, it is very easy to find the facts very quickly, and there were a number of things that were mentioned in that speech that are very easy to refute. I do not have the time nor the will to do all of them, but there are some critical points made by the Leader of the Opposition, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that must be condemnable, so I would just take a few minutes to look into a few of them.

For example, number one, we were given the sense that the Government, via the Office of the Prime Minister, has somehow conspired or meant to spend the massive sum of \$500,000 to build Buckingham Place in Tobago. The population might be led to believe that in these stringent economic times the Government now is intending to waste very scarce financial resources to somehow cater to the whim or the ego of the Prime Minister when really the truth is something quite different, which is that there is an existing residence for the Prime Minister in Tobago, Mr. Deputy

Speaker, that was allowed to run into decay by the former regime, and that this relatively conservative sum of \$500,000, which will not be able to effect all of the repairs needed to bring that residence back up to scratch, is really an opening salvo in terms of fixing that already existing residence, which is state property for which the Government is responsible. When one is, Mr. Deputy Speaker, evasive or elusive with the truth, it is not too difficult to find the facts to set the record straight. So I am going to set the record straight on a few more issues. That is one.

We heard a very impassioned—I do not want to be overly critical—plea on behalf of the Leader of the Opposition for the families of those officers that have the misfortunes and have been slain in the line of duty.

5.15 p.m.

We on this side, of course, share that concern for the families of those who have been affected so unfortunately. Of course, she managed to give the impression that the Government has done absolutely nothing to deal with the circumstances. But I have been sitting here wondering if the hon. Member has stopped reading the favourite newspapers of her party, the *Newsday*, because I read the papers every day and I recall very clearly headlines on October 3rd of the *Newsday* stating that Government has already started the process of compensating those families of officers who have lost their lives in the line of duty. So perhaps those headlines and those newspapers have escaped her notice. So I will ask her to go do a little research; not too difficult, just buy a newspaper from two days ago and you will find that evidence there. So that is the second point I want to look at.

The hon. Member made the point that the national oil company of

Trinidad and Tobago, Petrotrin, has stopped drilling. That there is no drilling at Petrotrin, there is no drilling at Trinmar, no drilling at all. When the information that is available to us provided by Petrotrin says that just this month alone which has just begun, they have already drilled 53 feet—serious. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Imbert: Fifty-three thousand feet.

Hon. Dr. L. Francis: Fifty-three thousand feet; we are left nonplussed. Perhaps there is another Petrotrin that we have not heard about that has ceased drilling, but the one that we are familiar with is drilling apparently par excellence. I want to reiterate the point that when one stands in the Parliament and one is evasive or liberal with the truth, these things are not difficult to verify. What is the point of doing this? But I will move on.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, of particular interest to me was the insinuation that since the PNM has been in government that some 20,000 people have lost their jobs within the last year. Now, there is no point in pretending that since we have come into office, directly because of the economic circumstances faced by the country, that it has been the unfortunate circumstance that a number of people have lost their jobs. There is no denying that fact. As to the actual figure which was never cited in any way, so we do not know where that figure comes from, what evidence it is based on, but I am not even going to argue that fact. I want to make a comparison in terms of how this PNM operates and how the previous PP Government operated.

Let us assume that the hon. Member is correct and that some 20,000 persons have lost their jobs since we have come into government in a year,

based on the economic circumstances that we face.

Mr. Al-Rawi: That is a quarter of the labour force.

Hon. Dr. L. Francis: Let us assume that that figure which was cited, for which there has been no evidence provided, is actually true, but let us compare that to the circumstances faced under the previous regime, because I could raise here a bundle of documents, [*Member displays documents*] which might surprise this House. In December 2010, the now hon. Prime Minister, Dr. Rowley, who was then a much more effective Leader of the Opposition, [*Desk thumping*] asked a very simple question in the House. The question was: How many people had lost their jobs or had been fired by the previous regime since they came into office?

Hon. Member: What is the question?

Hon. Dr. L. Francis: How many persons had lost their jobs, been fired under the previous regime since they came into government? The response was more startling, because what I hold in my hand here which I could now use to do a lot of curls, strengthening my biceps is actually a list of people who were fired, who lost their jobs, who were removed by the People's Partnership, not between May 2010 and December 2010, but between June 2010 and October 2010, 10,000 people—10,000 people. [*Desk thumping*] Look at it; 10,000 persons who lost their jobs, names, Ministries, positions. Mr. Deputy Speaker, if I were to be cavalier enough to start reading this list, I would exhaust the limited time allotted to me. I will reiterate: between June 2010, October 2010. [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Member for Couva South, you will have your opportunity, please, please.

Hon. Dr. L. Francis: Mr. Deputy Speaker, I am actually sad that you stopped him. It is the first thing he has said since I have been here that I actually understood. [*Laughter*] But I thank you for your intervention, Sir.

And I could go on. I could talk about the children's hospital that was opened, but not opened, that has just been completed and handed over to us. I could talk about all that sanctimony that came out, talking about the PNM and corruption. I am wondering—I actually know for a fact what 10,000-tonnes of irony looks like. That the former Prime Minister could stand in this House and accuse this Government of corruption is the epitome of irony. I now know what that looks like, and I could go on and on down that rabbit hole, going punch for punch, going blow for blow— [*Interruption*] You are muttering and mumbling again. I could go that way, but I have more significant matter to account for.

I remember my simple math when I went to secondary school, which is zero plus zero equals zero. Zero multiplied by zero equals zero. So if I were to spend the next 15 minutes discussing the nothing that has been said by the hon. Member, I would have contributed nothing to this House, which would have amounted to zero. [*Desk thumping*] And what would be the point of that? I have more significant things to do and Members on this side have more significant things to do.

Because you know what, in the last year this nation has been through the most difficult financial year in living memory—it has. When I think about the last year that we went through, it reminds me of the only year that I have lived that resembles this, which was 1986. Those of us who would have been alive that long—back then I would have been in primary school.

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So actually when the Member for Caroni Central and the Member for Tabaquite were first sitting in this House, I was in primary schools in long socks and Bata Dogs. But I remember what life was like in 1985, and then I remember what life was like in 1986. I remember not eating a grape or an apple between my being a child and my being an adult. I remember when the International Monetary Fund came and what austerity meant for my family and for my friends. I remember friends who were well to do one day and their fathers and mothers lost their jobs, and their circumstances were different. [*Interruption*]

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Hon. Member for Couva South, please. Since we resumed this is the second occasion, please let us keep it down.

Hon. Dr. L. Francis: Thank you, Sir. I would have been a child but I remember what those circumstances felt like. The PNM in the 1980s put a number of provisions in place to ensure our economic survival. But in 1986 the price of oil had declined from US \$26 a barrel to US \$10 a barrel, and Trinidad and Tobago went into economic spiral. Come forward, flash forward to 2016, and we face even more dire circumstances, but it is a testimony to the strength of this Government, to the managerial ability of this Government that our economy has not collapsed in the same way that it faced in 1986. That is another testimony to the strength of the Prime Minister, senior Members of Cabinet and this Government that we have managed to hold things together, we have managed to survive.

So it is tremendously galling to, on one hand, listen to a seasoned politician talk about the fact that this Government does not understand the circumstance we face, when everything she says subsequent to that outlines

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and highlights that she has no comprehension of the circumstances we face in this country today.

Dr. Khan: Point of order.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Clarify please, Member.

Dr. Khan: The Member is saying “she”.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Okay, hon. Member, please let us use the “hon. Member for Siparia” or “hon. Member”, and stay away from the other adjectives.

Hon. Dr. L. Francis: Apologies, Sir. The hon. Member has exhibited that she has no understanding of the circumstances we face. [*Crosstalk*]

Hon. Member: She is not a she? [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Continue, Member.

Hon. Dr. L. Francis: Thank you, Sir.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I have already iterated that aside from responding to the contribution of the hon. Member for Siparia, I am also charged with accounting for and projecting for the development of my constituency. On every occasion that I have stood in this august House I have attempted to make the very simple and very critical point that I am, on one hand, very proud to represent the citizens of the Moruga/Tableland constituency but, at the same time, I am very much aware, in a very poignant way, of the negative circumstances faced by that constituency.

To be perfectly frank to this House and the viewing public, just the decision to become a candidate to run for government, required a critical degree of thought on my part. On one hand, I was particularly aware of the difficult circumstances that our nation would be facing circa 2015 and

beyond. I was poignantly aware of the circumstances faced by my home constituency.

I was aware that even if the PNM won the election and I became—despite the projections that I would not be—the Member of Parliament for Moruga/Tableland, that I would face a very difficult circumstance in the interim, simply because of the fact that this constituency has traditionally been one of the most underdeveloped. The fact that it was underdeveloped meant that it would face a very difficult circumstance, given what would be the prevailing economic circumstances. Nevertheless, driven by my desire to serve my nation, and more specifically my community, I made the leap, and one year after I have absolutely no regrets. [*Desk thumping*]

So, on one hand, it is my responsibility now to stand here and to help account for my tenure as MP for Moruga/Tableland for the last year. I want to emphasize the point and underline it very succinctly, that many of the issues that animate my constituency would be considered very prosaic or tremendously irrelevant in other communities. Many of the things that most constituencies, particularly those for example in north Trinidad, take for granted, are still issues of major contention and major concern for my constituency. So if it is that the things I discuss in my report seem trite, seem insignificant, seem atavistic, something from a previous era, it is also—

Mr. Singh: Nice word.

Hon. Dr. L. Francis: Thank you. It is really indicative of the need for development in Moruga/Tableland.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, first off, I would like to talk about the situation where the water supply is concerned. I am tremendously pleased at the

generosity of the hon. Member for Chaguanas West, because he via his tenure has played a significant part in the problem faced by my constituents.

5.30 p.m.

During the previous budget debate last year and in every discourse in this Parliament in which I was allowed to bring this issue to the fore, I have made the point very critically that water remains a problem in my constituency. In fact, I would have mentioned last year during the same budget debate that during my walks which are mandated by our party in terms of during the candidacy, I had the particular displeasure of visiting a number of communities: for example, Marac; for example, Penal Road; for example, Tableland; where the water supply was intermittent at best; where people would have been tremendously pleased to have received a supply of water once a month, once a week where they would be lucky to receive water once a month. Where, for example, in the case of Marac or Penal Road, I had the misfortune to be informed that they had not [*Crosstalk*] yeah Penal Rock Road, thank you Moruga man. I had the misfortune to be informed that they had not received water for something close to three months.

One of the things I did, Mr. Deputy Speaker, very soon after I assumed the mantel of Member of Parliament was to try to personally investigate what could be the central cause of this problem. So I did something maybe a little interesting. The Moruga end of the constituency has traditionally been the one that suffers the most in terms of water. Now it receives a supply of water from a localized source, in this case it is the Trinity Dam. What I did was to basically talk to the CEO of WASA, talk to

the south manager and organize a visit to the dam which I did.

So within a month of becoming MP, one morning I found myself on the plant at the Trinity Dam and I saw something tremendously interesting. I saw a significant expanse of water, not tremendously large. This is not a mega dam al la the Navet dam, but it is large enough and has enough depth to provide a reasonable supply for Moruga. And if you have a reasonable supply from Moruga then that allows other sources of water to not be diverted there and to have a more equitable distribution throughout the constituency. So the Trinity dam was actually the fault line in terms of the supply of water in Moruga.

So I went to that dam. So there is a reasonable supply of water. I mean, it begs expansion, it begs dredging. There are things that can be done to affect the volume of water. So the water itself was not the problem. The problem was that the Trinity dam had hitherto been a source of water utilized by Petrotrin for its activities in the Moruga area. It was in the early 2000s acquired by WASA. Unfortunately, even though it was acquired for commercial and other uses by WASA, the infrastructure at that dam had never been upgraded.

So I faced the peculiar circumstance of going to Trinity, seeing this large expanse of water, going to the pump room at that dam and seeing literally, Mr. Deputy Speaker, a single pump with two very small ancillary pumps basically incapable of doing anything. The problem with that is that when that single pump fails and because it is over worked, it is overused, it tends to fail often, basically the supply of water is curtailed. And speaking with the engineers on site, they said to me that basically if that pump goes

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down for one hour, it literally means that a village does not receive a supply of water for the entire week. Because by the time the pressure has to build up again to continue the supply, basically an entire community has lost its supply on the schedule. And because of the fact that there was one pump there, this happened cyclically.

So when I went to Marac and I asked them about their water supply, they would say to me, okay, for the entire month we have not received a supply of water, and they were somehow ascribing it to some kind of evil machinations at WASA. It was really down to the fact that this plant had never been upgraded to deal with the supply of water in a commercial sense. Okay.

Having found the fount of the problem, what was the next step? Well, what I did was to contact the CEO of WASA, Mr. Poon King, and he graciously agreed to do a tour of the constituency with me. So just a month or two after I was able to convince him and he actually came down to Moruga and I took him to that plant. And he saw for himself, because I a firm believer in the notion that it is one thing to explain a problem to someone, Mr. Deputy Speaker, it is quite another thing to have that person see the problem himself. So, we went down to the Trinity plant through the mud, through the grass and he saw for himself. [*Crosstalk*]

Hon. Member: How many steps “all yuh” make?

Hon. Dr. L. Francis: More than you might take on a daily basis. Quite a few steps. [*Crosstalk*]

Hon. Member: Tell us how many steps.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Please. Please. [*Inaudible*] Standing Order. Please.

Hon. Dr. L. Francis: Thank you, Sir. We went to the plant, he saw for himself, Mr. Deputy Speaker, the problems that were faced at the plant and he made an agreement, on the spot, to provide another pump for the plant. The idea is, of course, that on any plant like that you need redundancy. So that if the primary pump breaks down, there is a secondary pump of sufficient and significant power to replace that pump. So that while you are fixing the first, the second one can be in use. You do not lose the kind of pump time that would be lost if you have a single pump.

Now, the projected cost of this single pump which is a very simple mechanism is \$100,000 due to the financial—yes, \$100,000. Due to the financial circumstances faced by WASA during the previous year, the pump is yet to be installed. But going forward I still have the assurance because I speak with him on a regular basis, that this pump is going to be installed, and when it is installed, Mr. Deputy Speaker, it will help significantly to alleviate some of the problems faced by my constituents. And recently they have been facing a number of problems. Within the first nine to 10 months of our tenure there was a tremendous improvement in terms of the supply of water throughout the constituency.

Recently, I have been receiving a number of complaints in terms of that supply. Much of it has to do with failing infrastructure. Aside from the pump situation at Trinity, there is also a problem in terms of power. Some of the booster stations, especially the one at Grand Chemin in Moruga, has been failing, but I have been working with the officials at WASA to ensure that these situations are going to or have been rectified. So that by the end of this week, tomorrow, those pumps at the booster station would have been

fixed, the electrical problem at Trinity would have been fixed and we can hopefully return to a more amenable supply of water in the community.

[Desk thumping]

Added to that, I was able to get the CEO of WASA to agree that as soon as funding was available, he would run many of the lines in the constituency that are missing. I will emphasize the point again. The state of underdevelopment in the constituency means that there are some villages, for example, there is one part of Marac, there is one part of Tableland, there are parts of Basseterre, that simply do not have pipes in ground, so there is no purview for pipe borne water. I have gotten the CEO of WASA to agree that as soon as funding is available, he will run projects to ensure that these situations are rectified.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, it may seem absurd, it may seem ridiculous, it may seem hyperbolic to be discussing water, which we would really prefer to take for granted as something that every citizen has at their beck and call.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Hon. Member, your time has expired. Do you care to—*[Interruption]*

Mr. Singh: No. You had 10 more minutes.

Hon. Member: That is only 32 minutes.

Mr. Singh: Forty-five and 10.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: So your additional 15? Your additional 10. Sorry.

[Crosstalk]

Hon. Member: “Go ahead nah, yuh good.” Go ahead. Is only 33 minutes you talk.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: My apologies, Sir. Continue. Right. It is the budget

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debate. Sorry. My apologies.

Hon. Dr. L. Francis: It is my intention, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that during my first tenure in Parliament, because I intend to do this again, that this water situation which has been a bugbear in Moruga, ad infinitum, is brought to rest. [*Desk thumping*]

Seeing that time is quickly running away from me, I move on to another critical historical situation in terms of the problems in my constituency and that is the road situation. It has been, Mr. Deputy Speaker, a long-standing issue that the road condition in Moruga has been abysmal. I am pleased to state and I have gotten significant feedback from my constituents that they are tremendously happy to note, that for the second year running in the budget presentation there has been a critical and cogent attempt to bring some level of assurance to us that this situation will be rectified. I am tremendously proud to say that my Government, our Government is going to expend significant resources during this budgetary year to fix the Moruga road. [*Desk thumping*] And that fixing does not entail simply paving the road. It entails fixing the slopes; it entails dealing with the drainage; it entails bringing an end from Petit Cafe in Indian Walk to Marac, to a situation that has been a long-standing pain to the people of my constituency. For that I wish to commend my party, I wish to commend its leadership. It makes a tremendous difference [*Desk thumping*] to my constituents.

Added to that, I would like to commend in person, Mr. Deputy Speaker, the hon. Minister of Works and Transport because whilst we are in the midst of talking about a project to come in terms of road paving, it would

be remiss of me not to mention—[*Interruption*]

Mr. Indarsingh: You commend Laventille West and you bypass—

Mr. Smith: Grumbles.

Hon. Dr. L. Francis:—the project of fixing the roads in my constituency has already begun. In fact, the Sixth Company Road which for decades has been in a situation of disrepair has recently been fixed. [*Desk thumping*] There have been road pavings at La Ruffin in Moruga. [*Desk thumping*] There have been road pavings at Valletta Trace. [*Desk thumping*] Some of the worse roads in Moruga/Tableland have been already fixed and that augurs well for the larger project of fixing this Moruga Road which has been a historical and traditional bugbear. I will not belabour the point.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, housing has been a particular issue in my constituency. I would have iterated last year that during the campaign when Dr. Rowley came to walk with me in the constituency, he was particularly appalled by the standard of housing that he saw. And in fact, on the spot he gave me an instruction that when he comes back as Prime Minister to tour Moruga/Tableland he had better not see the same standard of housing. [*Desk thumping*] I took that instruction seriously. So within one week of becoming MP, I found myself in the office of the Minister of Housing and Urban Development, the hon. Marlene Mc Donald. I will add that I did so without an invitation.

Hon. Member: “Yuh storm?”

Hon. Dr. L. Francis: I stormed. I stormed her house, her ministerial office. And she could have turned me away, but she was very gracious and we sat and we spoke. And I explained to her the critical situation faced by my

constituents in terms of housing. And she decided to partner with me.

Subsequent to that, I have also been partnering with the current Minister of Housing and Urban Development, and the end result of that has been that in the last year we have been able to distribute to constituents of Moruga/Tableland in excess of 150 houses. [*Desk thumping*] These are houses that would have been standing idle during the tenure of People's Partnership and that is not, Mr. Deputy Speaker, giving 150 houses to individuals. That is 150 families. [*Desk thumping*] It has not been only that.

5.45 p.m.

To be perfectly frank and to be perfectly fair, Mr. Deputy Speaker, the demand for housing in this nation is astronomical. I am sure it is the case for every Member of Parliament in this House, and if you sit in your parliamentary office during surgery every week, the majority of those persons who come to make requests of you come for housing. In my case if I see 100 constituents within my surgery, 75 of them, 80 of them, 90 of them sometimes come requesting housing. There is absolutely no way that the State can afford to provide the housing stock to deal with the need for housing.

One of the innovative and interesting things that I have tried to do during my so far short tenure has been to try to assist constituents in terms of improving the quality of their houses, and I have to in this case say thank you publicly in this House so that it is recorded to both Ministers of Housing, the hon. Marlene Mc Donald and the hon. Randall Mitchell. [*Desk thumping*] Not merely for providing houses to constituents, but also helping those who meet the profile, who meet the requirements, with grants to

improve the houses that they currently inhabit.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, just recently there was a ceremony at my office, very small ceremony, where we handed out cheques to 40 individuals for home improvement. Now, this is significant, but it is really a drop in the barrel. At the end of the day, if one were to do a tour of Moruga/Tableland right now, and look at the housing stock available, it is still in some ways significantly substandard. It is my intention, Mr. Deputy Speaker, as long as I remain in this post, that the quality of housing that is accessed by my constituents, either from the State or either from their own endeavours, will be significantly improved as we move forward. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Deputy Speaker, during the debate last year, I think in my opening, I made an off-the-cuff statement, an anecdote that it would have been easier to find an elephant in Moruga/Tableland than it would have been to catch a bus. Because, whereas during my entire life it was remarkably easy to get public transportation in Moruga vis-à-vis the bus, when the PP ascended into office in 2010, mysteriously the buses disappeared. I am pleased to say, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that after a five-year absence, the buses have returned to Moruga as of this Monday. [*Desk thumping*] And for that I want to thank the Minister of Works and Transport, I want to thank the PTSC, I want to thank in particular Mr. Brian Wynette for working very hard to ensure that the buses, which we thought were extinct, have finally returned to Moruga. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Hinds: Good representation.

Hon. Dr. L. Francis: Thank you very much, Sir. The last constituency issue, and there are many more but my time is slipping away, and I will refer

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to very quickly in passing, is the issue of crime. I remember poignantly last year standing in the budget debate and noting that what had traditionally and long standing been a very peaceful community—with the notion of crime was something remarkably whimsical, stealing a yard fowl—had suddenly become a place where though we had not had a murder for 50 years there were suddenly eight murders in eight months, and that the people of my constituency who had been habituated to living lives where the idea of living in a burglar-proof house was a non “sequitur” suddenly became fearful for their lives and their safety.

Dr. Gopeesingh: Non sequitur. [*Laughter*]

Hon. Dr. L. Francis: I appreciate your red tie, try to teach a teacher. Thank you very much. Mr. Deputy Speaker, with the requisite feedback from my constituents in terms of their concerns, in terms of their safety, in terms of the crime situation, I made particular and poignant overtures to the Minister of National Security. I can say definitively today that he took my concerns very seriously and in a very short space of time he made a very significant intervention. On one hand he returned to—[*Interruption*]

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Hon. Members, please! I am trying to hear the hon. Member. Please!

Hon. Dr. L. Francis: Thank you, Sir. On one hand he returned to Moruga a particular police sergeant who has had a long-standing history in the community and understands the community very well. And added to that he provided additional security forces in terms of members of the regiment, so that for the last six months we have had rotated every single day soldiers stationed in Moruga. And the consequence of that has been that a situation

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where crime is concerned or had simply become unbearable and was spiralling out of control, has been quieted immediately. And for that I would like to thank and commend the Minister of National Security because my constituents now feel safe again. Thank you, Sir. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Your time has expired. Do you care to avail yourself of the additional 10?

Hon. Dr. L. Francis: Thank you, Sir.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Proceed. [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. Dr. L. Francis: It is impossible, Mr. Deputy Speaker, to give any significant account for my tenure in the Ministry of Education in 10 minutes. But what I will attempt to do very quickly is to provide two very, I think, significant explanations to the public in terms of what we do at the Ministry, and I will focus specifically on the area of projects in terms of school construction and school repairs.

I was very amused to listen to the hon. Leader of the Opposition talk about the fact that the hon. Member for Caroni East had built over 100 schools during the tenure of her Government. [*Interruption*] That is a tremendously shady fact. In fact, through you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I would like to ask where those schools are located, because we cannot seem to find them? [*Desk thumping*] That is a very elusive fact. Of those 100 so-called constructed schools, when we checked the records of EFCL and we checked the records of EFPPD at the Ministry, the majority of them are at the stage of 1 per cent or 2 per cent construction. [*Interruption*] Now, I am not an engineer, I am not a builder, I do not know what 1 per cent construction means. Maybe it means that you put up the sign, maybe you turn the sod, but

the majority of the schools that were constructed by the former regime rest at these very, you know, minuscule percentages. And if we were to attempt to drive throughout the country locating them, it would be a fool's errand par excellence.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, aside from that curious situation and curious statement, I will contend and I will explain that we are faced with a very significant problem in terms of mobilizing school construction. Everyone here is aware of the situation. Basically the Ministry owes a significant sum of money to contractors, and because of that they have downed tools and we have been unable to really move forward through construction in the way that we would like. But I am happy to state to this Parliament and to the nation that, on one hand, we have a Cabinet-approved appointment to pay our contractors; two, we have gone through the painstaking process of vetting every single invoice submitted by EFCL; three, we are in the process of having the Attorney General's office review that vetting process, and as soon as that process is over, we will commence the payment of contractors, and many of the schools that exist, for example at Ramahi Trace, for example at Chatham, that are very close to completion, we will be able to open them in the shortest time possible. [*Desk thumping*] So, we have taken the year to get our houses in order, and we will begin that process of moving school construction forward in the not too distant future.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I also would like to give some brief information in terms of the vacation repair programme. Now, I had the interesting experience of reading another absurdly amusing article by the head of the SDMS today, in which he makes a kind of a rambling case that somehow the

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education sector is in chaos, when really he is just angry at the fact that what he considers to be his schools have not been completed. Mr. Deputy Speaker, we had the misfortune for the five years previous to our tenure of having a Minister of Education, in this case the hon. Member for Caroni East, who does not understand the term opportunity costs. Simply because he was on a very interesting drive to build a number of imaginary schools with no identified funding. He did not understand that basically you cannot use the same money to do more than one thing. So that if you were going to go forward trying to build all these schools which were never built, you could not then spend the same money in terms of vacation school repairs. So we face this year the unsurmountable task of trying to repair, and I will say this very slowly, 177 schools with 220 projects.

How is it when the Ministry of Education is cyclically involved in repairing schools during every vacation period that you end up at one time with this significant number of schools and this significant number of projects? I will tell you. It is because the previous regime had disbanded the repair programme. So that for years there were no repairs done to schools, because they were on an energetic drive to try to build schools that were never built. So, this year we face the unusual circumstance of having a number of schools that simply could not be utilized, that had to be demolished, had to be rebuilt. And it is tantamount to the leadership of the Ministry, and in this Minister Garcia must be commended. Because in the last vacation repair programme—

Dr. Gopeesingh: Not you?

Hon. Dr. L. Francis: It is not for me to praise myself, Sir. During the last

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vacation repair programme we basically, in three cases, demolished and built from scratch entire schools in 20 days—[*Desk thumping*]*—something which has not been done before. And unlike the schools built by the hon. Member on that side which cannot be located, I can direct you to the New Grant Anglican School, the Barrackpore Vedic School, and the Granville RC School, and you will see the industry and the resilience of this Ministry.*

And I could go on. But, Mr. Deputy Speaker, at the end of the day my time is running out and it is time to summarize. This has been an interesting year for me—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: You have two minutes, hon. Member.

Hon. Dr. L. Francis: Thank you very much, Sir. This has been a very interesting year for me. It has been one in which I have been forced to grow very quickly because the demands of this constituency and demands of this mega Ministry called education are unrelenting. I am pleased to state that, contrary to the belief of many people, I still reside at Moruga. And that means that I basically commute from Moruga to Port of Spain to the Ministry every single day. But during the campaign I gave a commitment that I would not be a winning candidate who would abandon my community, and I have not. [*Desk thumping*]

Despite the additional strain that it constitutes, I am still proud to be a resident of Moruga/Tableland. And as long as I find myself in that situation of being at the Ministry of Education and being the MP for this constituency, I have given a pledge that I will reaffirm today, that I will work hard for the betterment of education and for the betterment of Moruga/Tableland, that I will stand and I will speak here resolutely, I will be honest, and I will be

decent. Like many Members here, I have faced peculiar circumstances. I am sure that I am not the only one here who has been offered a bribe. I am sure I am not the only one here who has been asked to do something illegal. [*Crosstalk*] But I stand here affirming the fact that I [*Desk thumping*] got into politics to serve my constituency, I got into politics to serve my nation, and I will continue to do so with honesty and decency.

Thank you very much. [*Desk thumping*]

6.00 p.m.

Mrs. Christine Newallo-Hosein (*Cumuto/Manzanilla*): Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and I would like to state that it was indeed a pleasure to hear my political leader [*Desk thumping*] who gave a sterling contribution to this House earlier today and who highlighted, not just the issues, you know, but gave a blueprint, a blueprint as to how the economy can be taken forward. Because I read this document, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and I saw in the front of it, “Shaping a Brighter Future – A Blueprint for Transformation and Growth”.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I do not know if the hon. Member knows what blueprint means. But a blueprint is a plan, a plan that clearly shows a step by step path to where you want to go, and hopefully where it is you want to go will be successful. But I do not see success in this plan. All I see are taxes, how to spend money without putting a diversification plan or stimulus plan in place for this country. And I was taken aback by that. But you know, even further than that, I was reading in the budget statement and I quote the Minister of Finance when he says:

“...there is widespread agreement that economic diversification needs

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to be an essential pillar of our long term vision 2030. And it is also generally accepted that diversification could only be successfully pursued in a context of fiscal and monetary stability...Until the economy is stabilised neither business or consumer confidence will be sufficiently strong...to promote structural change.”

Mr. Hinds: Did you get permission to read?

Mrs. C. Newallo-Hosein: I am quoting. Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: At least kindly refer to your source.

Mrs. C. Newallo-Hosein: I said it earlier, sorry, you may not have heard, I quoted from the Minister of Finance, from the budget statement. And so there is a premise that the Minister of Finance assumes that the consumers and the business persons will have confidence in this Government and the truth is the people do not have confidence and neither do they trust this Government. [*Desk thumping*] And as such, the Government has to come much better and I think that one of the ways they can do so is by first speaking the truth. Speaking the truth about what happens in FATCA. By speaking the truth of how they met this economy which is, in fact, we left it much better than how they have taken it. The truth that crime has risen under this Government [*Desk thumping*] when it was very low under ours—
[*Interruption*]

Mr. Indarsingh: Spiral out of control.

Mrs. C. Newallo-Hosein:—spiraled out of control—and you know, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I made a comment in this House this year and I said, and the Member for San Fernando West was most upset with me when I said that crime seems to prosper under the PNM. [*Desk thumping*] We brought crime

down. We brought crime down. And as a result of it that is an achievement. But this Government opens a number of facilities that we have completed and calls that an achievement. This Government calls an achievement of reducing a Cabinet, and most recently I see when you open a car park that is an achievement too. And so we need to explain what achievement is. And this is for what we have accomplished, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

When we were in Government our astute leader sought to diversify our economy. And one of the things she had put in place was for our tourism sector, which, in fact, was increasing under the astute leadership of both Stephen Cadiz and Gerald Hadeed, who took tourism to a place that this country had not seen.

Now, I am going to go back and forth and take in into consideration my constituency, Mr. Deputy Speaker. In my constituency you may not know but there is something called or somewhere called the Bat Caves; that is in Tamana. Do you know, Mr. Deputy Speaker that National Geographic has visited that area in Tamana and this bat cave—there is a place in Austin, Texas that earns out of the bats alone an estimated US \$17 million. And here we are, want to make a Sandals in Tobago and give away lands in Tobago which is scandalous, and bring in a foreign entity, giving away our land, for 30 years probably and give away all incentives, because when they come into Tobago the Tobagonians will not benefit in any way possible. The taxis will not benefit, the farmers will not benefit, the other hoteliers will not benefit, because when you have this particular entity come in they are not interested in involving the smaller businesses and helping them prosper.

So everything is not going to remain or anything is not going to

remain in Tobago to benefit Tobagonian or even Trinidad. But what we have is local tourism where international persons are very much interested. And you know what we can do, we are talking about jobs, we are talking about all sorts of things, but if we were to invest in this local tourism, I am just giving you one part, we can in fact have persons employed, we can train them to be tourist guides and we can in fact raise the level of Trinidad and Tobago and we can also, because my area of Cumuto/Manzanilla, the whole of the Sangre Grande area is considered by the UN to be the poorest in all of Trinidad. And because it is the poorest we have to find ways of bringing the economy up. You want to talk about taxing, but what can you tax.

If you begin to invest in the local economy and begin to stimulate the economy you can in fact look at taxing anybody at that point. But that is just the bat caves. We also have, on the other side, which is still in my constituency, we have Fishing Pond, the boardwalk, which is very dilapidated; it is deteriorated to the point you cannot go, but there also, you have a turtle nesting site. And again, Mr. Deputy Speaker, what I am saying is that you can look at the local tourism and begin to invest locally and begin to empower the persons that live in the community so that they can, in fact, begin to again stimulate the economy. Because, apparently, the Government does not have any ideas, they have no vision, they have no understanding [*Desk thumping*] of how to do it.

As my political leader said, they had indicated, let us do it together. And, of course, the Prime Minister has indicated, well no, you better do it alone because “all yuh” need to be off my shoulders. And so as a result of that, I am stating that the other side—I had to be bored to death by the

Member for Moruga/Tableland who really had nothing to contribute. He had absolutely nothing to contribute except to complain and whatever it is, and I want to say something, Mr. Deputy Speaker. You know for the Baptist holiday when we were giving out greetings, the Member on this side gave extended greetings to the Baptist community. And the Member for Moruga/Tableland gave his contribution on behalf of the Government and spoke about the whole history, he is a history professor and when our person on our side spoke and said, you know the holiday is here because of Mr. Basdeo Panday, he got angry. He started to steups and grumble—
[*Interruption*]

Mr. Hinds: Who is that? Who is he?

Mrs. C. Newallo-Hosein: The Member for Moruga/Tableland started to grumble and I was wondering, my God, if it is you are a historian, then how come parts of history is just not applicable.

Mr. Deyalsingh: Mr. Deputy Speaker, point of order. May I ask for a ruling on 48(5), please? Reference to somebody as “he and she”.

Hon. Member: “Ohhh God.”

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Again, no need to rule at this time. Continue. I will determine as we go along in terms of the using of “he or she” accordingly as the Members continue the debate.

Mrs. C. Newallo-Hosein: Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Mr. Deputy Speaker, you know, another thing that we—I am very proud that we did, we implemented something that is called the “People’s Card”. The “People’s Card” is the biometric card. And the reason why we did it was for a number of reasons. One, there has been a lot of mismanagement of funds. There has

been a lot of inefficiencies and as such to have proper accountability and to ensure that the different grants, the different social grants were in fact reaching the persons who are deserving of it. But not just to reach them, but also to transform their lives, to empower them so that they can be weaned off of the social programmes, but not dragged off as the Government appears to be doing now.

And you know, upon coming into Government, the first thing that they did was to shut down the biometric card. They shut it down and I cannot understand why, because if the Government came in on the premise that they were going to be accountable and they were going to manage the economy and they were going to put in the systems and the processes in place to ensure that there was accountability, then why shut it down. Because what they reverted to was the direct deposit. And the direct deposit, Mr. Deputy Speaker, is that you just put moneys into someone's account and you cannot determine if they purchase food items with it. You cannot determine if it is, in fact, the recipient who applied for the grant is in fact getting it. You have no way of monitoring whether the moneys that are being expended is in fact reaching the person, helping the person and how can you manage the person's ability to become now empowered by weaning them off. There is nothing. No accountability. And so it begs the question, is this Government genuinely interested in being accountable to the people of Trinidad and Tobago? And the answer is, no.

6.15 p.m.

And what is even—you know, I cannot even say it is funny, because it is not a “ha ha” funny. The Minister of Finance speaks

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about ICT and technology and how important it is, and here it is, a key element that even the National Insurance Board wanted to come on board for because they found it to be an excellent idea—because here it is, the persons can circumvent having to come in twice a year to prove life—because, you know, they have to come in to show that they are alive—this here—[*Holds up finger*] that you know, when we go to the US and you have to put your finger in?—this here would have determined that that person is alive. And should that person die, that card cannot be transferred illegally or at all, to anyone. So you would have, in fact—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Members for Chaguanas East and St. Joseph, please, that little crosstalk, I am getting a little disturbance.

Continue.

Mrs. C. Newallo-Hosein: And so, the fact that the people's card was the most feasible and effective way to manage the food card as one of the programmes, to me, the Government has missed the light, has missed the boat, has missed everything.

Hon. Member: They do not have any vision, how “dey go see dat”?

Mrs. C. Newallo-Hosein: They have no vision, as my colleague says. They have no vision. And as such, what you have done is that you have allowed for the inefficiencies to continue, and so as a result of it, you know, the Government seems to be like a seesaw, one minute they are up on something, the next minute they are down on it. Because the Minister had indicated—and this is an article in the *Express*, May 11th of this year. The Minister boasted that the

biometric card saved the State \$25 million.

So if you have something that is saving the State \$25 million—and it could be more; it would have probably been more by now—why dismantle it? Why disband it? And that is the question I am asking the Government. And we all understand, as the political leader indicated and as the Government has clearly stated, we understand that it is a very difficult time now and therefore you are looking to manage the limited resources. But the limited resources should not cause the most vulnerable to be ignored and to be left behind. Our social safety net must be employed very cautiously and very wisely to cushion the impact of the working poor.

Which brings me to the disability grants. Do you know, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that a lot of persons who are on disability grants have had it cut? No explanation—none. And I have visited these persons myself and I did not go—I did not say “ah coming” so they could sit down in a wheelchair or hold on to a cane or anything, eh. I went unexpected and I am seeing persons who are incapacitated and cannot move, in some cases; have very limited mobility, and they have had their disability grants cut without any explanation, and so are persons with food cards. They have had it cut with no explanation. And the reasoning behind it, the Government said they have been doing an audit.

But what is the result of this audit? No one knows. You know? Over 13,000 persons lost their food cards—no reason why. And, you know, I am going through the Recurrent Expenditure and I am looking

at the figures and I am surprised to see that there was a cut in salaries and cost of living and there was a cut in short-term employment, and there was a cut in the contract workers. And, you know, I could not understand, why would you cut in these areas? You know why I am saying that? Those persons are field officers, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and for you to approve a grant, a field visit must be done so that a proper assessment of the potential recipient must be ensured, and if you do not have field officers going out, it means you cannot have any approvals. Probably that is why, when you look in your Recurrent Expenditure, you are seeing so many millions of dollars have not been spent because they could not approve anything.

So here you are, cutting left, right and centre and people are suffering because there is a mountain of paperwork on everybody's desks, including the PS, because no one can be assessed. So as a result of that, we have had persons who have not received any disability grant; we have persons who have not been able to successfully access their pensions; we have persons who have not successfully been able to get any grant for—house grants, for electrical and for sanitary plumbing.

We have so many persons that are waiting one year—one year—for an assessment and that cannot happen because they fire everybody—over 100-odd persons last week and more, because somebody determined their job “ain't” important enough.

Hon. Member: What they “red and ready” to do?

Mrs. C. Newallo-Hosein: They “red and they ready” to go back out

Mrs. C. Newallo-Hosein

of Government [*Desk thumping*] because they do not understand governance.

Hon. Member: Well said. Well said.

Mrs. C. Newallo-Hosein: You know what is the interesting thing, Mr. Deputy Speaker? When our esteemed Prime Minister was preparing to take her position as Prime Minister, in her manifesto she said, “I am not going to give my people a grant. They have worked hard and they deserve a pension.” And so she reverted the grant and gave a pension, and the—

Dr. Gopeesingh: The PNM had it under “Grants”.

Mrs. C. Newallo-Hosein: The PNM had it under “Grants”. And our Prime Minister—[*Interruption*]

Hon. Member: Faris, keep quiet.

Mrs. C. Newallo-Hosein: “Yeah, yuh doh know.”

Mr. Al-Rawi: “She know what she saying?”

Mrs. C. Newallo-Hosein: “You doh know.”

Dr. Gopeesingh: Yes, that is true. The PNM had it under “Grants”.

Mrs. C. Newallo-Hosein: I know what it is I am saying, Mr. Deputy Speaker. So as a result of it, we also increased pensions. You know, Mr. Deputy Speaker, as soon the “red and ready team come een”, they change it from “pension” to “grant”?

Hon. Member: So they could take it away.

Mrs. C. Newallo-Hosein: So they could take it away. And beyond that—

Mr. Al-Rawi: “She eh know what she saying.”

Mrs. C. Newallo-Hosein

Mrs. C. Newallo-Hosein:—they indicated that they were going to increase it to \$5,000. Ask any pensioner if they received \$5,000.

[Interruption]

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Hon. Member for San Fernando, please.

All right, Member.

Mrs. C. Newallo-Hosein: Thank you. Mr. Deputy Speaker. Mr. Deputy Speaker, so after that they reverted to “grant”. Do you know some of the pensioners did not get their grant? And this is how come I know, eh, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I am not talking off the hat—off my head. I am on the ground. That is my passion. I am on the ground. And when the various persons came, they brought the form and when they brought the form, how they got the form, in the first place, is that their pension did not come to the bank. So when they went in, they were told, “You have to fill out the form all over again. Fill this out.” And they were given a form which says, “Grant.”—“Senior Citizens’ Grant.” So as a result of it, we recognize that the Government has an ulterior motive and that motive is exactly what is being indicated, and there is some sort of deception because there is no intention to give the senior citizens any pension, because they could cut it any time now because it is a grant.

And further to that, you know, I was seeing in the papers—I have it here somewhere. But I saw in the papers that this week the Minister—both Ministers: the Member for St. Ann’s East and Member for Lopinot/Bon Air West—celebrated ageism, and spoke about, you know, discrimination, because that is what ageism is. It is,

you know, discrimination against the elderly. And I was, like, for real? Could this be for real? Because here it is, they cut GATE for persons who are 50 years and over; they have changed everything from “pension” to “grant” and they have literally treated the elderly with gross disrespect. [*Interruption*] There is something about that.

But, you know, under Kamla Persad-Bissessar’s government, there was something called the “silver economy”, and the “silver economy” allowed for our senior citizens to contribute in meaningful ways. You know why? Because we did not consider them to be dead. They were very much alive and they very much had a number of initiatives that they were waiting—

Mr. Al-Rawi: The Retirees Returning to Work Programme, we had that.

Mrs. C. Newallo-Hosein: Yes, the Retirees Returning to Work Programme. And so, as a result of it, it is important for us to recognize that what this country had for five years brought growth, brought development, stimulated the economy, it brought savings because we left moneys in the account and we also did not touch our Heritage and Stabilisation Fund. [*Desk thumping*] We had a fund that this Government is withdrawing. It is a free ATM machine, and we are asking the question—you are accusing us of spending so many billions, but you are seeing the growth, you are seeing the development. But you have spent 60-plus. What can we see? [*Desk thumping*] What have you done? Where has the money gone?

And so, my constituents—I met with my constituents and they

asked me to send a clear message, and this is the message—

Mr. Hinds: “How many ah dem?”

Mrs. C. Newallo-Hosein: You have failed. You have failed. And not only have you failed, you cannot be trusted. This Government cannot be trusted. [*Desk thumping*] I looked at the Development Programme for 2017, as well as the Recurrent Expenditure, and I was shocked that they had less money for agriculture—less money. My area is an agricultural community and as a result of that we need proper access roads. Our farmers cannot get to their produce. The produce is sometimes rotting, particularly now it is the rainy season. The roads are almost impassable. And what makes it even worse is that with the increase of diesel, Mr. Deputy Speaker, it means that it will cost the farmers more to get to their produce.

6.30 p.m.

You know, I have here—Deputy Speaker, we on this side do not boast about what makes us happy as being drinking beers and having a good laugh. What makes us happy on this side is when we can serve the people, serve the people, serve the people. [*Desk thumping*]

Deputy Speaker, I wrote the Minister of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries and I asked for roads for my constituency, roads that will help ensure that my farmers in the area who are the food basket for the nation, who feed our nation, who can actually earn foreign exchange if they went into downstream production, agro processing if they were given the opportunity—because they have. We have hot pepper now being turned into pepper sauce for sale. So we have the opportunity, we have the potential and

we are doing it, but we need to have the proper roads to do so.

So I wrote asking for the slope stabilization at North Manzanilla Road. I have asked for Caparo No. 2. I have asked for Caigual, Alexis Trace, Salazar, Nariva. All of these roads I am asking for, proper agricultural access roads, but I am not sure if we could get it with this budget that they have gotten because if they want to reduce the import bill, they have to do something in Trinidad, for it to be increased here in Trinidad, for us to feed ourselves. And so, I do not understand the logic in how they have disbursed their funds and they did not spend. They said they had the money and they did not spend it.

But further to that, Deputy Speaker, we have roads that are required. The hon. Minister for Works and Transport was kind enough to ask us and we submitted a list. I asked for North Oropouche Main Road and you know—and that was number one. I have a number of roads. I have 31 roads. The reason why I asked for that one in particular, Deputy Speaker, if anything happens on the main road from to Sangre Grande to Manzanilla, on that main road, the North Oropouche is a direct link from Sangre Grande to Manzanilla. “Come an visit meh, we will see it together.”

If we were to invest in rehabilitating that road we would be creating not only a link, but we would also be putting at ease several hundred residents who have been suffering in dust for the past year. We have areas like Tamana Section 2 Road. Deputy Speaker, if you went through it, you will think you are on rally in some trail, but that is a road and that road in my constituency. We have Marcus Road that needs to be developed; De Gannes Trace. We have Balata Hill Road. We also have Los Armadillos

Road. So many roads—Old Plum Road—that we need to be fixed, but I do not know if that is a priority for this Government.

I do not know if the rural areas are a priority for this Government. I do not know because you know, Deputy Speaker, when you speak about equity, when the PP Government was in power there was equity when it came to road development. [*Desk Thumping*] There was equity in Diego Martin, there was equity in Point Fortin, there was equity in Valencia, there was equity in Arima, there was equity everywhere. You know what, we come into this “red and ready” Government and what do they say? We shutting down. We shutting down everything because you know what, it is not important enough because it appears as though it benefiting the people of UNC as though only UNC live aside. We all live together. We walk side by side. When we built the road in Diego Martin, the highway that was “pulperizing” for how long, and on the Churchill-Roosevelt Highway going to Arima. How many years we saw mountains of dirt and rock and everything pile up? Years! Why? Because it was not important enough until we did it. We did it and we had a hard-working Minister of Works in the name of Dr. Surujrattan Rambachan who did it. [*Desk thumping*]

You know, at one time we had the best hospital, Sangre Grande. Best! We have no drugs. None whatsoever, and then this Government want to put 7 per cent tax on online purchase. In case they do not know, medicine is coming airfreight. So that means that the medicine will go up for our citizens. You have cold storage coming in through in food, airfreight. So that means the price of food will go up even further. What will happen to the working poor and the middle class, the dwindling middle class? And this is

what I am asking: what is the Government doing to circumvent, to mitigate against this ominous crisis that is before you?—because everything they want to do is tax. Our political leader said today we did not bring on any new taxes, and yet we were able to have moneys in our account. And so, I think it is important for this Government to find innovative ways. I would have wanted to steal a word from my Member here but I would not, but he would say it nicely about his box.

Deputy Speaker, the achievements of the People's Partnership is that we were able to help parents of children who had cerebral palsy. [*Desk thumping*] We were able to help them stay at home and manage and to care for the children, but this Government does not understand that. Do you know why? They have never had people at the center of their development. They are heartless and this is why the people do not have confidence in them and they do not trust them. [*Desk thumping*]

We implemented a unit called the IAU Unit; that is the Inter-Agency Unit, which helps with the rehabilitation. It takes the street dwellers off of the street. They go and they coax them into giving up this street life. Do you know what this Government did last week? They disbanded the IAU and fired all the staff. Ask the Minister why? You know, Deputy Speaker, an NGO called, so I am not breaking any confidence here. [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Members, please, please, the constant crosstalk. Proceed, Member.

Mrs. C. Newallo-Hosein: Thank you, Deputy Speaker. And so, the IAU worked towards removing a number of street dwellers while we were there and I can give you a figure. The figure would have been throughout Trinidad

216 street dwellers, but you know what, they kept the policy unit but they got rid of the implementation, the execution arm. Ask me how you will be able to accomplish anything in the Ministry because policy does not deal with implementation. So you disband the unit and you fired all the staff. So you are anti-people. You are anti-people.

We had a SEED Programme and that SEED Programme was for us to wean persons off of the programmes who can be weaned because there are some people would not be able to be weaned off. They will remain on the programme until they are ready to go home in heaven. So we had this programme where we actually trained persons, and after training—because they got training in financial matters—so they know how to do their accounts and how to manage everything and, of course, they were provided with whatever equipment of their choice, whether it was a sewing machine, or a whacker, whatever it is, within a \$15,000 range, and we were able in five years to empower 3,000 persons. We are people centred. People centred. And so, Deputy Speaker, there are a number of things.

We understand that there are a lot of single parents, and so in a bid to help and to educate young single parents, we embarked on what we call the Baby Grant Programme and we were helping persons. We were able to educate them, to train them. I went to one of the meetings and a lot of the young people there were very happy. Some of the grandparents attended and do you know what those grandparents said?—we are sorry you did not have this programme earlier. We are sorry that you did not introduce it because maybe my daughter, or my son, might have understood the values and the importance of being prepared for parenthood before becoming a parent. And

it is because of that, Deputy Speaker, I was happy to report to my Prime Minister and say, “Prime Minister, the decision you made concerning the Baby Grant was worth it”.

This Baby Grant is not something that she pulled out of a hat, eh. This Baby Grant is applied in Chile, in Brazil, including Australia. This Baby Grant is not something that is new. It is probably new to people in Trinidad and Tobago but it is not new to the world, and this is the thing that, you know, I am amazed about with this Government, that they have not looked at scanning what is happening globally and begin to think out of the box to see how it is you can realize dreams, help people realize their dreams, help this nation become better, empower your citizens, create a society that will have high morals and integrity because you would have been able to adopt programmes that would be successful and beneficial for all. But that is not something that this Government understands.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Hon. Member, your time has expired. You care to take your additional 10 minutes?

Mrs. C. Newallo-Hosein: Thank you, Deputy Speaker. I am wrapping up. Deputy Speaker, I want to end by stating that I would like to see some water projects in my constituency as well. Water projects: Tamana Hill is waiting on a booster pump for the longest while; we would like to have the laying of the pipes in Vega de Oropouche completed and in Non Pareil.

6.45 p.m.

We have a request for Palm Tree Road and Leeman Road and Flemming Road. I mean, a number of areas and there are so much water leaks too, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that I would like to see fixed. Because you

know, in my area, it does not just cause—the leaks, as you would know, it would not just cause a hole you know, but because of the land how it is sometimes undulating and the way it is, it is the type of soil, it causes severe destabilization in my area, and so we need a lot of slope stabilization and a lot of road rehabilitation because of these leaks that we have all over, whether it is in Spring Circular Road and so forth.

But, you know, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I would like to end by stating this. I went to a programme in Barbados and my apostle was there and he preached on this message. He says you can hire a hand but you could never hire a heart. [*Desk thumping*] That was many years ago, it may have been over 10 years ago but the message remained with me. And it remained with me because you know what, when you have a heart for people, like Kamla Persad-Bissessar and her Ministers, [*Desk thumping*] you will always have people-centred development. And when it is you hire a hand, you will have heartless decisions being imposed upon the people of Trinidad and Tobago.

And so as a result of this, I hope that the Government will recognize that they need to change. We would welcome an election, general. Let us bring about the change but until that time, I would like them to seriously consider the fallout from what is happening. There is the propensity for crime to increase, homelessness to abound because of the fact that you have persons losing their homes. You can have an increase in suicides and then obviously an increase in crime. And so as a result, I would like to ask this Government to not be a hired hand but to emulate my political leader Kamla Persad-Bissessar and by doing so, your heart cannot be hired. Thank you.
[*Desk thumping*]

The Minister of Public Administration and Communications (Hon. Maxie Cuffie): Mr. Deputy Speaker, it gives me great pleasure to speak after my friend from Cumuto/Manzanilla. You see, I also represent parts of Tamana and I agree with her that the conditions there are terrible. I have been to places where there is no running water, where water has been absent for decades, and the strange thing is that Tamana has been represented by her party for the last 30 years. And even when her leader said today that while they were in Government, they had the highest budget ever, they had the greatest revenues ever, you did not ask for anything to be put in Tamana?

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I want to share—*[Interruption]*—No, she spoke about us—I think she was referring to me liking to open things. *[Laughter]* Now, I did open a car park. But I am looking forward to opening this. *[Member displays sign]*

Dr. Moonilal: You have permission to display that?

Hon. M. Cuffie: I do. Now this is the new pavilion at La Horquetta Phase 5. The start date is May 2013. *[Laughter]* The project is supposed to take four months. It has not finished yet.

Mr. Deyalsingh: May when?

Hon. M. Cuffie: May 2013.

Mr. Deyalsingh: Who was in the office?

Dr. Tewarie: You got permission to display that?

Hon. M. Cuffie: Yes, I did get permission from the Speaker. And my friend and neighbour for Tabaquite was the Minister then, and four months, May 2013, turned into four years.

Today, I had the pleasure of sitting in a Cabinet that approved a

Hon. M. Cuffie

recreation ground for Todds Road, to move the Todds Road recreation ground to the Couva/Tabaquite/Talparo Regional Corporation and this is the first time Todds Road is getting a recreation ground. [*Desk thumping*] And over the last 30 years, Todds Road has been represented by the Member for Caroni West, the Member for Caroni Central, the Member for Caroni East.

Dr. Moonilal: Stop there, please stop there. [*Laughter*]

Hon. M. Cuffie: And you know what pains me is that I am the MP for La Horquetta/Talparo. The ground is not in La Horquetta/Talparo, it is in Caroni East but it serves the residents of Caroni Central, Caroni East and even the residents of Tabaquite. And it is the only place that is not covered by the Couva/Tabaquite/Talparo Regional Corporation and does not have a recreation ground.

Mr. Deyalsingh: The only one?

Hon. M. Cuffie: The only one of all the grounds in Caroni. So when they speak about the discrimination, I can tell you, I, as the Member for La Horquetta/Talparo, organized, appealed, pleaded for a ground that will be in Caroni East.

Dr. Gopeesingh: Thank you. Which ground?

Hon. M. Cuffie: Mr. Deputy Speaker, I am happy to be able to speak in this debate today and to first thank the Member for Diego Martin North/East, the Finance Minister, for an excellent budget presentation [*Desk thumping*] and to thank the Minister of Planning and Development for work on the Development Programme that will assist us in returning growth to this economy. [*Desk thumping*] I think they have done well, given the enormity of the challenges the country faces and on behalf of the constituents of La

Horquetta/Talparo, I thank them for ensuring that this budget provided for the maintenance of equity in the sacrifices that we are all being called upon to make.

My constituents know what good governance requires and appreciate the good public administration that is necessary for it to prevail. We have heard a lot about what happened in the last five years and the “woulda, shoulda, coulda”. The fact is that we are here and we have been called upon to rescue this country. Just as La Horquetta/Talparo and Phase 5 in La Horquetta will get its recreation ground, Trinidad and Tobago will once more return to prosperity as a result of the work that we are doing. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Deputy Speaker, when we speak about good governance, what we are really referring to is the necessity for a proper public administration. And we have had problems over several years with public administration but given that the country is now in a position where money is a serious issue and when we do not have the resources to satisfy all the needs in the country, it is even more important that we have good public administration.

By the time I assumed the portfolio of Minister of Public Administration and Communications, we recognized that there were several things that needed to be addressed. And as Minister of Public Administration and Communications, my job is to do everything possible to bring back proper administration to this country. We cannot turn this country and this economy around unless we tackle the real problems of how the country is run. We cannot develop this country unless we tackle the problems of waste, corruption and mismanagement that are the heart of the economic challenges

that we face. [*Desk thumping*] We cannot turn this country around unless we remove the inefficiencies that are so much a part of doing business in Trinidad and Tobago.

Recently, last week as a matter of fact, the World Economic Forum's *Annual Global Competitiveness Report* was published and it assessed the competitiveness of economies and provided unique insights as to how we operate. Mr. Deputy Speaker, each year since 2012, Trinidad and Tobago's competitiveness index ranking has gotten progressively worse. In 2016, we were ranked 94th out of 138 economies. Today, we are 10 places lower than in 2012.

Furthermore, our first pillar of competitiveness, institutions received our worse rating.

Mr. Singh: Mr. Deputy Speaker, Standing Order 44(10). It is not my intention to have a Deyalsingh moment but I would like you to intervene. Standing Order 44(10).

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Deyalsingh moment? What do you mean by that, Sir?

Mr. Singh: "A Member shall not read his speech except with the leave of the Speaker..."

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Hon. Member, with regard to the Standing Order, you can seek leave if it is that you will be reading some of your excerpts.

Hon. M. Cuffie: Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I seek your leave.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Kindly proceed.

Hon. M. Cuffie: Mr. Deputy Speaker, our institutions, as I said, were ranked 107 out of 138 economies in terms of their efficiency. And if you look at Parliament as one of our institutions and our inability to get a simple

thing like the FATCA Bill passed on time, we can see why we have a problem. That piece of Opposition intransigence that we witnessed over the last two weeks will have real implications for our competitiveness ranking and eventually our ability to attract investment.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I am entrusted with improving the delivery of government services to citizens, the modernization and renewal of the public service and the provision of credible government communications and information. I have embraced my responsibilities wholeheartedly.

7.00 p.m.

This portfolio calls for transformation, restructuring and refocusing the public service so that we can assist the Minister of Finance and the Minister of Planning and Development to achieve the goals that were outlined last Friday.

This Government has a vision for our economy. It is a vision which I understand, even though those opposite clearly do not get it. But fortunately for us in Trinidad and Tobago, on September 07th, the whole country got it. [*Desk thumping*] A fundamental part of this vision is that our institutions need to be transformed to become more efficient and focus on creating value and delivering excellent service. This is the work that we are doing in the Ministry of Public Administration and Communications. This vision seeks to ensure that a project that is supposed to take four months, like the La Horquetta Pavilion, does not take four years to complete. We intend to deliver a public service that will ensure a more customer-focused and result-oriented—

The collapse in the prices with the subsequent shrinking of the budget

poses a challenge for all of us. That is why we realize that we need to become more innovative and to rise to the economic challenges that we face.

One of our critical objectives over the next few years, Mr. Deputy Speaker, will be improving of the staffing situation in the public service. There are jobs in many areas of the public service for competent, committed and effective people that go unfilled, and there is a serious need to examine how we create the right opportunities for willing and competent citizens. As one of the core strategies to address this manpower issue, the Ministry is collaborating with the Public Service Commission and the Service Commissions Department in a major initiative to strengthen and modernize those institutions. They will be better equipped and resourced to fulfil their obligations to the various other service commissions, which are such an important part of our democracy.

A revised organizational structure has been developed for the Service Commissions Department to assist with achieving its goals and our vacancy reduction in one of the nine functional areas addressed by the department. We have established short-term projects, which are expected to be completed by December 2016, to address the problem of the vacancies.

Our contribution in the Ministry, Mr. Deputy Speaker, will include support for the legislative changes, the organizational structural changes, process enhancement, training and the development of improved systems, among other areas. Those initiatives will continue over the next few years.

We can all recall, Mr. Deputy Speaker, at least those of us who are old enough, that there was a time when people aspired to be in the public service and they accepted that public service was not servitude, but rather a

contribution to a higher calling. We need to restore that trust in the public service and to dispel the myths of the uncommitted worker that have prevailed for so long.

In addition to strengthening the offices of the service commissions, the Ministry is bolstered by the capacity of the strategic human resource division, which provides oversight of the implementation of the human resource plans, of not just the Ministry but the public service generally. By working in collaboration with the central government agencies, the Personnel Department and the Service Commissions Department, we intend to restructure and reform the public service in this holistic approach to Government that will help shape policies and procedures which will enhance the lives of all our citizens, not just in La Horquetta/Talparo or the neighbouring constituencies, but across Trinidad and Tobago. When we fill these positions we will improve the employment situation. This is all part of reorienting the public service to the current economic reality which we as a country face.

The Member for Cumuto/Manzanilla mentioned Information Technology, and I want to spend some time talking about that. Last year, the Inter-American Development Bank carried out a study on doing business in Trinidad and Tobago and they attempted to examine why the public service does not work efficiently. The study found that ICT requirements for simple tasks was one of the main impediments to doing business in Trinidad and Tobago. As a result of that, we have decided to focus on serving the public through ICT. We have an iServe project that will seek to take services online so citizens have an easier way of doing business with the Government and to

improve the experience of the public in their interface with Government institutions.

We have already had it with the single electronic window, ttconnect. All of these have been serving the public, but we need to take it further and faster and to make ourselves more accountable to the public. ICT is a fast-growing economic sector in itself and an enabler for sustainable development in all aspects of the national economy and society.

Trinidad and Tobago should be at the forefront of the global revelations. Our citizens, especially our young persons, are among the most avid users of social media in this hemisphere and it is in ICT we see one of the greatest synergies between the portfolios of public administration and communications, and we need to foster that by getting greater use of ICT in all the society.

In the 2015 manifesto, which we have adapted as Government policy, our vision is to make Trinidad and Tobago a hub for innovation and technology. One of the ways we have been seeking to do that is to ensure that all citizens have access to ICTs. Mr. Deputy Speaker, in the 2017 budget estimate for the development programme, you will see that \$2.5 million has been allocated for the development of an ICT solution for the Property and Real Estate Division of the Ministry.

I am pleased to announce today that although the budget has not been passed that programme has already been completed and the ICT solution [*Desk thumping*] is being implemented by the Property and Real Estate Division of the Ministry, and the cost of that solution that was estimated at \$2.5 million is zero. You heard me right. We have spent not one cent to do

it.

We have been able to implement the solution, which organizes the records of the Property and Real Estate Division. It places the application process for Government properties online by simply using in-house solutions. [*Desk thumping*] We were able to use iGovTT, the staff of the Ministry, to produce that solution ahead of time and without spending a cent.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, that is the way we intend to make this country more efficient. And that project was not done in four years or even four months. It took us four weeks to do it. [*Desk thumping*]

I wish to publicly commend the executive and staff of iGovTT and the Ministry of Public Administration and Communications who worked on this project and developed the code and the web-based application, which we intend to use as a template to tackle other issues as we move to make delivery of public services more efficient.

I also want to take this opportunity to congratulate the staff of the Diamond Division of the Ministry for winning the Commonwealth Association of Public Administration Ministries Award (CAPAM) for innovation for yet another ICT project. The Trinidad and Tobago Diamond Buzz was announced as the winners of the innovation incubating category at the CAPAM's President Dinner on Saturday, August 20, 2016. The Ministry of Public Administration and Communications was presented with a certificate of distinction and the 2016 award. Now, this project is another example of the Ministry's development of innovative technology-based solutions within the public sector. It harnesses the talents of a group of young, burgeoning software developers working alongside targeted public

service agencies to conceive and create ICTs that will improve access to information and provide services to citizens.

The project seeks to prove that common citizens' complaints can be addressed using innovative and sometimes simple technology innovations, open source software, in-house resources, as opposed to expensive propriety software that is often accompanied by expensive consultancies, licensing and even more expensive maintenance.

We intend to use ICTS to solve many of the problems that now afflict the public service. That is the vision that propels us to ensure that there is broadband connectivity for every citizen who desires. [*Desk thumping*]

In the first instance, we worked with the private sector to drastically increase the ICT footprint through the free public Wi-Fi hotspots in the 13 PTSC buses in highly-traversed routes. Mr. Deputy Speaker, from all accounts, that programme is working splendidly, and I know because the Prime Minister keeps referencing it.

7.15 p.m.

In the second phase, we will expand the citizens' experience in accessing Internet based on the expansion of the Wi-Fi initiative to several areas, including NALIS libraries, the Brian Lara Promenade, the Arima Dial, public hospitals, PTSC transportation hubs. All will be providing connectivity often at dire times. The expected cost of this phase is no more than \$900,000 of the funds we have been allocated for this year.

By the third phase, Mr. Deputy Speaker, we will have touched almost every community, including the MP for Cumuto/Manzanilla, who has enquired about it. What this Government would have done, Mr. Deputy

Speaker, is the creation and deployment of our free, island-wide public broadband wireless network, affording citizens the ability to seamlessly access Wi-Fi Internet, securely at hundreds of locations throughout Trinidad and Tobago. Now, this provides additional opportunities for improved productivity and online engagement and another avenue to conduct business with the Government. This initiative will function in conjunction with other existing channels by both the Government, and other Internet service providers, to enhance the means by which all services will become available to citizens.

Now, many of these services are being provided through enterprise agreements, like the one managed by the Ministry with the Microsoft Corporation in the United States. These three-year agreements govern the use of Microsoft software in Trinidad and Tobago. Mr. Deputy Speaker, under the last administration, the three-year software agreement with Microsoft cost this country US \$52,462,752.62. Now, that represents TT \$331.6 million. That \$331.6 million represented software that we were being charged for, some of which were not in use and there were others in use that we were not paying for and we were penalized. In other words, that \$331.6 million represented waste, mismanagement on the part of our public services.

Hon. Member: And possibly corruption.

Hon. M Cuffie: And possibly corruption. Over the last four weeks, a team from the Ministry has been in negotiation with Microsoft. I am pleased to announce today that we have reached consensus on a new agreement, subject to Cabinet approval, [*Desk thumping*] that will cost US \$4.2 million

a year, amounting to just over US \$12 million over the three years. That means, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that we will save in payment to Microsoft, US \$40 million in a three-year period. [*Desk thumping*]

We have been able to negotiate a US \$40 million reduction in licence payments to Microsoft; that means TT \$272 million over a three-year period. Now, apart from the obvious savings in foreign exchange, \$272 million can fund the entire development programme of the Ministry of Rural Development and Local Government so that they can get roads in Cumuto/Manzanilla, we could get grounds in Caroni Central, Caroni East and in La Horquetta/Talparo. We can repair landslip in Moruga, provide Bailey bridges and all the facts or all these things that the rural communities need.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I congratulate the negotiation team, comprised entirely of officers of the Ministry of Public Administration and Communications and iGovTT, for their work in eliminating waste, corruption and mismanagement, that has saved this country \$272 million. [*Desk thumping*]

This administration will continue to use ICTs to create an enabling environment, to facilitate the effective delivery of public services within budget. The E-legislative agenda speaks to the goals that we have for the use of ICT. For 2017, the Electronic Transactions Act will be suitably amended so that it will become enforced in Trinidad and Tobago. The amendments are designed to ensure electronic commerce, electronic Government and electronic delivery or business to business, or B2B transactions. Mr. Deputy Speaker, in so doing, we would not only smooth the efficient operation of

business and delivery of services locally, regionally and internationally, but we will improve Trinidad and Tobago's competitiveness and innovation dramatically. It means that you will be able to pay Government bills via credit card or other electronic means.

In the *Trinidad and Tobago Guardian* of May 27, 2016, reported on a study by MasterCard on the implications of electronic transactions for Trinidad and Tobago. And according to that study, the Trinidad and Tobago economy can grow by 3.5 per cent if the country increases electronic payment by 30 per cent in a four-year period. The Electronic Transactions Act amendments will address this. It will provide not just Government payments, but also increase Government earnings.

Furthermore, when the Act is fully implemented, local entrepreneurs can also establish systems to receive international payments electronically. This can lead to a whole new e-business industry creating a whole new source of foreign exchange. To adopt this, the Ministry has since reconstituted the e-business round table of private and public sector executive, to expedite the implementation of the Act. The other legislation that we intend to push includes the Data Protection Act amendment, the Freedom of Information Act amendments, the Telecommunications Act amendments and the Cinematograph Act amendments. Mr. Deputy Speaker, these pieces of legislation are all characterized by a common thread. They reflect the Government's focus in designing legislative infrastructure, so as to create an enabling environment for the widespread use of ICTs.

This brings me to the Telecommunications Authority of Trinidad and Tobago. I also have great pleasure in announcing that Trinidad and Tobago

has been elected to the chairmanship of the Council and the Executive Committee of the Commonwealth Telecommunications Organisation for the period 2016—2018, and that Mr. Gilbert Peterson, the Chairman of the Board of Directors of the Telecommunications Authority of Trinidad and Tobago, will serve as the Chairman of those bodies on behalf of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago. This is a tremendous honour and it gives us great influence in the Commonwealth Telecommunications Organisation, and gives us the potential to get even greater assistance in our ICT thrust. I wish to, today, commend Mr. Peterson who I am sure will be a worthy representative of this country.

One of the major accomplishments of the Authority, is that Trinidad and Tobago has been removed from the watch list of the US trade representative, and we have now become compliant with the foreign content providers for Internet [*Desk thumping*] and I can only hope that the Member for Mayaro—[*Interruption*]

Mr. Paray: Fully compliant

Hon. M. Cuffie: Thank you. [*Interruption*] Mr. Deputy Speaker, I am also pleased to inform this honourable House, that from this month, the Telecommunications Authority has mandated the implementation of mobile fixed number of portability, to enable subscribers to change their providers without having to change their numbers. [*Desk thumping*] TATT and the fixed and mobile operators, have agreed to implement mobile number portability from October 31st, and for fixed number of portability, it is from November 30th, this year. Before the end of this year, you will be able to change you phone providers, whether TSTT—[*Interruption*]

Hon. M. Cuffie

Hon. Member: It was in the works.

Hon. M. Cuffie: It was in the works, but it is like the La Horquetta/Talparo pavilion, it needed somebody to get it done. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Singh: I want to ask a question. Thank you very much. I think that is a very progressive move, but I want find out in similar fashion, what was in the works. When is the decision on the third provider going to be made by the Government of Trinidad and Tobago in the mobile sector? [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. M. Cuffie: Thank you, Member for Caroni East. You know, I asked the same question, and what I found out was that while you all were in office, the authority had made a decision, and I am told they were prevented from implementing the decision, because there was fear that if it was done, it would have implications for your electoral prospects. That is what I have am told by the people from—Now, all I will tell you, [*Interruption*] that we have appointed a new board, and we will address that matter as soon as it is brought to our attention.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, we intend to take ICT forward. We intend to take procurement forward, and I want to just turn my attention to addressing the work that we have been doing to treat with the issue of procurement. The Public Management Consulting Division, PMCD, of the Ministry has been working with UNDP and the Ministry of Finance to determine the structure, staffing and effective functioning capacity, to establish the office of the Procurement Regulator. To this end, work has been done to analyze the functions of the office, frame the organization arrangement, identify the job profiles and write the job description for the office.

7.30 p.m.

I now turn to our effort at rationalizing Government accommodation. We consider it important that public officers operate in safe and comfortable working environments, which we believe are conducive to productivity and good health and safety. You would be aware, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that this Government recognized two things when we first sought to construct the Government Campus Plaza: one, that the portfolio of government properties had neither increased in quality nor quantity for decades and two, increasing numbers of public officers were working in unsuitable work spaces that frequently invited the OSHA department and the represented trade unions to take action. This often resulted in both partial and total shutdown causing significant disruption in the quality of service offered to the public, and the consequent loss of revenue.

I cannot understate the accommodation crisis that Ministries currently face. Outstanding demand in Port of Spain is for approximately 500,000 square feet of property. Most public officers know this, and the general public can sense their discomfort, their growing discontent as they became collateral damage in the process.

Today, I can report that three of the five Ministries and agencies earmarked for the Government Campus have moved into their accommodations and are now operating from the plaza. [*Desk thumping*] The Customs and Excise division, the Immigration division, the education towers are now 100 per cent complete and occupied. With respect to the two other Ministries, the Ministry of the Attorney General and Legal Affairs Tower, it has been completed but it is not yet occupied due to ICT issues

Hon. M. Cuffie

that are being worked on, and the Board of Inland Revenue Tower is expected to be completed by the 31st of December 2016. In two weeks the AG will be moving in. [*Desk thumping*] I have been updated.

In moving out of rental accommodations, we have been able to save taxpayers' money. As an example, the Ministry of Public Administration and Communications handed back the keys to a building being rented at over \$1 million a month for three years while you all were in office, and the building was never occupied.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Hon. Member, your speaking time has expired. Do you care to avail yourself of the additional 10?

Hon. M. Cuffie: Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Proceed.

Hon. M. Cuffie: We have also taken up occupation of One Alexandra Place which had been unoccupied for six years and was incurring a rent of \$600,000 a month, a figure negotiated by you all and never occupied. [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Members.

Hon. M. Cuffie: In fact, it was rented in 2009—[*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Hon. Members for Princes Town and Naparima, please, you all will have your turn. Go ahead.

Hon. M. Cuffie: Mr. Deputy Speaker, let me just educate the Member for Princes Town that the rental figure was negotiated by the then Minister of Local Government, Chandresh Sharma, and all the other Ministers who succeeded him were fine with it. [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Hon Member for Princes Town, the additional

Hon. M. Cuffie

comments will not be tolerated.

Hon. M. Cuffie: Mr. Deputy Speaker, the Government has been paying rent for several unoccupied buildings over the last few years. Under this administration, we have given up more than 20 leases, and in fiscal 2013 we have been able to reduce rents for unoccupied buildings from \$3.3 million a month to \$1.7 million and that is falling quickly. [*Desk thumping*]

I am running out of time, so I would just say a few words on the Government Information Services Limited and CNMG. Now, under the previous administration both organisations were left pretty much bankrupt. We have been able to stem the haemorrhaging of resources at both CNMG and GISL and eliminated the waste, corruption and mismanagement to the extent that they are now able to resume basic training obligation. They can now pay their bills. I am happy to report that not only is GISL now paying its creditors but they are even able to pay gratuity to former employees.

We are very much close to determining the way forward for both organizations following the consultation that was held last year on the role of state media. The final report entitled, Toward Dynamic Public Service Media had a proposal which has been forwarded to the Cabinet, and we are in the final stages of making a determination and an announcement will be made shortly.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, we recognize that it can no longer be business as usual at these organizations and we have developed new structures for the Government Information Services Limited Division, the Government Printery, the Government Human Resources Company, all these are being remodelled to take into consideration the changed economic realities and

become more cost effective in the delivery of the services they provide. Time does not permit me to go into details.

I can also report that the National Archives of Trinidad and Tobago has been working assiduously and is undergoing tremendous change that would see improved functionality and access to our archival resources. The Archives has embarked on a drive to automate and digitize all archival material. As Trinidad and Tobago takes more progressive action towards compliance in all facets of the digital economy, it would be remiss of this Ministry and our Government to leave our artefacts in the dark ages.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, one of the pleasures I had as the Minister of Communications was being able to open two libraries, one in Rio Claro, the other in Couva. [*Crosstalk*] Well, the projects started in 2009, and it is not my fault that you all spent a lot of time and simply refused to open the buildings, just as you refused to open the government campus. [*Crosstalk*] The residents of Couva and Rio Claro will always remember that they were given libraries by this PNM administration. [*Desk thumping*] We are also working assiduously to bring the Eric Williams Memorial collection to Port of Spain to be housed at the Heritage Library opposite the University of Woodford Square. That would also be an important landmark in the city.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I just want to give a financial summary of the resources that have been allocated to the Ministry. The combined portfolios, we had a budget of \$1.13 billion in 2014. Our available funds of fiscal year 2017 have been reduced to \$1.03 billion. Please note further, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that as of September 30, 2016 this Ministry has accounted for an expenditure of \$72 million or 81 per cent of the Public Sector Investment

Programme. This reflects commendably on our capacity to deliver and we intend to surpass this in the future.

These are challenging times and any institution faces these kinds of challenges when it needs to become—[*Interruption*]

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Hon. Member, you have two more minutes.

Hon. M. Cuffie: In my seven months as Minister of Public Administration and Communications, we have shown our resilience time and time again. This year is testimony to the fact that we have the capacity to reorganize and refocus, I thank you.

I thank the staff at the Ministry of Public Administration and Communications and, Mr. Deputy Speaker, all I can say is I will continue opening things. I will continue opening car parks, I will continue opening recreation grounds and I will ensure that we do our business so that they will never return to Government again. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Hon Members, at this time, I would just like to remind the House that Members are to seek the leave of the Speaker with regard to Standing Order 44(10) with regard to if you will be reading your speeches. So I would just like to remind you all of that, and I recognize the hon. Member for Mayaro. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Rushton Paray (Mayaro): Thank you, very much Mr. Deputy Speaker. It is my privilege to stand in this House, once again, as I add to the contribution today to the Appropriation Bill, 2016, an Act to provide for the service of Trinidad and Tobago for the financial year ended September 30, 2017. Before I get into my delivery this evening, Mr. Deputy Speaker, let me first congratulate the Leader of the Opposition, the Member for Siparia

Mr. R. Paray

[*Desk thumping*] for her sterling and clinical contribution made in this House today. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Deputy Speaker, the Member for Siparia has indeed demonstrated a keen sense of knowledge, experience and the understanding that is required to lead a country like Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*] Unfortunately, Mr. Deputy Speaker, those characteristics are woefully missing on the benches opposite. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Deputy Speaker, the Leader of the Opposition is no bully. She is a mother, a grandmother with a deep sense of love and compassion and welfare for each and every citizen of Trinidad and Tobago. So on behalf of the entire constituency of Mayaro, I want to wish her well and I want to thank the Member for Siparia for her contribution in the House today. [*Desk thumping*]

7.45 p.m.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, a little over a year ago this country was duped—hope I could use that word—into thinking that new faces meant a new way of governance. What the country got instead was the return of piousness bent on self-justification and a supposed morality, regardless of the cost to Trinidad and Tobago.

[MADAM SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Madam Speaker, one year ago a Member of the other House asked the country to judge him and his Government one year after. This is what we are doing here today. We are here to judge your performance over the last fiscal year.

You may ask why the need for the run up, the prelude, you see, there

are those who sit opposite us who played victims from time to time while in Opposition, and now when the shoe is on the other foot they can do no better other than to criticize. One year after we have seen unnecessary wastage and squandermania through poor governance of this boastful, prideful and sometimes arrogant administration—sometimes, not all the time. They can be a bit pleasant at times.

If I was asked to summarize the budget that was presented on September 30th, like William Shakespeare I would have named it “Much Ado about Nothing”. The theme of the 2016/2017 budget, “Shaping a Brighter Future – A Blueprint for Transformation and Growth”. But I have no doubt in my mind that each and every citizen of this country wants a brighter future, each and every citizen wants affordable education, they want quality and timely health care, and I am sure every citizen wants to feel safe in their homes while having the option to engage the company of friends and relatives throughout the length and breadth of this country.

As a responsible Opposition, we on this side are extremely mindful of the global environment in which we operate. We are also mindful of the global energy market with the impact of lower oil and gas prices and the effect on the developmental capacity of Trinidad and Tobago. We are also very mindful that in order to further this growth and development of our twin-island Republic, fundamental changes are necessary to allow for the progressive transformation of our country. So the question that we in this Parliament must answer over the next couple of days, is whether or not the hon. Minister of Finance, the MP for Diego Martin North/East, got it right in his presentation of the 2016/2017 budget. Did the hon. Minister of Finance

really lay out a blueprint for growth and transformation?

For over three hours on September 30th, we sat and listened to a lot of rant and rave of a government who knew that there was a FATCA deadline way beyond what was being touted in the public, creating scare and panic. There also was a government who at that point in time closed GATE on many students, many of whom come knocking on my door as the Member of Parliament for Mayaro. [*Desk thumping*] On the topic of GATE, if I may deviate for one second, I am wondering why in formulating a strategy for GATE, why a means test on the parents and not the child? It is like measuring the performance of a horse by measuring the jockey. There are students who are coming to me and saying that—[*Interruption*] “No, no it doh work so.” [*Crosstalk*] For if you have a child who is a high performance child and the parents, one may be a police officer and perhaps a clerk working in this very same Parliament and they are earning more than the \$10,000 or so, then that child is not entitled to a full covering of the GATE. Then on the extreme end you may have a child who is a non-performer whose parents may fall under the threshold and they are entitled to full coverage. So my concern is why are we measuring the parents where a sliding scale option—[*Interruption*]

Madam Speaker: I would like to hear the Member with his contribution, please. Everybody will have an opportunity to join the debate. Please continue, Member for Mayaro.

Mr. R. Paray: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Why a sliding scale option could not have been used where you could measure things like the GPA of the child, the financial condition of the parents obviously, the distance from

where the child lives to the campus the child wants to go to, whether the training is in line with the developmental priorities of the country? So you do a sliding scale and then you determine what contribution the Government would make. But there was a committee that sat for three months, I understand, with 16 men, and that is the best they came up with, measure the parents.

Madam Speaker, in answering whether the hon. Finance Minister delivered on his budget, allow me to set the foundation for my answer by going back in time to October 3, 2016, *Trinidad Express* page 13, an article entitled, “Stuck in an antiquated paradigm”, by political commentator Mr. Michael Harris, and I quote:

“If the 2016/2017 budget presented last Friday demonstrated anything at all is that the Minister of Finance understands nothing at all...”

[Desk thumping]

The 50 pages presented in this House disguised as a blueprint for transformation and growth was more of a blueprint for stagnation and suffocation of the economy of Trinidad and Tobago. *[Desk thumping]*

Harris further states in the very same article:

“...the budget he presented last Friday was almost a carbon copy of the budget he presented last year,”

Madam Speaker, after millions of dollars spent on Cabinet-appointed committees on economics, energy, education, agriculture, tourism, after 12 months was that the best they could have done, a carbon copy of last year’s budget? Nothing new, nothing creative, very disappointing. I would suggest to the hon. Prime Minister that since he wants his Government to wean out

citizens from state dependence, the Prime Minister starts with perhaps those boards and send them packing, because they have not delivered. They have done the Government a national disservice with that document.

Harris goes on again to make the point in his article that the budget document was “based on the premise”, and I would like to quote:

“...that the crisis we face is merely a fiscal problem occasioned by a cyclical dip in energy revenues and not a crisis of our fundamental economic structure.”

Madam Speaker, if ever there was a misread of the economic climate in Trinidad and Tobago clearly this Government is reading the wrong chapter. [*Desk thumping*] We are being served medicine for the wrong ailment. The fiscal measures that have been laid out in the 2016/2017 budget attempts at only bridging fiscal gaps in the spending portfolio. There is a void, a deafening silence on the transformational component that will drive new revenue streams, thus fostering growth and development in Trinidad and Tobago.

There is a cloud of mistrust, deceit and betrayal that is hovering and encircling this administration. I read in the *Trinidad Newsday* on September 29, 2016, an article by Verne Burnette entitled, “Not me and this Budget”. I would like to quote very quickly:

“Although he is head of the Government’s Economic Advisory Board Dr. Terrence Farrell says he is not taking any responsibility for tomorrow’s budget, the second of the People’s National Movement (PNM) administration.”

Madam Speaker, imagine, this gentleman is the head of your economic think

tank in this country, and he prefers to distance himself from that budget. Something is absolutely wrong with that. And if that was not enough, in the same article Farrell goes on to say:

“...there are people who are failing to recognize that the institutions that they head are not working. He hit out at people who, he said, remain in charge of such institutions, knowing that they are ineffective and just stay in their position collecting their salaries.”

I ask this honourable House: who is in charge? Dr. Farrell made it very, very clear what those in charge need to do.

What is notably absent from this entire budget is vision; vision is missing. It is so bad that the word “vision” does not even appear in the document. It is a visionless document. It seems like Vision 2020 and Vision 2030 received the ceremonial boot from the halls and corridors of the other side. I wonder why. I wonder who left and took Vision 2020 and Vision 2030 with them.

Madam Speaker, 13 months after this administration has been in charge and after their first budget which they suitably entitled “Restoring Confidence and Rebuilding Trust: Let’s do it together”, I can tell you that beyond a shadow of a doubt, they are still doing it by themselves. They are destroying confidence and dismantling trust amongst the citizens of this country all by themselves. In fact, they rolled into government boasting that consultations would be key to the decision-making process in this new Government. Well, consultations have been few and far. Since doing it together seems no longer relevant, clearly doing it alone seems to be the order of the day for this Government. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. R. Paray

This Government has no room for engaging citizens with a mind of their own. As long as you can think on your own, there is no room for you, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker: Member for Diego Martin North/East, I assure you, you will have an opportunity to reply in your winding up.

Mr. R. Paray: As long as you can think on your own, there seems to be no room to advise or to have consultations with the Government. You can just simply ask the former chairmen of the TDC and CEPEP, no room for thinkers. As long as you are making too much sense apparently they get rid of you. [*Laughter and desk thumping*]

8.00 p.m.

Madam Speaker: Member for Mayaro.

Mr. R. Paray: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. I have no problem with that. I mean, they know why I went to greener pastures and better places. [*Desk thumping*] Madam Speaker, because of that sort of ineptitude, incompetence and the snail-paced approach to governance, this country is worse off one year today than September 07, 2015. [*Desk thumping*]

What we have witnessed, Madam Speaker, in last 13 months of this Government, all they have done is attempt to talk and tax its way out of an economic restructuring period. Madam Speaker, I can tell you that their ship is sinking and supporters are not willing to stay on board with their visionless, misguided and bankrupt policies [*Desk thumping*] of doing nothing and calling everybody “tief”. But all is not lost, Madam Speaker. All is not lost. Twelve months gone, 48 to go or less and then there will be a renewal of life in this country.

Madam Speaker, I wish to take this House through a quick year in review, looking at the chaos and mayhem that has engulfed this country since the great betrayal of the people on September 07, 2015. Thousands of workers have been displaced, corporation employees, forestry workers, litter wardens, traffic wardens, contract workers throughout several Ministries.

In an article published in the *Trinidad Guardian* on Tuesday, August 30th, the CSO laid out some statistics. And I know the Member for Moruga/Tableland was asking about source and perhaps this would help satisfy that desire to get some source. [*Crosstalk*] So *Guardian* Tuesday, August 30th, and they were giving the statistics on workers in specific industries that have lost jobs.

“Transport, storage and communication 6,500 or 13.3 per cent;

Other manufacturing (excluding sugar and oil) 5,000 or 9.8 per cent”—less;

“Financing, insurance, real estate and business services, 3,100 or 5.0 per cent”—less;

“Construction 2,100 or 2.4 per cent.”

Madam Speaker, you are looking at over 16,000 families that have gone onto the breadline over the last 12 months in this country. [*Desk thumping*] This is the betrayal of the people of this country because I am sure they did not vote for that. The *Trinidad and Tobago Guardian* an article by Nadaleen Singh, August 30, 2016. [*Crosstalk*] CSO. CSO.

Madam Speaker, over 15,000 TT card holders have also been viciously excised from the programme and publicly ridiculed as being part of some fraud and conspiracy. Social services programmes such as Self

Mr. R. Paray

Help, NDSP and other interventions have been under review for almost a year. This has caused thousands of backlog and I am very glad to hear that the Member for Moruga/Tableland is getting some traction. Apparently he is getting cheques and he is getting services, and he is getting water and he is getting roads. I want your contact list, Sir. [*Crosstalk*]

Madam Speaker, in my constituency there has been over seven fires this year and not one grant has been processed. Not a grant. Not a single person. Not one of them has gotten a grant that we have applied for. And you know what—[*Crosstalk*]

Madam Speaker: Could this Chamber be given the respect that is deserving of it. Members cannot be just shouting across the floor. There are certain Standing Orders with respect to interruptions. Continue, please, Member for Mayaro.

Mr. R. Paray: Thank you, Madam Speaker. There is also a unique situation happening in my constituency, where there are certain people walking around and they are going to those people who are vulnerable and saying that, you know, we have received no applications from the MP's office. They are telling tales, I understand you cannot use the word "lie" inside here, but they are telling tales and they are saying the MP's office is not making these applications. And they are also instructing them to go to the PNM's office in Rio Claro and file the application and they are going to get the grant. I mean, this is the level of deception and dishonesty that speaks to the deterioration of the politics in this country practised by many, many people.

Madam Speaker, I do my best as the Member of Parliament to treat

with every single resident constituent [*Desk thumping*] that comes to my office. I do not ask about party cards and whether you voted for me or not. So I find this very distasteful.

Madam Speaker, criminals are running rampant and roughshod over state apparatus in this country and violent crime is uncontrollable and grossly undetected. Public health care is extremely deplorable and inaccessible with routine and regular shortages of drugs and medication. I see that the Minister of Health has left the Chamber, but I would like to make an appeal to him that I have submitted a letter to his office asking for the consideration of having dialysis machines in Mayaro just because of the sheer geographic distance that my constituents [*Desk thumping*] have to travel to San Fernando or Sangre Grande and when you have to pay \$400 a day for a taxi and another \$1,100 for those who are not getting the funding for it, it can be very, very expensive. So I am hoping that consideration can be given for this.

The vulnerable and disadvantaged in our society are now more traumatized one year after and we see them. As MP I see they come to my office every single day. There is also a growing anxiety amongst people. It is an unease. It is a bit of despair and one year later on this Government's record of their deliverables and delivery it has been pathetic, tragically poor and very ineffective and I am referring this based on my experience in my constituency. [*Desk thumping*] If any Members on that side are getting the services, well I thank them and I am glad for the people who are their constituents, but I think some of that graciousness should be extended to the people of Mayaro.

No new roads have been built, Madam Speaker. No bridges have been constructed. There is a landslip in my constituency in Agostini which is threatening a major artery to Mayaro that connects Rio Claro and Mayaro. And I have sent letters to the Ministry of Works and Transport asking for urgent attention. And if we lose that slipway, you cut off a main artery for students who have to get to school in Sangre Grande and Mayaro and so on.

So these are the kinds of things that have been plaguing our country over the last year. I mean, we have talked about the children's hospital on several occasions today. And the fact that it is now the Couva hospital and if I could borrow a phrase from the Member for Oropouche West, is that they have basically kicked the children out of the children's hospital. That cannot be something that we should be looking for because the facility was designed with children in mind. Clearly, even the children in this country are going to be betrayed if this is left to happen. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker, with a fiscal package in 2017 of \$53.4 billion and an expected revenue of \$47.4 billion and a deficit of \$6 billion, we are certain that we will see a continuation of the economic stagnation, slowdown and further dislocation and displacement of the poor and the vulnerable in our society. [*Desk thumping*] We will not be surprised if the Government has to dig deeper into the Heritage and Stabilisation Fund in 2017 just to balance this ill-conceived budget outlined in fiscal 2017. Instead of transformation and growth, what will unravel will be further decline, regression and stagnation. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker, those on the other side have often come in this House and said that as a government when the Partnership was in

government they did nothing for the people of Trinidad and Tobago. But today I want to pass some judgment on that on my own, particularly in the area of agriculture. After reviewing the budget statement for 2017 and comparing it to the 2016 budget statement, it is clear that this PNM administration is totally clueless with regard to the development of the agricultural sector.

The People's Partnership Government recognized the pivotal role that agriculture must play in the diversification of our economy. And to realize this, under the direction and guidance of, at that time, the Minister, hon. Vasant Bharath, they developed a National Food Production Action Plan, 2012 to 2015. The overall objective of this plan was to create a food secured nation while diversifying the economy. The People's Partnership Government recognized since then that in times of extreme fiscal constraint, the food production sector must make a considerable dent in the food import bill and generate food exports simultaneously.

Madam Speaker, we recognized at that time and as we continue to reiterate now, that exports from the agricultural sector is a very viable source of foreign exchange earnings that can be realized in the short to medium term.

Madam Speaker, in order for these exports to become a real source of foreign exchange, the right framework and foundation must be in place. But after listening to the budget speech on Friday and knowing the importance of agriculture in Trinidad and Tobago today, I was very surprised and disappointed that, again, agriculture has earned only a one-page allocation in the budget, and that one page is as poor as the three minutes and 35 seconds

that it received in a three-hour budget presentation by the hon. Minister of Finance. [*Desk thumping*]

The People's Partnership Government in its wisdom recognized the need for the agricultural sector, for the proper post-harvesting handling of packaging of fresh produce as an integral component of good agricultural practice and it is a prerequisite for the expanding and the development of export markets, especially the development of those packaging housing. But, Madam Speaker, the Partnership Government started to lay the bricks and the foundation for this.

To this end after there was extensive consultation with farmers' groups throughout the country, the People's Partnership constructed two out of five packaging houses that were planned. These packaging houses were planned to be built in the major agricultural clusters. But you know what is sad, Madam Speaker, there is one that sits in the neighbouring constituency of Tabaquite in an area called Brickfield. This facility was fully completed at the end of 2015 just before the general election. You know what, Madam Speaker, up to now the packaging house remains unutilized and overgrown with bush. It has not been—[*Desk thumping*] How can we say we want to refocus agriculture in this country and we are leaving these facilities idle to be overgrown with bush?

And just for information, Madam Speaker, Tabaquite is the area where this country gets its full supply of peppers, melongene and, you know, [*Interruption*] no, not pineapple, sweet corns and so on. So it is a very rich agricultural area.

8.15 p.m.

Mr. R. Paray

So, when these packaging houses remained dormant after one year, for whatever reason, it was not activated in the last administration knowing the importance of agriculture. What reasonable explanation can you give this country not to use it? But, I hope it is not spite. I am hoping it is not spite just as why the Mayaro fire station still remains un-operational, I do not know if it is because it has the plaque of the hon. Kamla Persad-Bissessar on it. I hope it is not spite that is keeping it down at the moment.

But, Madam Speaker, we talk about the betrayal of the people. There is a trust issue here, eh. When you have these facilities down you are betraying the farmers and their families. You know, those who had their hopes dashed, when you take these facilities and you leave them to go into ruin, what message are you sending in the industry as a Government. Madam Speaker, I am so disappointed that one year after—I mean, we have a Minister of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries who I know very well, very personally, we competed against one another during the general election, so there seems to be some sort of—

Mrs. Persad-Bissessar SC: He lost.

Mr. R. Paray: Well, he lost. Yes, he did lose; he did lose.

Mrs. Persad-Bissessar SC: That is important.

Mr. R. Paray: But, you know, he is an MP for the area. He is MP, I am the elected MP, so in—[*Crosstalk*] [*Desk thumping*] But, you see, he is the pretending MP and I am the elected MP. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker, whatever they call it, whatever word, anyone—[*Interruption*] Anyone who gets assistance and help, because at the end of the day as long as people get help, people are serviced, then the people win,

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and that is what we have to do in this House. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Indarsingh: Is that the same fella who is supposed to return to Canada?

Mr. R. Paray: Yes, that is the same guy. Madam Speaker, you know, I want to touch on a couple areas on agriculture, but I am looking at the time here, and I do not want to run out of too much of the time.

But, I want to raise this issue about the fish kill that happened in July of this year, and it has been several months and the Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries and none of the state agencies have been able to get in front of this matter. You still have fishermen in this country complaining that their fish is not selling because people still feel the fish is poisoned, and what it tells me is that there is a break of process in how the matter should have been handled. And what is more sad, you have the Minister of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries not dealing with the matter, making excuses. As a matter of fact, Madam Speaker, the people have lost trust, and it comes back to the same issue that I am speaking about, this cloud of mistrust and betrayal. Nothing that comes out of the mouth of some of these heads of these Ministries people are believing it anymore, and that is not good for the country. It is not good for the development of the psyche of our people when we are aware of the challenging times that are ahead. So, you know, the lacklustre response has been very, very disappointing. And I will tell you something, Madam Speaker, the fishermen have weighed in on that group, on that team, and as far as they are concerned those in the office there have failed miserably. Madam Speaker, this Government likes to use the word “development”, but I think they do not understand the meaning of the word. Clearly by their actions, they do not.

Madam Speaker, another issue in the agricultural industry is this issue around agricultural leases. Now leases are so critical for developing the farms and the farmers for their capitalization, their mechanization. Without going into too much of details, the Joint Select Committee had met concerning agricultural leases. I know a report has not been laid in this Parliament as yet. But you had all the officials and technocrats sitting in that meeting, and so many suggestions were made, but yet nothing came out in the budget presentation. I was thinking, you know, even if you would have heard an idea you would have put it and have it reflected in the budget so that the 20,000 farmers that are currently waiting for their leases, something could have been put in place to get some expedition of these leases. And sadly, Madam Speaker, nothing in the budget, nothing in the statement, nothing in the PSIP speaks to how we are going to move forward at a very fast pace to get these leases for these farmers. I was very, very disappointed by not seeing any issues to deal with agricultural leases because it is so important.

Madam Speaker, another big area here in the agricultural sector in this country which is critical, which I felt the budget should have addressed, is agricultural access roads. Agricultural access roads, I mean, it is really the communication link for the farmers to their market. You know, a year has gone and prior to that there were 20/25 roads that we have submitted notices to the Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries. These are roads where farmers have hectares of dasheen bush, of rice. You have so many different—it is a mixture of farming commodities in my constituency, and the rain falls and the tractors cannot go in it. And when you try to find out

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about what is the issue, the issue around agricultural access roads is that it is stuck somewhere inside the Ministry and getting the Lands and Surveys, and getting the names approved, and the names of the traces, and roads have to go on Lands and Surveys, and, Madam Speaker, these things are taking absolutely too long. It is not working for the farmers in this country.

Madam Speaker, I want to shed a little light on a bit of the performance targets that I think people must understand in this country. You know, there is a philosophy that says that the Partnership, we did not diversify, we did not set a frame for diversification. And while I speak on agriculture, I want to quote some numbers and these numbers come out from a report that I have here from the Ministry of Food Production in 2015, and it can also be found on the Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries' website and so on. Under the People's Partnership, 23,183 hectares of land were put under active production. Madam Speaker, 18,189 acres of land yielded 60,289,608 kilograms of produce. Now, does that sound to you like—

Hon. Member: What document are you reading?

Mr. R. Paray: It is a Ministry of Food Production document, the data was taken from the Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries' website. But, does that sound like an administration that has done nothing for agriculture in this country? I do not think so. The valuation for these commodities, that 60 million kilograms, the top 10 of that list yielded in terms of a value of \$369,133,694.87. Madam Speaker, does that sound like an administration that has done nothing for agriculture? I do not think so. I think that the foundation was laid by the Partnership ,we left a good track for the new

Government to come in and run on, and for one year nothing has happened, nobody has run, everybody sit down, nothing has happened in the sector.

[Desk thumping]

You may ask: well, how was this possible? How did we accomplish that? It is easy. You put roads, you try to get as much leases going, there were over 1,500 leases granted during the period, but there is much more that needs to be done. But, the budget document as a policy document does not speak to anything around that, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker, I would like to make a couple suggestions, because it is important that as an Opposition—

Madam Speaker: Hon. Member, your original speaking time has now expired, you are entitled to 10-minute extension, do you intend to avail yourself of it?

[Mr. R. Paray nods head]

Madam Speaker: You may proceed.

Mr. R. Paray: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I have a suggestion that I wish that the hon. Minister of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries, and perhaps the Government to take into consideration, and it stems from the consideration of looking at some revitalization in the sugar industry. And, where this comes from, it comes out of an experience in Puerto Rico which was recorded in the *Newsday* of September 29, 2016, in an article entitled, “P. Rico finds unexpected growth in agriculture”, and if I may be allowed just to read very, very quickly. The article says:

“The US territory is seeing something of an agricultural renaissance as new farms spring up across the island, supplying an increasing

number of farmers' markets and restaurants to meet consumer demand for fresher produce.

Farming has become one of the few areas of growth on an island struggling to emerge from a ten-year-old recession and a still-unfolding debt crisis. The most recent statistics from the governor's office show farm income grew 25 percent to more than US \$900 million in 2012-2014."

Madam Speaker, this position in Puerto Rico has created over 7,000 new jobs in the agricultural sector. The task is not an impossible one. All it requires is the political will and the necessary investments to drive the sector forward. You know, you ask whether this Government is serious or not, and I want to just talk briefly about the allocation that was given to the Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries. The Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries received \$350 million less in this fiscal year than they received in 2015/2016. And while we may want to shoulder the blame of so many things on the Minister of Finance, I would lay the blame, this one, solely on the shoulders of the Minister of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries, because when looking at the draft estimates I see that \$349 million was unspent in the last fiscal year.

So, clearly, Madam Speaker, if you cannot spend the money I give you in one year I am not going to give you the same amount of money next year. So, that \$350 million that was sent back, 349, that money could have been used to put into agricultural access roads, it could have paid forestry workers, it could have put money in the agricultural Ministry. There are so many things that the Minister of Finance could have done with that \$349

million, but he chose not to act, and that shows a level of incompetence, I would say, because something as critical as agriculture, I would have gone to the Minister of Finance, and if I have to rough him up a little bit, get that money, because it is critical to moving our country forward. [*Desk thumping*] But, as a casual thing the money was not spent, the money went and you know, I understand that the hon. Minister of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries, he has been making a comment lately that he is doing such good work in my constituency that the 3,000 votes he lost he is growing it slowly. But, I do not know what he is doing, but I am sure if he had spent that \$349 million to put the roads and stuff in my constituency, well then he might have been getting the 3,000 votes that he is dreaming about every day. [*Desk thumping*]

So, Madam Speaker, I would like to wrap up very, very quickly by stating categorically that this budget statement has fallen short in many, many areas. It is short on context, it is short on content, it is short on vision, it is short on strategy, it is short on ideas, and it is short on purpose. Madam Speaker, in this budget the Minister of Finance was absolutely short on everything in this budget.

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

8.30 p.m.

The Minister of Sport and Youth Affairs (Hon. Darryl Smith): Thank you, Madam Speaker, for giving me the opportunity to participate in the 2016/2017 budget debate here tonight. I would like to officially thank, first of all, Almighty God, for giving us life today to be here to take care of the people of Trinidad and Tobago's business. [*Desk thumping*]

I also would like to send my prayers out to all our neighbours in the Caribbean who have been dealt the havoc from hurricane Matthew. Our prayers are with them and I know that this House, all the Members here will send our prayers and I know our team, our Prime Minister, as he always does will ensure that we lend a hand to assist our neighbours in those countries.

I will also like to officially congratulate, on two notes, the Member of Parliament for Diego Martin North/East and the Minister of Finance; One, for his contribution last week when he delivered the budget. This is his second budget in his tenure as Minister of Finance. And the second note, on the good job that he has done to stabilize the country through these rough waters of economic hard times. I want to give him a hearty thank you from the people of Diego Martin Central. [*Desk thumping*]

I also would like to thank the Prime Minister, the Member of Parliament for Diego Martin West for also guiding this country over the last year. We all know of his experience over the past few years. He is the longest-serving Member of Parliament in the country, but this is his first time as a Prime Minister and again he too has captained this country through the rocky waters with the economic issues that we have been having. I also want to thank him for having confidence in me, in my first year as a Member of Parliament and a Cabinet Member for me to be the Minister of Sport and Youth Affairs.

I also—and I cannot come here and present my budget and what has happened in the Ministry of Sport and Youth Affairs without thanking the staff members of the Ministry of Sport and Youth Affairs, from my PS, from

my DPS, from all the staff members, from the chairman and the sport board, but also I want to thank the athletes, the young people who participate in sport, whether it is to represent Trinidad and Tobago, just for recreation, the young people of Trinidad and Tobago, the coaches, the parents, the teachers, the trainers, the psychologists, everybody who participated in the last year to assist Trinidad and Tobago's young people and athletes to do the best that they can.

And last but not least, before I get into the meat of my contribution, I always say first and foremost, my most favourite part of this job is being the Member of Parliament and being on the ground with the people of Diego Martin Central. And I want to thank the people of Diego Martin Central, a year ago, of having confidence in me, giving me the votes that I needed to be here to represent them. So I want to thank them for that. [*Desk thumping*]

The last time, Madam Speaker, I stood here for the budget was almost a year ago, is literally almost our anniversary. And it is no secret, most of us on this side and on that side, it is the first time we had been in the Parliament that would have been—is not a normal thing for a Member of Parliament on his first time or a Minister on his first appearance in the Parliament to have to do a budget debate. And it is no secret when the date was called by the former Prime Minister, now the Opposition Leader, the Member of Parliament for Siparia, when she called that September 7th date, it raised a lot of eyebrows—in the business sector, in a number of NGOs, and so on, across the country: Why was the election called so close to a constitutional time for a budget to be called?

In fact, I do not think in the history of Trinidad and Tobago a budget

has ever been called at that time. We all know what it takes, what has to be done in terms of preparation to have a budget taken care of and set up. It takes months in advance to recap, to get all your audits in, your accounts in and so on, so you can report to the people. But they did what they did. It happened and I guess we see the result with regard to why we are on this side and they are on that side. That is probably one of the reasons why. But nevertheless, we thank them for that. But last time, I mean, I am accustomed speaking in public, I am comfortable, but it was difficult because usually you have to come and report to the people what occurred in your Ministry and showcase what is going to happen in the future. And it was difficult for me and a number of Members here to do that in the short space of time. I can speak for myself and I am not here to politicize because we are beyond that right now. It is a level of maturity that this side shows, is that there was not much to show. And it is no secret why.

In one year, Madam Speaker, one year, three Ministers of Sports, three. And if you would recall they expanded the Government by 10 Ministries. Our Prime Minister came in, seeing what was going on with regard to the economy, put it back down to scale which is easy to manage. I do not even know how they were able to sit in the Cabinet room with the table that is there. They were probably sitting on each other. But nevertheless, nevertheless, you would have recalled they formed a new Ministry; Ministry of Sport and Youth Affairs has been part of the Government and part of Trinidad and Tobago for years. They took the youth affairs part away and formed a new Ministry. And do you know in that Ministry as well, Madam Speaker, there were also three Ministers, and also

three Ministers in the Ministry. And where are all of them today? There is only one that has survived, my colleague, the Member for Couva North, she was a Minister in the Ministry of Youth Affairs. Nine Ministers, Madam Speaker, nine Ministers to run the Ministry of Sport and Youth Affairs, a job that I alone do. Nine. [*Desk thumping*] Think of that.

The political leader, the Opposition Leader came and talked about the Minister of National Security and “oh”, they have three Ministers. There is one Minister of National Security and two Ministers in the Ministry of National Security. You would have had the AG speak about how many Ministers of National Security they had as well.

Mr. Al-Rawi: Seven.

Hon. D. Smith: Seven, in a five-year period. Three Ministers of Sport in one year and nine Ministers to run a Ministry that I can run on my own. But that is how they did things in their time. But this time around, I am fortunate to be able to talk and show the public what the Ministry, and notice I am not saying “I”, because when the Opposition Leader was speaking I swear it was parang, all I was hearing is I, I, I, on that side. I know we are in Christmas season, [*Desk thumping and laughter*] everything was I, I, I. On this side is “we”, is “we” and “we” at the Ministry of Sport and Youth Affairs could come and report to the people, the taxpayers, what we have done with their taxpayers’ money over the past 12 years or what we plan to do in difficult times for the next 12 years and make it work. We will make blood out of stone if we have to for the people of Trinidad and Tobago.

And for the last year, it is no secret, one of the issues that were, and I will read an article just now that I have here that will discuss that, was the

same I, I, I. There was an ivory-tower approach from the former Ministers that got them in a lot of trouble. We all know the history with regard to LifeSport and so on in there. But in the last year and just like most of my colleagues here who are new, we were a sponge. We came in here with a foundation of being in the community, being well educated, but we also knew that we are naive in certain things, we are not perfect. We came in here, we were a sponge and we listened to the people, we listened to our stakeholders and what we realize is that you have to do little things that make big differences. And I think this Government has done that to a perfection, doing little things that make big differences in these hard times.

You know, in Cabinet there are a number of subcommittees, finance, questions and there is a boards committee and early in the tenure, last year, I went to a boards committee and all the Ministers were going through their list of state boards that are under them. And in the discussion, the Ministry of Sport and Youth Affairs had two boards and I remember somebody asking me, so Minister of Sport and Youth Affairs how many boards and I told him two. And the Prime Minister said no. Minister of Sport and Youth Affairs, actually you have 50-plus boards that report to you. They may not be state boards but all the governing bodies you have to work with inclusive of the Youth League of Trinidad and Tobago, the Youth Council of Trinidad and Tobago. And then it resonated to me, that really and truly the Ministry of Sport and Youth Affairs really has the most people that are accountable to them in terms of boards with all the NGBs. And that stuck with me when the Prime Minister told me about that.

But this Government came in and it is part of our manifesto, you saw

it with the Minister of Rural Development and Local Government how we consult, the Minister of Education, the Member for Arima, we consult. The ivory-tower approach is done and I am very proud to say that for the first time in the history of Trinidad and Tobago a Minister of Sport and Youth Affairs sat down with every governing body and every youth body in the first 100 days. [*Desk thumping*] In the first 100 days, Madam Speaker. And that consultation helped me to do the job that I did over the period of time to assist the young people of Trinidad and Tobago and to assist the athletes.

One of the main points that kept coming back with those meetings was the instability that I just spoke about. It was not just Ministers changing. You know, in 2010 when the other side won the election, just like we did this year, there is a manifesto that you go to the election with and that becomes policy and each Ministry has to follow that. I follow it to a “T”, but each Minister will have a flavour, a personality, a character that will put a little shine on it differently. That could not have happened in the Ministry of Sport and Youth Affairs with all the changes. So it was a level of instability that all the governing bodies reported back in the first 100 days. There were a number of chairmen, there were a number of boards, whole boards came and go, PSAs came and go, chairman of the Sport Board came and go, Ministers came and go, it was just too much havoc, so nothing could have been stable and with a plan moving forward. Things were changing too much because of the issues that they were having.

I would have heard the Opposition Leader speak just now of something and again we are here to clean up the issues that she—she said something that really stuck with me, where the Prime Minister and the

Minister of Finance were the only two people to see the budget. That is so untrue. And you would have heard the rumbling here. We have a process and you would have heard former Ministers, I think one of their former Ministers of National Security talked about five-day weekends and the Prime Minister at the time not attending Cabinet and so on. We have Cabinet every week at the same place. If our Prime Minister is away on business or on vacation we have an Acting Prime Minister and we have a system. The system is when you have a budget and you are going into budget we meet with the Minister of Planning and Development, we go through line by line with the PS, then we go to a finance meeting and we go through line by line and then it is brought here. So that is far from the truth. Everybody was on board and each of these budgets is from the Minister themselves. So let me put that to rest.

You would have heard her speak about the hospital. We keep hearing about the Children Hospital, Children Hospital and why are we doing the Brian Lara. Let me tell you about that hospital, let me tell you about the whole scenario. "It have a park call Irwin Park in Siparia." In fact, there are two. The first time I went up there, Madam Speaker, "is two stadium identical". The only difference is one has a cycling track. I want everybody in Trinidad and Tobago to go down there and see that. It makes absolutely no sense. I will tell you this. They had an opening for the election, September something, August something, what they did for all the things, inclusive of the hospital and you would have heard that the hospital was not ready to open from the Minister of Health and he would get into that more.

They had a big football game. They had people in the stands and after

Hon. D. Smith

that they pack up and close up because it was not finished. Just like the hospital.

Mr. Hinds: Pappyshow.

Hon. D. Smith: I am the Minister of Sport and Youth Affairs, forget the cost, pappyshow. Two identical stadiums next to each other, they did a grand opening, had a football game and they could not continue because it was not ready, but the pappyshow. But I am going to come back to that pappyshow and try and educate the other side. They talked about the Brian Lara Stadium, they keep talking about the Brian Lara Stadium. HDC, as they leave one by one, HDC the Minister of Housing, Member for San Fernando East, in my constituency over 600 units sat down there since 2010. They were ready, I saw them, I was the Chairman of Diego Martin, I saw them. They were ready and they just laid there and left it there and for five years. We come in there, we opened it and people are now in Diego Martin Central, all over Trinidad are being able to enjoy a home for the first time.

[Desk thumping]

Hon. Member: They get their keys.

Hon. D. Smith: Yeah, I will get to that just now, I will get into the names. So when you come here and talk those things, Madam Speaker, they are easy to clear up. You know you hear the political pundits talk, you hear all the experts talk about good foundation for a politician when they are coming in. One of the things they say that you should be between the age of 35 and 40 and that makes sense, at that age you are developed, you have your home, you are qualified, you work, whether it is private or public sector and you have the rest, a next 15/20 years to develop into a politician. They speak

about starting off your political career in local government and I see a number of people there, including the Opposition Leader who was an Alderman, the AG was an Alderman. My colleague here, the Member for Arima was a Councillor and a Deputy Mayor. The Deputy Speaker was a Councillor as well.

So they all could tell you the—how local government gets you ready for central government with regard to the grassroots and the council and so on. One of the things they also say it is good for a politician when they are now starting off to start off in opposition. It gives you and it makes sense, it gives you a better appreciation of when you come into Government and you respect it more. And the last one that they say is that to start off your political career it is good to start off when there are hard economic times. I am proud to say, and I am not here to boast about it, I have covered all four. “Ah coulda do without de last one” with the economic downturn and the hard times but it is what it is, but it has made me stronger and it has made all of us stronger. It has made us more prudent and made us count every cent, every cent, [*Desk thumping*] and made us more efficient.

They talk about the aquatic, tennis and cycling, how we opened it and plaque and all of that. That is so immature. I have the documents, when all those plans were with Mr. Roger Boynes so many years ago. It is not my aquatic centre or tennis centre, you know, it is the people of Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*]

I remember a few weeks ago, the Member for Couva South asked when “muh people” from Couva—“all yuh remember that”, could get to use their pool. Something to that extent. It is not that, it is our people, it is

Trinidad and Tobago. In fact, I invite the world to come and utilize these facilities. It is not like on September 7th a guillotine just drop and everything just stop and just switch over. It does not work like that. It is a process.

8.45 p.m.

The hospital will be opened. Just like you all sat down on Brian Lara Stadium for five years, we could have done that with the aquatic centre, but we are mature on this side. Those kinds of long time politics—and I am here to tell you all that; to give you all advice—spinning wheel and all that, that did not work during the election. You are still in that mode. An Opposition is supposed to be there to help the Government.

And I could stand up here and “doh” give you all advice, you know, and I know and guarantee that we would be here for the next 15 years. [*Desk thumping*] But take my stupid advice. Take my stupid advice. Take my young advice. Take stock of yourself. Be a little mature. At least wait for us to make a mistake. We “not perfect”; we will make mistakes—but the spin thing.

I talked to a politician from another island and he was telling me, “Darryl, I do not envy you. It is so difficult to be a politician today because young people have information on their hands, on their cell phones and their tablets.” You cannot spin on them again. So take my advice—or not, and let us stay here for the next 15 years—stop trying to spin things. It is what it is. We are doing our best.

And you know, you heard the Minister of Finance speak, and when he said it here, I do not understand how the people of Trinidad and Tobago, and you all, did not understand it. Eighteen billion in revenue a few years ago

and it is now \$1.7 billion from oil and gas. Madam Speaker, that is like you making \$18 a year and it cut to \$1.75. It is black and white. And they want to come here and make comparison of their time. At one time when they were in government, oil price was \$120. We cannot compare that. People are seeing through that. [*Desk thumping*] But you all could continue, you know. Continue if you want. It is different times and you all will have to understand. It is no fault of ours; it is no fault of you all, that the oil and gas price is what it is. Let us work together to try and push and propel Trinidad and Tobago forward for our children. [*Desk .thumping*]

Mr. Hinds: Well said.

Hon. D. Smith: I, as Minister of Sport and Youth Affairs—the Minister of Finance told us we all had to cut 7 per cent. Things were so bad. It is like a trap door came out under us when September 07th came. Seven per cent represented \$33 million from my budget. Others were bigger. But we made it work. This year I got \$325 million. Last year I got \$600 million. I am not complaining. I will make that work. I will stretch that. I will stretch that with the help of my colleagues, with the help of the Minister of Finance and, hopefully, with the help of you all.

I will tell you all a story. I will give you all an analogy. I am not going to call any names. I will give you all two. There was a young footballer in Trinidad and Tobago who played football with me for Trinidad, and professionally, and he was heading home. He and his colleagues died in a car accident on his street, and the residents from his street, instead of helping him, robbed, whether it was his body, or if he was breathing in his last breath, they took his sneakers, his gold, his US in the accident.

[*Interruption*] I will come back to that. You see what is going on with the hurricane? It happened in the States the other day with Katrina. People took the opportunity in disaster to raid people, to rob people. But I am of the strong view that it is a few bad apples that do those things.

Trinidad and Tobago—everybody always say, “God is a Trini”. Look, we get away from Matthew. But I am saying the economic situation is like a disaster and we have to take it like a disaster.

Mr. Hinds: And they robbed us.

Hon. D. Smith: Well, no, I am not saying that. The same boys who robbed the boy’s body, brought back the money and the passport and everything for the parents.

Mr. Hinds: Bring it back. [*Laughter*]

Hon. D. Smith: My analogy I am giving is that we need Trinidad and Tobago, inclusive of the Opposition, to understand the maths that the Minister of Finance just said and we need to work together to propel Trinidad and Tobago forward in these hard times, just as if it was a hurricane or earthquake.

They would have also heard the Minister of Finance speak about accounts that were placed, not only in the Ministry of Sport and Youth Affairs. A number of other colleagues here speak of finding these weird accounts with millions of dollars. There was \$495 million in the Sport Company. When we came in, it was down to 397, and within the year I have been able to use some of that to pay off for some of these facilities. It is now down to \$244 million. I will make that work, along with the \$325 million, to make sure our athletes are okay. But it is damned if you do, damned if you

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do not with this Opposition, Madam Speaker. If I did not open the aquatic, the tennis and the cycling, they “woulda” say the children’s hospital and the aquatic and the tennis and the—not so?

Hon. Members: Yes.

Hon. D. Smith: They “woulda” say that. “Ah open it, dey making joke and say, all I had to do was full up de pool.” And if “yuh want tuh continue, continue. De people watching but they won't be fooled. Yuh could spin all de wheel yuh want. Dat is long-time politics. But I here to advise you. Take my stupid advice or yuh could move on.” Right?

One of the things, as I said, when I came in as Minister—even when I was chairman of the corporation, there were so many issues. In fact, it was a UNC-led corporation in Diego Martin and the speaker—who I am very proud—was the youngest chairman of the corporation until I came in, and that speaks to how Dr. Rowley gives young people and he loves young people. [*Desk thumping*] He gave me the chance. We have a young Minister of Housing. You have Port of Spain North/St. Ann’s West. His name is “Young” and he is also very young. [*Desk thumping*] But he loves young people. He gives them a chance.

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: “He very young”?

Hon. D. Smith: Well, “he young”.

Hon. Member: He is quite young.

Hon. D. Smith: Quite young. But going into there, just imagine there was so much rampant corruption, and the reason why I am saying this, Madam Speaker, is to tie in a point as to what happened in the Ministry of Sport and Youth Affairs. When I went in there to the corporation—and you will know

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some of the issues—we came in after the UNC. You know, they take the gold chain; “dey tief guns”; they had massive corruption inside there that we had to go and clean up.

Hon. Member: Yes, “ah hear bout dat”.

Hon. D. Smith: “Yeah, dey tief de gold chain.”

Hon. Member: The Mayor’s chain?

Hon. D. Smith: “De gold chain gone.” Gone, under UNC.

Hon. Member: “Dey tief it?”

Hon. D. Smith: But forget that. “Ah not here to politicize. Dey had other issues inside ah dere, Madam Speaker.” Flooding was an issue. Look at the rain we had, and I am sure all of you all getting WhatsApp pictures of minor flooding in your area. It is the first time in the history of Diego Martin, a full term has passed that Diego Martin has not had any major flooding. “Ah want some thumping for dat.” [*Desk thumping*] First time, three years. That was one of the issues that we had. We took it on—the bull by the horns.

And I am coming back to tie in the point, Madam Speaker. There were issues as well with garbage collection in Diego. They used to have riots and people burning rubbish and so on. We took that on. The same thing in the Ministry. We had to clean up the Ministry when we came in there. And I will tell you this. It is impossible for—and a lot of these Ministers, a lot of people, say how “we taking long to do thing”, but it is impossible for us to have come in there and swim against that current of issues that was going on there. I, for a fact, “woulda” drown if I had continued in that current that was going on in the Ministry. Me and the PS and the directors, we cleaned it up. We put basic policies back in place, basic human dignity.

I tell you “it had people who was embarrassed” to wear the Ministry of Sport and Youth Affairs shirt to go to work. They used to turn the shirt inside out. Everybody used to laugh at them. Now they wear it with pride. [*Desk thumping*] The first thing we had to do was clean up the Ministry. The second thing we had to do was to ensure that we focus on the athletes and the youths which is part of our manifesto.

And I am going to read something here, and “I not about I, I, I”. That is why I thanked everybody before, because when you see—and I have many more I could have brought, but because of time’s sake, I am reading this just to tell you my team, my Cabinet colleagues, my Ministry workers, my staff at the MP office, is the reason for articles like this. I am going to read it real quick. It is from the *Guardian*, September 11, 2016.

Mr. Hinds: Headline.

Hon. D. Smith: “Smith gets passing grade”.

Mr. Hinds: Awww! [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. D. Smith: “Minister of Sports Darryl Smith has come in for praise from several heads of the country’s National Sporting Organisations on the first anniversary of his appointment to the post.

The general consensus was that Smith had done an excellent job of meeting the needs of the different NSOs while operating on a reduced budget.

President of the T&T Football Association, David John-Williams...”
By the way, congratulations to the Soca Warriors. They won last night, 3/0—4/0, sorry. It was in the Couva South area. I did not see them, but nevertheless—

“—but maintained that the Minister ‘had been very good for football’

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and had ‘always been accessible’, giving him an eight out of a 10.”
Not giving me, giving “we” an eight out of 10. I want to change that.

“Speaking on behalf of the Trinidad and Tobago Cricket Board”—
which is also housed in Couva South—“third Vice-president Patrick
Rampersad said he had also been pleased with Smith’s performance.”
Not “Smith's performance”, “we performance.”

“In my mind, he’s done a tremendous amount with the resources he
has. He is well-intentioned and has a fairly good grasp of the
requirements of sport. I think he is boxed in by the economic issues
and so on and there are developments that take place higher than his
level that interfere with the kind of progress that he would like to
make. I would give him more than a passing grade”—I give him a 7.5.
“Another vote of approval came from Ephraim Serrette, President of
the”—N3As

“He’s always been in contact with us, working with us for solutions
and in the case of funding”—communicating with us smoothly.
“Overall, the relationship has been very good.”

I could go on and on. I just want to read one that I want you all to remember.

Hon. Member: Good job.

Hon. D. Smith: No, I “doh” need this job, Naparima. If you want, I could
give you a job in the Ministry of Sport, you know. [*Laughter*] I could “geh
yuh a job”.

Madam Speaker, hear this one:

“...president of the Trinidad and Tobago Hockey Board Douglas
Camacho said that after the turbulent reign of former Minister Anil

Roberts, Smith's diplomatic approach to the job had come as a welcome relief."

"All yuh remember dat name?"

"He's certainly been better than the recent Minister"—

Remember they had nine, eh. Remember it is nine. So he say, better than all nine. We better than all nine.

"as he has tried to be collaborative and listen to ideas. He's done a pretty decent job and has really made an effort to outreach which is quite a pleasant change from the recent past!"

Camacho was especially impressed with what Smith had managed to accomplish during"—this hard—"economic time."

And it goes on and on, Madam Speaker, and there are others as well, but I would not get into those. But that is not about me, it is about my Minister of Finance; it is about my Prime Minister; [*Desk thumping*] it is about my colleagues, because when we meet, we discuss and we get ideas from everybody.

Madam Speaker, let me just touch base—and I could speak for the next four hours. I have so many things that we have done in the Ministry of Sport and Youth Affairs. You would have heard the Member for Siparia, the Opposition Leader, talk about, "we people could drive around and see what I do. Yuh could see this and yuh could see that." But it is not about that. Again, that is long time politics, Madam Speaker.

Mortar and steel and wood is not about development. Somebody asked if we know what development is. Development is not about that. It is about the people. "All yuh have tuh understand that. Yuh cyar make money

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on de people, yuh see; yuh could make money when yuh build ting. Dah is de difference.” [*Desk thumping*]

But we will spend on the people. “Leh meh tell yuh something.” The Eastern Regional Multipurpose Sporting Facility in Grande, finished in time and on budget. [*Desk thumping*] The community swimming pools, “all yuh” had a Minister who was the best swimming coach in the world, never do anything for swimming. Just imagine we have eight swimming pools across Trinidad and Tobago and “none ah dem open on the weekend”.

Hon. Member: Yeah, none.

Hon. D. Smith: “None ah dem” open after four o’clock. Eh? We make sure that the swimming pools are opening on the weekends now, Madam Speaker, and opening until nine o’clock. [*Desk thumping*]

We renovated Diego Martin, Cocoyea and La Horquetta and we plan to do the others this year. We did lighting work in Hasely Crawford; lighting work at the Ato Boldon Stadium. We improved the indoor sporting arenas; we renovated the Maloney office of the indoor facility. In Mayaro Sporting facility, plumbing upgrade. But “yuh see, yuh cyar drive rong and see those things. Yuh cyar cut a ribbon to do those things. Dah is what de Opposition is about”—little things that make big differences. And that is something that is inherent in Trinidad and Tobago, where Ministers do not maintain. We “doh” maintain what we build. We just continue going, going at a pace, building new things. “Yuh have to maintain what yuh have.”

And I am proud to say for the first time we have worked with Shanghai on these three projects. Shanghai has developed a software package that will maintain the facilities. When a light bulb has a 12-month

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cycle, “yuh start tuh get ah alarm on yuh phone at nine months to change de bulb.” But that has not been the norm. We wait for the track to “mash up” and the whole stadium “have to close down and den yuh go and tender and then it take five months”—

Hon. Members: NAPA.

Hon. D. Smith: NAPA, well, I know somebody will deal with NAPA. The Minister of Culture will deal with them with NAPA. “I eh go get into dat.” But that is how we have to do things: preventative maintenance, and “that is” the little things that make big difference, Madam Speaker. [*Desk thumping*] The sewerage system, floodlights in Eastern recreation, little things that “yuh doh see”. St. Paul’s Street, electrical upgraded; Dwight Yorke Stadium, roof work, electrical work; Hasely Crawford, we did work to the track. Right? Youth facilities in Laventille, Malick, California, did development works there. And, of course, it is the development aspect of it with the young people.

We did an Easter camp and a summer camp. “Ah see ah geh ah question tuh answer about how much de summer camp cost.” No problem. We are an open book. When the Parliament comes back, I could answer that with my eyes closed. But again, “looking tuh spin thing”. Right?

For the first time in the history of Trinidad and Tobago—just imagine 80 years we going to the Olympics—we have never had a review of the Olympics, where the taxpayers’ moneys have gone, how we could improve. Last week we had a session. All the players, from athletes to the doctors to the NGBs to the media, everybody was involved, and it was the first time. We scratched the surface. People were able to ventilate. It got heated at

times, but they were all happy at the end of the day. And it is the start of something that you will see which will usher us into a new sport policy, which will discuss and deal with rewarding athletes, because we do not want to be politicizing that either.

9.00 p.m.

The youth camps, Presto Praesto and Chatham, we finished a training today, Madam Speaker, with UTT, where these young men would have a UTT diploma. These are young men that may have caused issues in their community, they have an opportunity for two years to get a stipend to go and learn a trade. Now it is going to be a UTT diploma and they could go on and have a degree for the first time. Last year we had 85 per cent graduation, this year we had a record number of people applying to go into the programme.

Something that you are going to be seeing new for the first time as well and it is a no brainer, naming rights for facilities. Trying to politicize and naming facilities after athletics is nice, it is fine, but it does not bring any revenue. The Sports Company right now is finalizing with some major players so we could be making, as the Opposition said just now, a “cacadah” to assist us with maintaining these facilities, Madam Speaker. So, you are going to be seeing some changes with regard to that.

I have always said, Madam Speaker, that, and it is something as part of our manifesto and now policy with regard to database and analysing of information. I do not think politicians, to be quite frank, should be making any decisions. I think data, properly analysed data, and information should be making the decisions for us. And for the first time the Ministry of Sport

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and Youth Affairs, and I know a number of other Ministers are working in their Ministries to set up a database analysis team. I am almost finished and we are going to be launching something that is going to blow the people of Trinidad and Tobago minds in the next few months, where you could just click and see where all our facilities are: 3D videos, the capacity, everything in terms of days opening and so on. [*Desk thumping*] There is a reason for that because we are already getting calls from universities, clubs, from across the world, to rent the Aquatic Centre, to come here during the winter to play tennis.

Hon. Members: Aaaaah!

Hon. D. Smith: Yeah! Roger Boynes, I thank you. Roger Boynes, I thank you for that vision. Thank you. [*Desk thumping*] I thought the Member for Chaguanas West was by the dentist how he shout out “ah” so. It is we. Stop, you are still spinning the wheel. It is a process. “The guillotine doh cut. I want you to deal with meh.” When you were the Minister of water resources when I was the Chairman of Diego Martin Regional Corporation, you never helped me in the rivers. We had to go—me personally, Madam Speaker, I had to go in and clean the rivers by myself. Calling him, calling him, no answers. I want him to come and deal with me. Diego Martin has not flooded not because of him, because of the Minister of Works and Transport, the Member for Laventille West, and from the hard work of the people of Diego Martin. [*Desk thumping*] I am here when you are ready.

Mahaica Oval: five years Mahaica Oval stand up there, they did absolutely nothing. Point Fortin—Minister of National Security, you are getting your oval next year in Mahaica. [*Desk thumping*] The hockey field. I

am happy to tell the hockey population that they are going to be getting a new turf. Member of Parliament for Tunapuna, your people are going to get their new turf up there next year. So things are happening. The Brian Lara field in Santa Cruz, people forget there is a field in Santa Cruz. The Minister of Community Development, Culture and the Arts, the Member of Parliament for that area is pleased that we are going to open that in a few weeks. It is not me, it is not my own, and I will invite all the members of the Opposition to come because it is the people of that area who will enjoy it and play and participate.

In terms of legislation agenda, and again this is something the Member for Princes Town keep coming. He sent a question for “meh” partner, the Member for San Fernando East, with regard to the sports commission. For the final time the sports commission is not a building. It is nothing to build. I do not know how many times I will tell you. What language I will tell him that. “He asked me, ah tell him that. He come and ask the Ministry of Housing; you will deal with him when dem questions come.” The Sports Company’s original plan was to morph into a sports commission, where policy—and it will branch out to different little pockets to deal with overall sports. Right now it is duplication with the Sports Company and the Ministry. We have to fix that. Right? So that is going to happen. You are going to see that legislation coming. [*Interruption*]

Hon. Member: Repeat it just in case he did not hear.

Hon. D. Smith: Nah, let him come with the question. Boxing: there is a boxing board from 1930-something. A young man, rest in peace, died in the ring and they came with legislation with regard to a boxing board. That is

archaic. There are so many sports. I know the AG is one of those cuff fighters and so on with karate. The sambo—there are a number of other sports that you could get damaged, we are going to change that to a combat sports Act. Look out for that. And, of course, we are going to be pushing the anti-doping Act next year as well.

Madam Speaker, I could go on and on, but I am watching the time. I cannot stand up here—[*Interruption*—talk? “I hah to big up meh Diego Central though.”

Madam Speaker: Members, I know it is late, but please just behave and—
[*Interruption*]

Hon. D. Smith: Madam Speaker, I have to talk about Diego Martin Central because my colleagues here have done a lot of work for the people of Diego Martin Central, and I cannot come here and not thank them and let the people of Diego Martin Central know what was done and what we plan to do in the next year. Well I spoke about the Diego Martin sport facility. That sport facility is in the middle of Diego Martin. It borders the Member for Diego Martin West, the Member for Diego Martin North/East, and it is going to be finally done. That sat down there for five years under the last Government, but you do not hear us complaining. We will get it done. It is in the north-east, he always takes claim, but it is across the road from central, right. I used to play there as a young man and it will help the Bagatelle area, the Patna area. The entire Diego Martin area will benefit from that.

I want to thank—you will hear the Member for Mayaro trying to badger the best Minister of Agriculture. He is the best Minister of

Agriculture. [*Desk thumping*] The man came in the first week and started a project in Cocorite. We have been asking for how much years to do the jetty in Cocorite. Finally it is going to be done. We spoke about the refurbishment of the pool in Diego Martin already.

The distribution of homes. The former Minister of Housing came in there, those houses sat down there for so long. They changed the colour, they changed the tiles, they changed the countertops, all kind of things. People crying, begging for housing in Trinidad. All of us, that is the number one request as an MP, and they just lay-lay on that for so long. The MPs came in, the Ministers came in and they distributed in Chaconia, 130 units, and I am thankful for that. What is to come in this year? The Minister of Housing has said Victoria Keys will be given out this year, 234 units. Vieux Fort. People forget about Vieux Fort. That is the border of the Member for Port of Spain and myself, in Bournes Road. That is going to be given out as well this year, 130 units.

I am thankful for the Member of Parliament for St. Joseph, that finally the Minister of Health is going to be building a health centre in Diego Martin Central, and I want to thank you for that. That is going to be made in Diamond Vale between the pool and tennis court. So look out for that next year.

The Member for D'Abadie/O'Meara, the Minister of Public Utilities, started work with extension of sewer lines in Morne Coco Road—and listen to this—a 500,000 gallon service reservoir for Four Roads. Minister, I thank you and the people of Diego Martin Central thank you. [*Desk thumping*]

The Member of Parliament for Laventille West, the Minister of Works

and Transport—you all talk and boast about the highway in Diego Martin. It is Ken Valley who designed and came with that, but we do not come and boast and talk that. But all “yuh” finish it “nah”, it was supposed to have a walkover. “All yuh ain’t do the walkover.” Six people dead by the walkover. The Minister of Works and Transport is going to build a walkover for us in Four Roads that will save many lives and I thank him for that. [*Desk thumping*]

Local government: you have local government election and I could close my eyes, and all “yuh” “doh” even bother to send people down in Diego Martin to run. Do not even bother. Three years no flooding, never heard off, without the help the Member for Chaguanas West when he was in charge of that weird Ministry water resources. I do not know what they were doing inside of there. No major garbage issues. Projects in Ravine Road, laying of pipes. Right now in Ravine Road, WASA is working with us to lay pipes for first time. Petit Valley, Providence Estate: box drains, culverts, retaining walls. In Ross Lands, the basketball court, they are doing work up there. Morne Coco, Alyce Glen, Pioneer: box drains, roads being paved, millions of dollars being spent in Diego Martin Central and I thank the Diego Martin Regional Corporation for that.

And as the Member of Parliament for Diego Martin Central, I have been doing a number of initiatives to help the young people, the elderly, the disabled. A couple of the projects that we have done is, we have hosted for the first time a talent show where a number of young people from the area were able to come and showcase their talent in the hotspots. We had a summer and Easter camp for kids that was free. We had education tours,

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Madam Speaker. Just imagine, for the first time we took a number of kids to see the opera. I am sure people in here never see the opera. Those young people cry. Who see the opera in here?

Mr. Karim: Who say so?

Hon. D. Smith: Member for Mayaro never see the opera.

Mr. Paray: Yeah, I saw the opera.

Hon. D. Smith: You see the operas. You sure? Okay. They cry. Thirteen-year-olds, seven-year-olds, Madam Speaker, when they heard the voices, fantastic, in Queen's Hall, they had a time. You all need to start to do that in your constituency. If you all need the Ministry—Madam Speaker, if they need to use the Ministry of Sport and Youth Affairs van, call me. The Member for Oropouche West, you all call me for balls, bats, anything. I am here to work with you all. It is one love. It is a team. This I, I, I thing have to stop. [*Desk thumping*] It is we. So call me anytime, I am there to work with you all for the young people, right.

We took the young people down Sangre Grande to see leatherback turtles, and I hear the Leader of the Opposition talking about this Cazabon art show. Let me tell you all something. We took two maxis full of young people to see those art work, and if none of you all have seen it you all should see it because they have a number of paintings in and from your constituency. I took those young people. They were able to see Carenage, they were able to see Diego Martin, they see things in Mayaro, they see things in Pointe-a-Pierre. Take the young people. It is not about the Prime Minister. It is education. It is our own. It is art and culture. A society cannot survive without art and culture. That is our identity. [*Desk thumping*] Take

some pride.

We did back to school drive where we bought books and bags for a number of students. We also bought sneakers and so on for them. We brought the Trinidad and Tobago national team of the blind cricketers to play. For the first time—and again I am offering this to all the MPs, even on the other side—young people in Diego Martin Central got to experience the game of baseball. I do not know if you all know, the top 100 athletes that are paid in the world, 50 of them play baseball and a number of them come from right here in the Caribbean. The coach was here and he saw a number of talent in the first day that he could see getting scholarships. Take advantage of it. Open up the minds of the young people in your area so that they could see and experience new things. They are starving for the attention, they are starving for an avenue and a canvas to express themselves. Baseball could be one of those things.

Finally, Madam Speaker, with all these things that we are doing in Diego Martin, I have to give kudos to the Minister of National Security. Today I got some statistics from West End Police Station and they said the same period last year, serious crimes in my area was at 176; for the same period this year it has dropped to 127. So Minister of National Security, I thank you for the work that you have been doing in Diego Martin. These programmes, along with the police, we always work with them, it is working and we continue to do that.

So, Madam Speaker, in closing, it has been a good experience in my first year as a Member of Parliament and as a Minister, and I am thankful for my colleagues. I am thankful for the staff at the Parliament for all the help.

we are going into, again, another year. Difficult time but we will make it work. We are not going to have the mismanagement; we are not going to have the leakage. We will make the best bang for our buck for the people of Trinidad and Tobago and, again, at the end of this contribution I am really hoping that the Opposition and the Government could work together, wait for us to make some mistakes. Do not try and spin things because I am telling you, you will be there for a long while.

Thank you. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Barry Padarath (*Princes Town*): Madam Speaker, let me first take the opportunity to congratulate the Leader of the Opposition and the Member for Siparia for an outstanding and exceptional [*Desk thumping*] responsive budget contribution. Madam Speaker, you would have recalled that the Leader of the Opposition and Member for Siparia had indicated, prior to her response, that we intended on being the voice of the people of Trinidad and Tobago in response to this budget presentation. I noticed a short while ago a former Independent Senator took to social media and said “If we thought Hilary pounded Trump, well my God look at what Kamla has done to this Government today”. [*Desk thumping*]

I listened to the contribution of the Member for Diego Martin Central, and several things that he indicated in his contribution made me wonder whether or not he was really living in Trinidad and Tobago. He spoke about taking children to the opera, having the opportunity to expose them to new and different things, and that we on this side should do a similar exercise. The best Ramleela and theatre you will find is in Chaguanas West; [*Desk thumping*] the best Ramleela you will find is in Naparima; the best

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Ramleelayou will find is in Couva South, Mayaro, Couva North, Fyzabad, but do you know what?

Mr. Al-Rawi: In Palmiste.

Mr. B. Padarath: Yes, my friend the Member for San Fernando West, in your constituency of Palmiste. But, Madam Speaker, up to today there are several Ramleela organisations in this country. While they beat their chest proudly about sending children to see the opera, right here, something that is part of our own culture, that has come down from centuries, brought all the way from our ancestors in India, that they are trying to starve these organisations who are trying to promote culture right here in Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*]

9.15 p.m.

Madam Speaker, I heard the hon. Minister speak about nine Ministers in the Ministry of Sport and Youth Affairs. But each of those Ministers, you know what they have against their names? Delivery, delivery, delivery, [*Desk thumping*] delivery, delivery, delivery, delivery, delivery. Madam Speaker, I heard my friend speak about being new to Government and that he realized that on this side, we had not much to show after being in office. But you know, the irony is he is saying that we have not much to show after being there for five years when they, after being in office for one year, had to use several of our achievements in sport and youth affairs to publish [*Desk thumping*] to beat their chest to give the impression to the population that they had achieved something.

Madam Speaker, you know I really did not want to go there, but my friend from Diego Martin Central [*Interruption*] spoke about employees

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[*Laughter*] from the Ministry wearing the uniform—[*Interruption*]

Madam Speaker: Members, I know it is late, I would like to just remind Members for those who may be a bit uncomfortable that dinner is being served and you are entitled to filter out, but Members who remain, I would like them to conduct themselves in a fit and proper manner. Please continue, Member for Princes Town.

Mr. B. Padarath: Thank you, Madam Speaker. You know I heard the Member for Diego Martin Central and Minister of Sport and Youth Affairs indicate that there was a point in time that employees of that Ministry were ashamed to wear the uniform, and he tried to insinuate that it was because of the lack of performance from former Ministers under the Partnership administration. You know I think that is rather unfortunate coming from a man who holds the portfolio of sport and youth affairs and does not even know the name of the Chief Justice of this country and publicly called the Chief Justice “Ivey Archie”—[*Interruption*]

Madam Speaker: Member, Member, I would not allow that. I would not allow that. I would ask you to withdraw that and continue.

Mr. B. Padarath: Madam Speaker, I withdraw the comment and I move on. During the budget presentation delivered by the Minister of Finance last week Friday, the national community sat anticipating measures that would:

- 1) Better the quality and standard of life of the people in Trinidad and Tobago;
- 2) Assist the poor and the vulnerable in society;
- 3) Create avenues for new revenue streams for the nation;
- 4) Explain how they intended on creating more sustainable jobs;

and

- 5) Create a master plan that would chart the course for the nation during the challenging economic times.

Madam Speaker, the anticipation and the final result reminded me of Samuel Beckett play “Waiting for Godot”. We waited and we waited and we waited and none of these measures outlined ever came. It was a lot of sound, fuss, fury, reminiscent of last year’s budget presentation. Now, what did members of the national community have to say? What was the feedback from members of the national community?

I would like to share with you some of the comments made by persons in the banking sector, persons from the energy sector, persons from the Chambers of Commerce and persons from civil society on the budget presentation 2017. First, let us take the comments of Mr. Brian Manning who sat on the CNC post-budget panel. Mr Manning, the son of the former Prime Minister, Member for San Fernando East, now deceased, to me, had the best description of the budget presentation and the economic implications it had for our nation. Brian was listed as a former investment banker and this is what he had to say. He said and I quote:

You cannot starve a nation during famine and drought and expect that to be a strategy for results.

Madam Speaker, the President of the Trinidad and Tobago Chamber of Commerce, Robert Trestrail, on the same panel discussion as Brian Manning, when asked about his thoughts on the 2017 budget presentation, had this to say and I quote:

The Government has made many of these promises before. They need

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to start being facilitators and not actors. The promises are promises, just that. We need to see action and implementation which has not happened in most cases.

Most people in Trinidad and Tobago share the view of Mr. Robert Trestrail. They share these sentiments that there has been no delivery on promises after promises after promises and we know now what PNM really stands for: Promises Never Materialize and People Never Matter. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker, economist Indera Sagewan-Alli has described this budget as a holding budget. It is vacuous and without any real tangible plan and the Leader of the Opposition today spent a significant amount of time illustrating from comments made from the budget presentation of 2016 and 2017, that this budget really has no real tangible plan for balancing the books and putting the country back on a path of growth. Indera Sagewan-Alli further stated that the Government was manipulating the figures with respect to expected revenues from oil and gas. She indicated that Government has intentionally set the budget at a \$48 barrel price for the \$53 billion budget so that they would have access to the Heritage and Stabilisation Fund. She said and I quote and she was referring to the Minister of Finance:

If he sets the price lower than this and a price comes in higher at his budgeted price, he cannot touch the Heritage and Stabilisation Fund, she said.

Madam Speaker, one of the many voices of civil society Hazel Browne—renowned Hazel Browne from the network of NGOs—has described this budget as an election budget. She, too, being a member of the

CNC3 post-budget panel shared her thoughts and this is what she had to say. She stated that the budget was meant to be a short-term measure to appease sections of the population while Government grappled to figure out what to do. Madam Speaker, I myself would describe this fiscal package for 2017 as disjointed. It is a slapdash approach to economics. It is as if few ideas and sound bites were thrown into the presentation to give the impression that the Government had a real sustainable development plan. Instead, what has happened is that the population has seen right through the smokescreens and the mirrors. They know that the Government has betrayed the people. [*Desk thumping*]

I turn to the issue of economic forecasting and the general financial outlook for Trinidad and Tobago. You know, the *Review of the Economy* was a very telling document and we were very grateful to have this as part of the package of documents presented to Members on both sides. But, Madam Speaker, it appeared as though that they thought that we would not have read these documents and I saw one Member—I believe it was Couva North—she made the comment that the devil is in the details. The *Review of the Economy*, prepared by the Minister of Finance for 2016, indicates that:

“...the Trinidad and Tobago economy is projected to contract for a third consecutive year, with a decline of 2.3 percent in real GDP in 2016, following smaller contractions of 0.6 percent in both 2014 and 2015. The weaker performance here in 2016 reflects lower real economic activity in both the Petroleum and Non-Petroleum sectors, with estimated contractions of 9.6 percent and 1.8 percent respectively.”

Madam Speaker, the document goes on to say which is most interesting and telling is:

“The loss of vigour in the Non-Petroleum sector...is largely due to the spillover effects from the contracting Petroleum sector. Sharp declines in Government’s current revenue in 2015 and 2016 is due to lower international oil and gas prices...”

You have heard from many others such a similar statement and it is no surprise, it is no secret that oil and gas prices are down.

Let me repeat that their own *Review of the Economy* prepared by the Minister of Finance finally admits the truth. They thought, as I said, no one would read these voluminous documents but the devil was in the details. The details is telling the truth that while the Minister of Finance, in his usual pappy show mood, would have this country believe that the Partnership is to blame for the current economic situation the country is in, we see that the external shocks of oil and gas prices upon which our economy is heavily predicated is the main driver for the contraction of our economy. The Member for Siparia has no control over international oil and gas prices and the *Review of the Economy 2016* tells an interesting tale. It exposes the Government’s betrayal of the people. It demonstrates that they have no plan and that they are intent on riding the wave and hoping that the prices of oil and gas go back. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker, *Focus Economics*, the Trinidad and Tobago outlook on September 13, 2016 in its publication stated that:

“Trinidad and Tobago...is suffering from multiple”—economic—
“woes. The depletion of natural gas and oil fields, combined with

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petrochemical sector plant closures, led to a sharp decline in output in the crucial energy sector in the first half of the year, according to the Central Bank. Together with the persisting low energy price environment, this caused a decline in revenues from fuels and therefore in fiscal revenues. This, in turn, resulted in government spending cuts in public infrastructure, which constrained growth in the non-energy sector. Moreover, as oil and gas revenues represent almost two-thirds of total export revenues, the current account is under pressure, and the substantially overvalued local currency is encouraging speculative capital outflows.”

Madam Speaker, from the following numbers, while the Partnership served as the Government of Trinidad and Tobago, you can see the strong and even hand that we ran this country with. This is the economic data between the period 2011—2015. Our population grew from 1.3 million in 2011 to 1.4 in 2015. The GDP per capita was consistent: 19,161; 19,314; 19,766, peaking in 2014 at 20,250. If you look at the inflation rate: 2011, 5.3; by 2015, we had taken inflation down to 1.5. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker, when we came into office with billions of debt racked up under the PNM-led administration to which the current Finance Minister and Prime Minister belonged, we did not complain. We did not run up and down the country crying, we got down to work and that is the continuum of Government. The Member for Oropouche East always tells me, he says that is part of the usual governance practice. There will be projects and there will be expenditure, but instead of trying to run the nation’s financial affairs with an even hand, an unknowing, unplanned,

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unaware of what to do in Government, they took the easy way out and sought to blame the Opposition who is now their predecessor.

Madam Speaker, the numbers do not lie. We ran this country from 2010—2015 in a way that—and you know, the Member for Siparia said that today when she spoke. She said you can see the hospitals, you can see the roads, you can see the bridges. But my friend from Diego Martin Central said take a new approach to politics. Well, wake up, wake up. The reality is that people in this country, they want to see what you have done with the \$60 billion that you have spent. [*Desk thumping*]

9.30 p.m.

Madam Speaker, let me turn to the area of deliverables. Madam Speaker, it is always very easy to make statements without substance. This Government has had a history of being consistently inconsistent. That is a trademark of theirs. But when we look at the promises contained in last year's budget by this Government with respect to policy and implementation, they obviously will get a failing grade.

You know, Madam Speaker, I saw on October 02, 2016, the *Trinidad Guardian* in its EY report, they did a fact-finding mission and I am so gratified that many of these media houses—you know, we see, especially in this US election cycle, a lot of fact-finding missions on what politicians say that you go back and you check to see whether or not it is true. Madam Speaker, in the report published in the *Guardian* on October 02nd, this is what it said; it demonstrated that 90 to 95 per cent of the fiscal measures announced in 2016 were not actioned.

Madam Speaker, let us examine some of these promises that they have

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not actioned after being in office for one year. You know, Madam Speaker, the young people have a particular language and part of that language transcends from whether it is Trinidad and Tobago to being a Caribbean culture to being international and I am seeing that there is a phrase that is called “light them up” being used across the board. Madam Speaker, light them up means, when translated, to expose untruths and to show up lies, inaccuracies, half-truths and innuendo. Well, Madam Speaker, I intend to light up this Government.

Here are the undeliverables, the half-truths and the falsehoods. Madam Speaker, mid-year review 2016, online shopping, which they have returned with again, not implemented, not delivered in 2016, no revenue brought in. Madam Speaker, maxi-taxis and taxis, reduction in taxes on maxi-taxis and taxis, not implemented. Alcohol, proposed unspecified increase in taxes and levies, not implemented. Oil and gas tax regime, proposed review of the regime to encourage production in marginal fields and areas of so-called stranded gas to encourage drilling and increase production of oil and gas, not implemented. Oil and gas tax regime, review of the supplemental petroleum tax on crude oil prices moderately higher than US \$50 per barrel, not implemented. Madam Speaker, VAT proposal to seriously consider reducing the statutory period of an acceptable delay in VAT refunds to three months, not implemented. Property tax, which again we hear about in 2017, enforce collection of property tax using old rates and levels as a starting point, not implemented. Agri-processing, and my friend from Mayaro spoke about so much of this. Again, every year in the budget they repeat, repeat, repeat the same promise. Agri-processing tax incentives,

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tax holiday and other incentives for agricultural processing industries, Madam Speaker, not implemented.

Madam Speaker, all the crocodile tears that they cried today about not being able to bridge the gap between revenue and expenditure has a lot to do with their own failings. They have failed to action anything substantial that they said would have brought in much needed revenue.

Madam Speaker, the Government, according to economist, again, Indera Sagewan-Alli, has adopted a haphazard approach when it comes to the fuel subsidy. They are aiming for sound bites that would appease the population to give them the feeling that everyone is contributing to the national burden. Madam Speaker, we shall return to discuss this in some more detail later on, with respect to the fuel subsidy, the new tax bracket, the tax on online shopping and the tax breaks for the yachting industry.

Madam Speaker, the Government has always had a problem with Maths and Arithmetic, as is evident today when the Leader of the Opposition spoke with having provided two figures, in terms of what really is the budget presentation for 2016/2017.

But Madam Speaker, let us continue to light them up. This is the reality of what has occurred. Without any concrete plans for revenue, the only plan the Government has revealed is punishing the population for their incompetence. We have not indicated that we are against the restructuring of the fuel subsidy. What we are saying is that every successive PNM Government has had only one actionable plan of revenue raising and that is tax, tax, tax, tax, tax [*Desk thumping*] and raise the price of fuel. Madam Speaker, what we are saying is that if you are speaking about doing this

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together, why is it that consistently the working class is feeling the biggest pinch?

Madam Speaker, I turn to the issue of youth and youth development. The PNM, on assuming office, indicated that their manifesto from the 2015 General Election would become Government policy. They have said that time and again. The Leader of Government Business has indicated it is. Madam Speaker, in that document several initiatives were outlined regarding youth development. Like the budget of last year, several promises were made.

Madam Speaker, this is what they said they will do and this is contained in their manifesto. They said that they will create a system where the intellectual property rights of our youth are developed and respected. Madam Speaker, not delivered, not implemented. Nothing has happened with this policy.

They said that they will encourage the private sector through fiscal incentives to increase its level of youth employment. Instead, what we have seen is more youths on the breadline, no policy coming forward with respect to youth employment, no answers being provided by the Minister of Sport and Youth Affairs in his contribution.

Madam Speaker, they said that they will 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 youth in diverse communities.

You know, Madam Speaker, I heard the Member for Diego Martin Central speak and he spoke about Diego Martin. He spoke about La

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Horquetta. He spoke about Tunapuna. But never once did I hear Princes Town. Never once did I hear about Naparima. Never once did I hear about Chaguanas West. [*Desk thumping*] Madam Speaker, it begs the question. The constituents that we represent, are they not people too? Are these young people not young citizens of Trinidad and Tobago? Madman Speaker, they said that they will devote special emphasis to the rehabilitation of young offenders, as well as a proper support system to assist in their reintegration into society.

Madam Speaker, you know, I recall the Member for San Fernando West coming to this House indicating that we needed to pass the Family and Children Division Bill and that it needed to happen within a specified time and big song and dance about what the Member for Princes Town supported and what he did not support, which turned out to be nothing but lies. If you check the report, the Member for Princes Town was not even at the Joint Select Committee that day when those issues were discussed. But, Madam Speaker, to today those pieces of legislation, that particular piece of legislation remains.

Mr. Deyalsingh: Madam Speaker, Standing Order 48(6) about lies, please.

Madam Speaker: Member, I will allow it because it was not imputed on any particular Member.

Mr. B. Padarath: Thank you, Madam Speaker. [*Desk thumping*] Madam Speaker—[*Interruption*]

Mr. Deyalsingh: Madam Speaker, he did say the Member for San Fernando West.

Mr. Charles: No! No!

Madam Speaker: Member for Naparima, I would like you to conduct yourself in a fit and proper manner and I would like when I am speaking nobody else speaks, please. Member for Princes Town, I have ruled that I would allow it. I would just ask you to be more temperate in your language, please.

Mr. B. Padarath: Thank you, Madam Speaker. In their manifesto they said that they would encourage youths to become leaders in their communities by exposing them to training in civic responsibility. They said that they would establish a youth leadership development institute that would provide training and interactive seminars on leadership. Madam Speaker, their manifesto said that they would highlight 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. Madam Speaker, once again this was not mentioned at all by the Member for Diego Central as part of the plans for the Ministry of Sport and Youth Affairs.

Madam Speaker, they said that they will 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 employment. Again, Madam Speaker, absolutely nothing has been done in this regard.

Madam Speaker, they said that they will encourage young people to be more politically-minded and provide opportunities and facilities for dialogue on youth issues. They said that they would create a forum for the youth arms of the national parties and independent young voices to debate and discuss issues. Again, Madam Speaker, one year later and absolutely

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nothing. They said that 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.

Madam Speaker, absolutely nothing has been done. We continue to light them up because nothing has been done in this regard. [*Desk thumping*] Not one of these items have been accomplished.

In their *Public Sector Investment Programme* of 2017 on page 106 under “Youth and Entrepreneurship” I see that the Government has allocated \$500,000 towards the youth leadership institute. I fear this is another mamaguy, another attempt once more to hoodwink the young people. Madam Speaker, next year we would be in the same position speaking about a youth leadership institution, since we are judging them from their past performance about lip service to the youth.

You know, Madam Speaker, sometimes I am actually surprised when you speak to Members opposite. It is amazing as though they do not share these documents with them. They do not read their PSIP or their social sector programmes because they do not even speak about it when they have the chance to tell the population what their plans are. But \$500,000 and I am almost certain, just like all the other measures they have mentioned, absolutely nothing will become of it. [*Desk thumping*].

Madam Speaker, the top five financially viable and sound companies in today's world are technology-based companies, Apple, Facebook, Samsung, Google and Twitter. Madam Speaker, in an increasingly competitive technologically-driven environment, ICT is very important, and

I was happy to hear the Member for La Horquetta/Talparo speak a bit about this.

Madam Speaker, I felt ashamed, embarrassed and mortified for the Minister of Finance when he spoke about information technology and broadband. Trinidad and Tobago, under a Kamla Persad-Bissessar administration had jumped 15 places. Let me repeat that, 15 places on the world economic forum index for the education sector becoming more technologically-driven. And Member for Caroni East, you had a very instrumental role in that, putting policy into action. Madam Speaker, 15 places of the world economic forum index, that allowed us to focus on empowering young people through technology, through our laptop initiative, so that they would be able to compete successfully in this ever-changing ICT environment.

Madam Speaker, the Minister of Education announced that Government would be providing 100 laptops for schools, but it will remain the property of the Ministry, not the student. Madam Speaker, they have acknowledged, even though they do not want to publicly, that the programme was a great initiative. However, their spite, their bitterness, their acrimony has led them to the betrayal of the people. [*Desk thumping*]

9.45 p.m.

Madam Speaker, the Minister of Finance announced unashamedly, that students would be allowed through a new programme, called “Bring Your Own Device”. You would recall the Leader of the Opposition has often said that inside the PNM, that is “ah big people party”, and that there are those whose children do not know what hardship is like. They do not know

what it is like to scramble to put “bhaji and roti” and butter and bake on the table.

Madam Speaker, these are the issues that affected the men, women and children of our society. Once more, they have moved the technology out of the hands of our children and out of the homes of our nation. The “big people party” and their boys and girls alone, would have the competitive advantage, because they can now bring their own laptops and smart devices to school. This programme “renks” of discrimination and the Government must be held accountable.

While we acknowledge that the leading companies globally are ICT-based companies, we must also prepare our workforce to adapt to these demands. Government, through the Minister of Finance has indicated in the Budget Statement, page 60, if you turn to the Budget Statement, under the heading Curriculum Reform, that an ICT Education Plan would be unveiled to spend the next five years. When the Partnership Government was there, it was already in place. We had already put that in place. What they are seeking to do is, dismantle the strides we made in the education sector.
[Desk thumping]

A few months ago, the nation awoke to a photograph on the front pages of our newspapers, with half the Cabinet on board a bus. I think all they were missing, Madam Speaker, were red noses and colourful wigs. Well, maybe, except for one or two. They were launching the island-wide north to south, east to west, broadband for free Internet across the country. I said to myself, “My God, is that broadband they were boasting about”? The smiles on their faces showed one of achievement, and after one year in

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office, they have put broadband on buses to run up and down Port of Spain to San Fernando, and then tell the country, free broadband for all. What a bunch of jokers. [*Desk thumping*] You know, the Member for Siparia spoke about the three J's: Julian, Jones, Juniper. Now, the fourth one she did mention was, the pack of jokers; collectively.

Madam Speaker, in the area of sport it is evident that this is by far the worst performance by a Minister in this portfolio. The Government has placed priority on the wrong projects and the wrong areas, which need attention and focus. First of all, the flagship projects of the Partnership administration in the area of sport is the National Aquatic Centre, the National Tennis Centre, the National Cycling Centre and the North-Eastern Multi-Purpose Facility in Grande. [*Desk thumping*] We take ownership of those facilities in terms of completing those projects.

I saw recently, the Rowley-led Government has listed these facilities as part of their achievement. That is untruth, and “bol’ face” misrepresentation, that they are peddling out there. [*Desk thumping*] These facilities were completed by the Partnership. When we left office they were—[*Interruption*] yes, you were so right Member for Diego Martin Central, you were left only to fill the pools and put the final coat of paint. [*Desk thumping*] No amount of PNM propaganda will influence the population to believe that these were achievements of the PNM.

Madam Speaker, we were a Government with a plan. When the People’s Partnership returns to Government shortly, we will capitalize on the sporting arenas that we constructed to invest in sport tourism. We were accepting when we departed office, proposals from international teams to

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utilize our national aquatic centre for training, for international meets. [*Desk thumping*] This in turn would have brought in revenue and created jobs in the local market. You know, the Member for Diego Martin Central spoke about young people, and he spoke about all these projects, but never once did he talk about job creation for the young people of Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*] That was the vision for the Member for Siparia.

Madam Speaker, the Tarouba stadium would have been transformed as part of the national sporting academy for Trinidad and Tobago. We intended on creating avenues through the national sporting complexes, to open new areas for sport for Trinidad and Tobago nationals, by investing in people through sport, it helps them to achieve their hopes and their goals to improve their lives.

The vision for sport in Trinidad and Tobago under a Partnership Government, required a major shift in culture. I would like to pay tribute to the Member for Caroni Central who put together a lot of our policies and ideas with respect to our manifesto. [*Desk thumping*] It was a comprehensive manifesto that dealt with creating jobs in every sector including the sporting sector. This was a Government, the Partnership Government with a vision and with a plan of realigning investments, evidenced-based decisions, to maximise impacts in the sporting industry.

We spoke about transforming the Tarouba facility into the Tarouba Sports Academy. This can support activities at the nearby aquatic centre, the Cycling Velodrome and the National Tennis Centre. It was all part of a comprehensive plan. Madam Speaker, Tobago was not left out, which could provide—UTT which could have provided academic input on the sports

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academy, they would be able to encourage our elite athletes to remain here, and be home grown while achieving similar benefits abroad.

Madam Speaker, you know, one athlete told me today, they said, “You know, in Jamaica there is a programme for elite athletes, but it started at the primary school level”. And we ask ourselves, “Why does Jamaica do so well at the Olympics”? That is because they see the youth as an investment and they start at the primary school level. [*Desk thumping*] They do not treat the youth as though it is burned on the population, but we continue to light them up. They have failed to action any plans they have indicated through their PSIP, through their budget statement, but we have put forward a plan with our manifesto, and I am certain as night follows day, the sun will rise again in this country and it will take a Partnership Government [*Desk thumping*] to implement many of these policies and programmes.

My friend from Pointe-a-Pierre posed a question on the Order Paper a few weeks ago. This Rowley-led Government promised a 20 per cent increase in OJT stipend, [*Interruption*] at a whopping \$62 million in the budget presentation of 2015—2016, that would take effect from December 01, 2015. This was actually in the budget presentation, the statement made by the Member for Diego Martin North/East. What did he say? The Member got up in his budget statement and he said, “from December 01st, 2015, OJTs stipends will be increased by 20 per cent”. Two weeks ago, unapologetically, the Prime Minister—[*Interruption*]

Mr. Deyalsingh: Madam Speaker, may I have a ruling on Standing Order 48(5), as to the use of the term “Rowley-led Government”, please?

Madam Speaker: Hon. Member, this is not a reference to a Member in terms of the particular Standing Order.

Mr. B. Padarath: Thank you, Madam Speaker. You see, no amount of distractions coming from that side, will change the fact that the Prime Minister stood in this House unapologetically and said, that while it was a measure of goodwill, what had he done? Absolutely nothing! They failed the young people of this country. [*Desk thumping*]

The Government has promised a Moruga Youth Facility in this year's budget. However, when you look at the documents, no allocation has been made, neither has it been mentioned in the PSIP. Another carrot to dangle before the horse, and in an election year, without any intention of delivering on it. [*Desk thumping*]

I would like the Government through their Minister or even the Prime Minister, when they speak, to advise and indicate whether it is true, because I am advised that the next cuts to come is in, OJT. They are looking at restructuring the programme next year to send home persons. This is a major concern of young people, Madam Speaker. There is word that 8,000 placements will be removed from the OJT Programme. On August 24, 2015, and I read from an article published in the *Express*, headline:

Rowley's flip flop on GATE, CDAP and OJT

Hon. Members: Who is the author/date?

Mr. B. Padarath: Ceola Belix, August 24, 2015. Madam Speaker, the People's National, it says:

The People's National Movement leader Dr. Keith Rowley is taking the Government to task—

He meant the Partnership Government:

—for stating that his party will cut several programmes which were created under previous PNM administrations.

It goes on to say that:

The PNM leader, Dr. Rowley is taking the Government to task for saying that his party will cut several programmes which include GATE, which includes OJT, which also includes CDAP.

We have seen that there is no medication in the hospitals. So we assume CDAP too, has been cut. We have seen the cuts to GATE, and we anticipate the cuts to OJT. The only sporting facility mentioned that is being constructed is currently at the Diego Martin Sports Centre. The PSIP indicates that they have allocated \$25 million on the project. I ask, you know, really, who are these projects to benefit? They speak about—and the Member for Diego Martin Central spoke about constituents and so on, but is it really not—and they will have to answer these questions, because these projects have been ongoing like many other of these sports facilities in this country, millions spent and no delivery.

Madam Speaker, PNM Chairman and Minister of Rural Development and Local Government, the hon. Franklin Khan, has stated at several local government consultations, which Government will be moving to put the resources for recreation grounds in the hands of the regional corporations, instead of the Sport Company. However, there has been no mention of this. There have been no plans. This has not materialized.

The Government is yet to explain its role, in hiring a chef de mission to the Rio Olympics, who has not cleared the air on a possible conflict of

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interest, signing on to ESPN to be a host and commentator, while he was supposed to be in charge of the Olympic team. Several athletes have publicly indicated that the lack of performance and cohesion from the team, was mainly because they lacked cohesion. The chef de mission who travelled to Rio with accommodation and so on, provided by the State, was also working for ESPN.

Madam Speaker: Member, your speaking time has expired. You are entitled to 10 more minutes. Do you wish to avail yourself?

Mr. B. Padarath: Yes.

Madam Speaker: You may proceed.

Mr. B. Padarath: Madam Speaker, at a time when the country has found itself in shambles because of an incompetent Government, they continue to place priorities on vanity projects, such as \$90 million on the Lara stadium, \$400 million on buildings, \$3 million in Cazabon paintings, \$2 million on Mercedes-Benz, and *Soca on The Seas* receiving an additional half a million. They have betrayed the people. They have taken bread and butter out of the mouths of thousands of people in this country, [*Desk thumping*] and exchanged it for paintings, Benz and stadiums.

Hon. Members: Stadia!

Mr. B. Padarath: Madam Speaker, today, our hospitals are without medicine. Our cancer patients cannot get relief of pain in their last days; many of them. They do not have the dignity of having a backup plan, for the unavailability of pipe borne water at the St. James Infirmary.

Madam Speaker, I have been receiving bills, quotations and prescriptions from cancer victims across the country, who cannot get

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medication in the national hospitals for the past six months. One of the most common injections for cancer victims is a drug called Zodiac. The hospitals have been without this drug for the past four months, and patients have been suffering, even dying. When you take the price of Zodiac of \$4,500 and you divide that into 90 million, you know how many doses of Zodiac you would have gotten? You would have gotten 200,000 doses of Zodiac in the nation's hospital, [*Desk thumping*] but what did they do? They spent the \$90 million instead on the Brian Lara Stadium.

10.00 p.m.

Madam Speaker, another drug for cancer patients that is unavailable is sandoglobulin which cost \$3,000 a vial. Madam Speaker, we could have gotten 30,000 vials of sandoglobulin if they had used the \$90 million on the stadium for cancer patients by purchasing this drug.

The hospitals are without cancer drugs known as palbociclib which cost \$3,000 per unit. Madam Speaker, we could have gotten 1,000 units of palbociclib for the \$3 million spent on the Cazabon paintings. Madam Speaker, two other drugs for cancer patients are cytarabine and kytril which are also not available right now in our hospitals. It goes for \$45 a unit. Madam Speaker, for the \$2 million we spent to take the back pain off the Prime Minister with the purchase of the Mercedes-Benz, for the two million we could have gotten 44,444 units of cytarabine and kytril.

Madam Speaker, I have spoken to a Trinidad and Tobago national who carries the name Johnny Gonsalves. Johnny started a petition on behalf of cancer patients and their families. He has thousands of names on that petition, and he has given me the permission to use his name in the

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Parliament today. Madam Speaker, Johnny and thousands of cancer victims are looking on today from their beds as we do this debate. They are hoping that by me raising their plight that they will be able to get some relief. [*Desk thumping*] Madam Speaker, I light them up again. You see, Madam Speaker, Johnny has stage four cancer and for the past few months he has made attempts to see the Minister of Health to which I have a copy of the letter right here and, Madam Speaker, he has not had the courtesy of a response even though there are many, many thousands of signatures on that petition. You see, Madam Speaker, Johnny needed to get gemcitabine for his treatment which cost TT \$5,000, and he needed a dose on a weekly basis. Today, Madam Speaker, Johnny could not get the medication right here in Trinidad and Tobago.

Madam Speaker, when you look at it across the Ministries, the Government has spent \$216 million, on what? Cocktail parties, publicity, promotion, overseas travel and entertainment. When you add up all, it comes up to about \$216 million in this year's budget spanning all Ministries and boards. That \$216 million could have bought 43,200 doses of gemcitabine, which could have been purchased for persons like Johnny Gonsalves in this country.

Madam Speaker, in the PSIP of 2016/2017, the Government on page 106 has allocated \$35 million to build and refurbish community centres. There is no indication of where these centres will be built. Again, Madam Speaker, we have no trust and faith that this will happen. This is their usual modus operandi.

It appears that schools in Naparima, in Princes Town, in Siparia like

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Parvati Girls' and Shiva Boys', the Ramleela Centre, have no mention in this budget. It is as though these constituencies have absolutely no say in the governance of Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*] You see, Madam Speaker, after one year in office, what was their achievement? It was not developing local art forms and institutions. Instead, their legacy lies in *Soca on the Seas* and Cazabon paintings.

Madam Speaker, I am reliably advised that there are Members of the Cabinet who have viewed paintings, additional paintings, to be purchased to add to the Cazabon collection in this country. I ask the hon. Prime Minister to categorically deny that he was one of those Members who went viewing for them to buy additional paintings to add to the Cazabon collection.

Madam Speaker, you know Machel Montano and Angela Hunte have a song called "Party Done". Madam Speaker, party done, because apparently there is no mention of the Carnival industry in the entire budget. [*Desk thumping*] There is no mention of it in the PSIP. [*Desk thumping*] Stakeholders in the Carnival industry will tell you that last year's Carnival under the PNM—this year's Carnival, sorry under the PNM, was the worst Carnival in over a decade. [*Desk thumping*] Madam Speaker, there has been no avenues in terms of incentives. There has been no discussion in terms of how they plan on creating this industry to add additional jobs, what they can do to increase tourist arrivals through Carnival. Absolutely nothing in this regard.

Madam Speaker, as I wrap up, I saw one commentator recently commenting on the Prime Minister's book *From Mason Hall to White Hall*. Madam Speaker, the commentator indicated that it appeared that people

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were more interested in Trinidad and Tobago in the Prime Minister's departure from White Hall than his arrival and, therefore, it may do him well, it may do him some good to start authoring his exit because the entry and stay into White Hall has been nothing short of disgraceful, conduct unbecoming of a Prime Minister, poor performance and simply without a plan.

Madam Speaker: Excuse me.

Mr. Deyalsingh: Standing Order 48(6), Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker: I am on my legs. Member, Member for Princes Town, I would ask you to withdraw that. There is no basis for that at all.

Mr. B. Padarath: Madam Speaker, I abide by your ruling, I withdraw, but these were not my comments. These were the comments of one—
[*Interruption*]

Madam Speaker: Member once you quote the comments, you adopt them as yours.

Mr. B. Padarath: Madam Speaker, it is my hope that as we move towards one of the most auspicious times in our nation that very soon the light and the grace returns to the corridors and power in the person of the Member for Siparia.

Madam Speaker, our mantra has been “serve the people, serve the people, serve the people”. Madam Speaker, you know, I sit in this Parliament as a Member having been elected by over 15,000 members [*Desk thumping*] and I continue to hear that they try to throw derogatory comments and remarks at me. But, Madam Speaker, do you know what? [*Crosstalk*] Today I have said, time and time again, I will stand inside and outside of this

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Parliament and I will not be silent unjustifiably [*Desk thumping*] in representing the voice of the people of Trinidad and Tobago. So, Madam Speaker, when they want to talk about jacket, hello, I know I look good, you know. I know I look good. [*Desk thumping*]

You know, Madam Speaker, my friend, the Member for Diego Martin Central spoke about sponge and absorbing, and I thought that he was speaking about SpongeBob SquarePants, but you see we on this side have panache, we have class [*Desk thumping*] in the way we do things [*Desk thumping*] and we have learnt that from the Member for Siparia.

So, Madam Speaker, during this auspicious time, Hindus are observing a period called Navratri where they worship the female aspect of God. And, Madam Speaker, the Member for Siparia is like the Shakti in this country, and she will continue to be the guiding grace. During this time, Madam Speaker, we pray that good governance and good representation will return to Trinidad and Tobago through the Member of Siparia. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker: Member, your speaking time has expired. Leader of the House.

ADJOURNMENT

The Minister of Planning and Development (Hon. Camille Robinson-Regis): Thank you very much, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker: Members, Members, I know it is late. Leader of the House.

Hon. C. Robinson-Regis: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, I beg to move that this House do now adjourn to Friday the 7th of

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Sept—what are we in?—October. I am so confused by the panache and so on, sorry. [*Crosstalk*] Yeah, I was lit up. Sorry, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker, I beg to move that this House do now adjourn to Friday, October 7th at 10.00 a.m. at which time we will continue the budget debate. [*Desk thumping*]

Question put and agreed to.

House adjourned accordingly.

Adjourned at 10.09 p.m.