

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Wednesday, January 18, 2017

The House met at 2.30 p.m.

PRAYERS

[MADAM SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

**PAPERS LAID**

1. Response of the Service Commissions Department to the First Report of the Public Administration and Appropriations Committee on an Examination into the Current Expenditure of Ministries and Departments under three (3) Sub-Heads: Current Transfers and Subsidies, Development Programme—Consolidated Fund and Infrastructure Development Fund. [*The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Esmond Forde)*]
2. Response of the Integrity Commission to the First Report of the Public Administration and Appropriations Committee on an Examination into the Current Expenditure of Ministries and Departments under three (3) Sub-Heads: Current Transfers and Subsidies, Development Programme—Consolidated Fund and Infrastructure Development Fund. [*Mr. E. Forde*]
3. Response of the Environmental Commission to the First Report of the Public Administration and Appropriations Committee on an Examination into the Current Expenditure of Ministries and Departments under three (3) Sub-Heads: Current Transfers and Subsidies, Development Programme—Consolidated Fund and Infrastructure Development Fund. [*Mr. E. Forde*]
4. Ministerial Response of the Ministry of Social Development and Family Services to the First Report of the Public Administration and Appropriations Committee on Examination into Current Expenditure—Consolidated Fund and Infrastructure Development Fund for the financial

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- year 2016. [*The Minister of Social Development and Family Services (Hon. Cherry-Ann Crichlow-Cockburn)*]
5. Ministerial Response of the Ministry of Rural Development and Local Government to the First Report of the Public Administration and Appropriations Committee on Examination into Current Expenditure—Consolidated Fund and Infrastructure Development Fund for the financial year 2016. [*The Minister of Rural Development and Local Government (Sen. The Hon. Kazim Hosein)*]
 6. Ministerial Response of the Ministry of Education to the First Report of the Public Administration and Appropriations Committee on Examination into the Current Expenditure of Ministries and Departments under three (3) Sub-Heads: Current Transfers and Subsidies, Development Programme—Consolidated Fund and Infrastructure Development Fund. [*The Minister of Education (Hon. Anthony Garcia)*]

STANDING FINANCE COMMITTEE REPORT (Presentation)

The Minister of Finance (Hon. Colm Imbert): Madam Speaker, I have the honour to present the following report:

First Report of the Standing Finance Committee of the House of Representatives for the Second Session (2016/2017), Eleventh Parliament on the consideration of proposals for the Variation of Appropriation for the fiscal year 2016.

URGENT QUESTIONS

**Infant Aidan Babotee
(Urgent Assistance for)**

Mr. David Lee (Point-a-Pierre): Madam Speaker, the Member for Oropouche West is delayed and I will ask the question on her behalf. To the Minister of

Health: In light of the medical condition of two-month-old Aidan Babotee who was born with bilateral congenital cataract and who is clinically blind, could the Minister indicate what urgent assistance can be granted to the toddler?

The Minister of Health (Hon. Terrence Deyalsingh): Madam Speaker, the case of two-month-old Aidan Babotee came to my attention via CNC3 news by Ria Rambally. On investigating it was discovered that this child was never in the public health system, was only being treated privately. The Ministry of Health and the Minister of Health personally enquired as to whether the operation to remove the cataracts could be done safely and expertly in the public health care system, and the answer was an unequivocal yes. That was communicated to the parents. The parents in their wisdom and their choice have decided that they only want their child treated in the private health care system. That is the parents' decision, and if the parents wish to have it financed by themselves or by members of the public, the public health system cannot intervene with the parents' choice. But we stand ready to perform the surgeries safely and effectively, at no cost to the parents, in the public health system. Thank you very much.

Madam Speaker: Member for Caroni East. [*Interruption*]

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: Madam Speaker, the Minister of National Security is on his way. Can I ask for this question to be asked later down in the list of questions, please?

Madam Speaker: Leader of the House, do you have an idea when he would be here—[*Minister Dillon enters Chamber*]

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: He is here now.

Madam Speaker: In the interest of time then could we just ask Member for Caroni East to ask question No. 3.

**2017 Chutney Monarch Competition
(Steps to Address Collapse of)**

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Dr. Tim Gopeesingh (*Caroni East*): Madam Speaker, to the Minister of Community Development, Culture and the Arts: In light of the imminent collapse of the 2017 Chutney Soca Monarch Competition, could the Minister please indicate what steps the Government intends to take to urgently address this matter?

The Minister of Community Development, Culture and the Arts (Hon. Dr. Nyan Gadsby-Dolly): Thank you, Madam Speaker. We have no indication that there is any imminent collapse of the Chutney Soca Monarch Competition at this time.

Dr. Gopeesingh: When will we know of the imminent collapse? When will you know?

Madam Speaker: We revert now to question No. 2.

**Murdered Schoolgirl
(Measures to Ensure Safety of Children Travelling)**

Dr. Tim Gopeesingh (*Caroni East*): Madam Speaker, in light of the recent murder of schoolgirl Rachael Ramkissoon in San Raphael last Friday, could the hon. Minister of National Security please state what steps and measures would be taken to ensure the safety of children, the thousands, who are transported to school from rural areas of the country?

The Minister of National Security (Hon. Maj. Gen. Edmund Dillon): Thank you, Madam Speaker. The Ministry of National Security, working together with the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Works and Transport, are doing a coordinate approach to ensure the safety and security of students within the rural areas and throughout Trinidad and Tobago.

Dr. Gopeesingh: Minister, could you be kind enough to elaborate some measures that ought to be taken to ensure the safety of our young children being transported publicly and by the school buses, if you can.

Madam Speaker: Member, I believe that was the original question asked, and it

has been answered. Do you have another supplemental question?

Dr. Gopeesingh: No, I just wanted to know the measures.

**Chaguanas District Health Centre
(Long Waiting Period for Services)**

Mr. Fazal Karim (*Chaguanas East*): Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. To the Minister of Health: Could the Minister indicate how he intends to address the growing demands for medical services resulting in extremely long waiting periods at the Chaguanas District Health Facility.

The Minister of Health (Hon. Terrence Deyalsingh): Madam Speaker, the Ministry acknowledges that there are extremely long waiting times for medical services, and we are engaging in both short-term and long-term measures. In the short-term the Regional Health Authority has engaged in some time motions studies to enhance turnaround time. We are doing in the short-term. We are also looking at the staffing requirements.

In the meantime, Madam Speaker, residents of Chaguanas, depending on the part that they live in, can access services at the St. Joseph Health Centre which is no more than five or 10 minutes away on the highway or at the Couva Health Centre, no more than five, 10 or 15 minutes away. But in the long-term, we have identified the land for the building of a new health facility, as your administration had put on the table. The design is completed, but there is a revised quote, because I answered a question to this for the Member for Barataria/San Juan.

We are doing a redesign scope. That redesign scope goes to Cabinet by February and then we will retender the project to give the people of Chaguanas an excellent health facility. Thank you very much.

Mr. Karim: Madam Speaker, to the Minister of Health. I suspect the lands you are talking about are in the Connector Road, which connects Chaguanas to Charlieville. Could you indicate as an outer limit, for the expectation of those who

are listening to the answer, by when you think as an outer limit that construction might start?

Hon. T. Deyalsingh: At this time I am unable to commit the Government to a time limit. But I do commit the Government to seeking to have this matter dealt with expeditiously for the people of Chaguanas.

ORAL ANSWER TO QUESTION

- 38. Miss Ramona Ramdial** (*Couva North*) asked the hon. Minister of Tourism: Could the Minister provide:
- a) the figures for international air arrivals in Tobago from July to December 2016; and
 - b) a comparison of these figures for the same period last year?

The Minister of Tourism (Hon. Shamfa Cudjoe): Madam Speaker, the total number of international arrivals to Tobago from July to November 2016, is 6,708. The December 2016 total is not available as yet. That is part (a). Part (b), for the same period last year, July to November 2015, the total of international air arrivals in Tobago was 6,447. The total for December last year was 1,701.

FINANCE (VARIATION OF APPROPRIATION) (FINANCIAL YEAR 2016) BILL, 2017

Bill to vary the appropriation of the sum the issue of which was authorised by the Appropriation (Financial Year 2016) Act, 2015 and varied by the Finance (Variation of Appropriation) (Financial Year 2016) Act, 2016 [*The Minister of Finance*]; read the first time.

Motion made: That the next stage be taken later in the proceedings. [*Hon. C. Imbert*]

Question put and agreed to.

STANDING FINANCE COMMITTEE REPORT (ADOPTION)

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The Minister of Finance (Hon. Colm Imbert): I beg to move the following Motion standing in my name:

Be it resolved that this House adopt the First Report of the Standing Finance Committee of the House of Representatives for the Second Session (2016/2017), Eleventh Parliament on the consideration of proposals for the Variation of Appropriation for the fiscal year 2016.

Madam Speaker, the Standing Finance Committee of the House of Representatives met on Friday, January 13, 2017, and agreed to a variation of the 2016 appropriation and also noted the transfer of funds between sub-heads for fiscal year 2016.

The variation of appropriation in the sum of \$491,278,723, was necessary on the following basis: Firstly, to bring to account expenditure amounting to \$370,497,277, funded by an advance from the Treasury Deposits in fiscal 2016 and, secondly, to realign the provisions in the aggregate sum of \$120,781,446, in the fiscal accounts, to facilitate the reassignment of responsibility to the Minister of Public Administration and Communications.

The Standing Finance Committee also noted the transfer of funds between sub-heads in the sum of \$1,019,704,671 or \$1,019,704,671, for fiscal 2016.

The increase in the Heads of Expenditure which is the subject of the matter before the House is \$491,278,723 and the decrease is an equivalent amount, the exact same amount, of \$491,278,723. This produces a nil effect.

The approval for the reallocation—[*Interruption*] Yes, a nil effect. The approval for the reallocation of funds is currently being sought by way of the Finance (Variation of Appropriation) (Financial Year 2016) Bill, 2017.

The details of these changes were circulated to all Members and discussed at the meeting of the committee on Friday, January 13th, where clarification was

sought with respect to some of the proposed changes to the appropriation. During the course of this debate, the proposal contained with the Bill will be addressed, as required, by the line Ministers involved—as required.

Although previously stated, please allow me to elaborate further to this House on the two main reasons for the additional funding of \$491,278,723. The first is Head 78, Ministry of Social Development and Family Services, whereby an increase of \$370,497,277 is being sought to retire an advance from the Treasury Deposits to reimburse the Central Bank of Trinidad and Tobago for the encashment of cheques in respect of senior citizens' pension and public assistance and disability grants. Just a digress—Treasury Deposits are used to provide temporary advances for urgent, pressing matters and as we close the accounts for the fiscal year, as we are doing today, you have to bring these temporary advances to book and retire them.

In accordance with section 17(1)(b) of the Exchequer and Audit Act, advances made from Treasury Deposits are recoverable within 12 months after the close of the financial year in which the advances are made. That is just for information.

The second issue is an amount of \$120,781,446, required to realign the provisions in the fiscal accounts in accordance with the new assignment of responsibility to the Minister of Public Administration and Communications, and the restructuring of that Ministry, as stated in the *Gazette* No. 35, dated March 17, 2016.

Madam Speaker, it should be noted that the increase under Head 31, the said \$120,781,446, is compensated for by a decrease of equal value under Head 70, Ministry of Communications, because that Ministry no longer existed after March

17th, and a new Ministry was formed.

At this stage I would like to address the Head of Expenditure, the first one, where there is a reduction in the sum of \$370,497,277, to cater for the advance to the Ministry of Social Development and Family Services. This is Head 40 whereby the appropriation for the Ministry of Energy and Energy Industries was reduced by \$370,497,277. Following a final review of the 2016 accounts, savings were identified by the Ministry of Energy and Energy Industries under the item “Shortfall in subsidy, sale of petroleum products”, primarily because of the decline in oil prices and its ensuing impact in subsidy claims for marketing and distribution companies. In other words, the price of oil was less than anticipated for the fiscal year and, therefore, the price of petroleum products was less and, therefore, the subsidy requirement was less, resulted in the saving.

The other Head, Head 78, which is benefiting from the savings under the fuel subsidy, Ministry of Social Development and Family Services, required the increase of \$370,497,277, in order to provide for or bring to account additional expenditure incurred from the payment of senior citizens’ pensions, as well as public and disability assistance grants. In part due to a greater number of persons accessing the programme, due to an increase in the statutory limit to qualify for senior citizens’ pensions from \$3,500 to \$4,500. This is an innovation of this administration.

Speaking now to the transfer of funds. In August 1988, Cabinet delegated its authority to approve transfers between sub-heads under the same Head of Expenditure to the Minister of Finance. The actual Cabinet decision included the following extract: request for transfer of funds between separate sub-heads under the same Head of Expenditure, should no longer be submitted for the Cabinet, but

can be decided by the Minister of Finance on the advice of the Budget Division. So this has been a practice in Trinidad and Tobago, successive governments, starting with the NAR Government in 1988, then through to the PNM, UNC, PNM, PP, back to PNM, where the Minister of Finance was given the authority to approve transfers within Ministries between sub-heads, from one sub-head to another. So Cabinet approval was no longer required from 1988 to do this.

So in fiscal 2016, the Minister of Finance approved the transfer of funds in the sum of \$1,019,704,671, between sub-heads. These transfers were approved by the Minister based on notes and justification from the various Ministries requesting the transfer, as has been the practice now for the last 20-odd years.

The transfers were requested to reflect changed circumstances in Ministries and Departments and reordering of priorities. They do not increase the appropriation in any way. When a Minister requests approval for a transfer or virement, the Minister must demonstrate that they can achieve savings in one sub-head to transfer to another sub-head. It does not increase their complete or total appropriation. Statements showing the transfers approved by the Minister of Finance with explanations, were attached to the agenda which was provided to hon. Members of this House at the committee meeting.

Let me now give some further information. At the time of the presentation of the 2016 Budget, not the current one, the last one, in October 2015, oil revenue was based on an oil price of US \$45 per barrel West Texas Intermediate, and a gas netback price of US \$2.75 per MMBtu. Based on these assumptions and other assumptions, the revenue projected for fiscal 2016 originally was \$60.286 million. The forecast for expenditure was \$63.049 million—this is thousands sorry—\$60,286 million was the revenue, \$60.3 billion, and the forecast for expenditure

was \$63.049 billion, resulting at that time in a projected deficit of \$2.8 billion for fiscal 2016, the last year.

In September 2016, at the time of the presentation of the most recent budget, the 2017 Budget, revised estimates for 2016 were included in the draft estimates for 2017. The revised revenue was projected at \$44.94 billion, as compared to \$60.29 billion, and revised expenditure was projected to be \$52.2 billion as compared to \$63.049 billion, at September/October 2015. I want to underscore this point.

I have heard hon. Members opposite, I do not know why they keep saying this, and I would hope at some point in time it would come to an end—the expenditure for fiscal 2016 was not \$60 billion. It was \$52.23 billion. This has been stated in this House on enumerable occasions, yet hon. Members opposite continue to speak about a \$60 billion expenditure in fiscal 2016. Let me repeat, the revised expenditure for fiscal 2016 was \$52.2 billion, and the revenue was projected at \$44.94 billion, which would have projected a deficit of \$7.3 billion.

This revised position was laid in Parliament at the time of the delivery of the 2017 budget in September 2016, three months ago. All of the data for 2016 is not yet finalized, however, the provisional outturn on fiscal operations for 2016 has shown a deficit of \$7.6 billion, which is just over \$300 million more than the revised estimates. The variance is mainly as a result of a higher than projected expenditure of \$171 million as well as lower than projected revenue of \$188 million.

I will now advise the House of the significant variances with respect to revenue and expenditure, just some basic data.

3.00 p.m.

As I said just now, the revised revenue for fiscal 2016 was \$44.94 billion, whereas the actual amount collected was \$44.75 billion which is \$188 million lower than the revised projection. And, Madam Speaker, one must understand that at the time of the budget the public servants are working on estimates because they would not have had the data for the last two or three weeks for the fiscal year, so they are doing estimated projections. So they estimated that revenue would be 44.9 and it was, in fact, 44.75. So there was \$188 million lower than revised revenue.

The negative variance was due mainly to lower receipts on taxes on goods and services of \$91 million, taxes on international trade of \$45 million, non-tax revenue of \$522 million and capital revenue of \$104 million. So all of these were lower than anticipated receipts in these categories.

However, the lower than estimated receipts in taxes on goods and services, non-tax revenue and so on were offset by higher receipts, significantly higher receipts than anticipated under taxes on incomes and profits. We realized increased collections of \$514 million, increased collection on unemployment levy of \$29 million and increased collection on the green fund levy of \$39 million. So when you balance the lower receipts under non-tax revenue and taxes on goods and services, et cetera, with the increased receipts on taxes on incomes and profits, et cetera, you come with a variance of \$188 million.

Specifically, the lower receipts on taxes on goods and services of \$91 million was reflected by a decrease in receipts under excise duties of some \$23 million partially due to payments under oil of \$12 million not being brought to account due to a reconciliation exercise currently under way; betting and entertainment taxes of \$66 million which were not received due to administrative delays; motor vehicle taxes and duties of \$33 million due mainly to reduced sales

of vehicles with large engine sizes and a decreased demand for ro-ro vehicles because of the age restriction. The lower take from the preceding categories was partly mitigated by higher receipts from value added tax of \$25 million which was partially as a result of the tax amnesty.

Under taxes on international trade, the lower receipts of \$45 million emanated chiefly from import duties as the reconciliation exercise undertaken by customs did not yield the anticipated return in arrears of revenue.

Under non-tax revenue the lower receipt of \$522 million lower than expected was due mainly to royalty on oil and gas which was lower by \$206 million as a result of lower oil prices than expected. Profits from the national lottery due to the receipt of lower surpluses for the period October to July, 2016. Equity profits from the Central Bank were just lower by a small amount of \$13 million. And with respect to administrative fees, lower than projected receipts of \$141 million occurred mainly because of the late submission of deposit statements by WASA in respect of water improvement rates which were not brought to account in 2016 and the non-receipt of expected remittances of oil impost payments of \$37 million from companies.

The lower receipts under capital revenue of \$104 million reflected decreased receipts under unspent balances from statutory boards and similar bodies of \$25 million. Under transfers from the Caroni reserve fund of \$168 million because the balances were not deposited in time for the closing of the year. These were partially offset by higher than projected receipts under grants of \$89 million, mainly from the disbursement of \$108 million from the European Union with respect to the sugar protocol and for support to enabling competitive business of \$50 million. The lower take, as I said before, was partially offset by higher receipts

under taxes on incomes and profits, unemployment levy and Green Fund.

With respect to taxes on incomes and profits, receipts from oil companies were higher by some \$20 million; other companies by \$491 million; and the business levy was higher than anticipated by \$13 million mainly because of outstanding payments being remitted by companies during the period of the amnesty.

And this disproves the theory that tax amnesties are not a good idea. There is a view and it is a correct view that if you continuously give amnesties, people will continuously avoid paying taxes in order to avoid penalties and interest and then pay during the period of the amnesty thereby escaping penalties and interest. But be that as it may, we received a considerable sum of money in fiscal 2016 as a result of the tax amnesty in excess of \$500 million. I think the actual figure is \$750 million, and this went in no small measure to helping us to manage our finances and to run the country in 2016.

So a lot of theoretical armchair academics make all sorts of pronouncements about things like amnesties, but they do not really understand. Seven hundred and fifty million dollars is a lot of money. Until we improve the administration at the Board of Inland Revenue, many companies simply defer the payment of taxes, they dispute them, they take them to the Tax Appeal Board, they go to court and so on and this ties everything up in administrative delays. So that the amnesty certainly did work in fiscal 2016.

The higher take from the preceding categories partially offset from the lower receipts from individuals as collection of pay-as-you-earn taxation from the energy and non-energy sectors declined as a result of continuous weakening of oil and gas prices on the global market, as well as the partial payment or arrears of salaries by

Ministries and Departments. The positive variance from the unemployment levy, \$29 billion and the Green Fund of almost of \$40 million came primarily from payments during the period of the tax amnesty.

On the expenditure side, the *Revised Estimates of Expenditure for 2016* projected at the time of the budget was \$52.2 billion. The actual amount was 52.4 which is \$171 million higher than the revised level.

The major areas in which expenditure was higher than expected was Other Goods and Services. Expenditure was higher by some \$72 million mainly under the subcategories of goods and services by \$17 million and management expenses by \$74 million.

However, spending was lower than estimated under Minor Equipment Purchases in the amount of some \$19 million. The main items under Goods and Services which reported higher than projected expenditure was Rental of Vehicles and Equipment, \$113 million, due mainly to unanticipated expenditure incurred as a result of the expansion of the programme for rental of CCTV cameras by the Ministry of National Security. So there was an increase in expenditure in rental of closed-circuit television cameras of \$111 million, \$39 million increase in fees and a \$30 million increase in Janitorial Services mainly to allow the Ministry of Education to facilitate the payment of outstanding bills, which is something we as a government are grappling with—all of these bills that came over in 2015 that we are now required to settle.

The higher expenditure was partially mitigated by lower than projected expenditure under Repairs and Maintenance and under the Ministry of Health with respect to drugs and other related materials and food and institutions. This was mainly as a result of processing of paperwork. It did not affect in any way the

actual expenditure by the Ministry of Health. It was just a delay in bringing to book the paperwork before this 30th of September.

Higher expenditure under management expenses of \$74 million incurred mainly under discounts and other financial instruments due to the unforeseen expenditure of \$33 million for discounts on the issue of bonds and also for the provision of additional collateral of \$40 million on a cost currency swapped-note transaction from US dollar to yen.

And, Madam Speaker, I will speak about this at another time, but in this place. The former Government when it went on a road show in 2012, while out there raising money, mysteriously agreed to a currency swap arrangement with Citibank, where the Government of Trinidad and Tobago undertook to gamble—the previous Government undertook to gamble on the exchange rate of the Japanese yen versus the exchange rate of the US dollar, a currency swap.

So far this country, as a result of this highly risky and reckless action of the former Government, has lost \$400 million on gambling on exchange rates of foreign currencies. And I will bring a report to this Parliament to show the recklessness of the individuals involved in that matter, Madam Speaker. Yes. I am going to bring it. We need to learn about these things. Government should not be gambling taxpayers' money on currency swaps and exchange rates. Let the private sector do that. That is not for a government to do, to go and gamble on exchange rates. [*Interruption*] That was under your administration. [*Crosstalk*] Managed by Citibank. I said Citibank.

Overall interest payments were more than projected by \$10 million. [*Crosstalk*] That is fact. Truth is truth. If, Madam Speaker, if truth offends them, I am sorry, I will be very offensive.

Interest expended on domestic loans was \$24 million more than estimated as a result of processing of new loans. Interest payments on external loans were less than projected by \$13 million mainly on account of delays in processing debit advices related to wire transfers, and also because of the rescheduling of interest payments on loans that were not finalized.

Current transfers were higher than projected by \$622 million. This was attributable to mainly to the higher level of transfers to educational institutions, \$68 million, due mainly to the payment of arrears of salary under Direct University Services, which is UWI and the University of the Trinidad and Tobago. So \$30 million went to UWI to pay back pay and \$30 million also went to the University of the Trinidad and Tobago to pay back pay.

We also had increased transfers of \$768 million under Households due to the payment, again, of outstanding retirement benefits to retired public officers. Under Pensions, \$68 million more than expected and, as I have indicated previously, an advance of \$370 million to meet commitments with respect to the payments of senior citizens' pension and so on.

Under the category of Households there was also lower expenditure under the food price support programme due to delays in processing claims. And on the OJT programme, due to administrative delays in transferring the programme from the Ministry of Education to the Ministry of Labour and Small Enterprise Development.

Under state enterprises there was increased expenditure of some—or is it reduced expenditure? Yes. Reduced expenditure of some \$62 million mainly as a result—I am sorry. This is increased expenditure as a result of payment of \$42 million from Treasury Deposits to meet commitments with respect to the Point

Fortin highway. And that is another issue, Madam Speaker.

The Point Fortin highway project, a project that was estimated to cost \$7½ billion was started without any financing arrangements in place. It was in fact a charge on the Consolidated Fund. So, the Minister of Finance and the Economy, my predecessor, had to find money from time to time to pay those billions of dollars on that highway project without any long-term financing, without any loan arrangements in place; even when halfway through, the previous Government decided to take out a loan, it was only for the amount of \$1½ billion. There was a shortfall of some \$6 billion in terms of long-term financing for that project.

So we had inescapable payments on that project; otherwise we would have found ourselves in legal difficulties. So we had to take \$42 million from Treasury Deposits to meet commitments with respect to the Point Fortin highway project.

Lower expenditure was effected under Transfers Abroad, \$97 million, due to administrative delays which caused the expenditure to be incurred just after the end of the fiscal year. There were also reduced subsidy claims regarding the sale of petroleum products as a result of the collapse in oil prices. So there were reduced subsidy claims of some \$91 million. Reduced claims for Non-Profit Institutions of \$19 million and Other Transfers, a reduction mainly under the Caricom Development Fund and also under the regional health authorities as bills from suppliers were not submitted by suppliers before the end of the fiscal year.

Personnel Expenditure was lower by \$124 million. Wages and Cost of Living Allowance accounted for \$20 million of this decreased expenditure. Salaries accounted for \$85 million of the decrease expenditure and Allowances accounted for \$11 million of the decreased expenditure.

This mainly occurred in the Ministry of National Security where there was a

decrease of \$73 million because there was a payment of arrears of 50 per cent in the last fiscal year. The next 50 per cent will be handled in this year, in 2017. Although expenditure overall was only lower by \$5 million, Personnel Expenditure under the police service went up by some \$40 million. Overtime went up by \$14 million and allowances went up by \$22 million—all in the Ministry of National Security—but there was sufficient money to meet these payments.

Transfers to Statutory Boards was less than projected by \$166 million, mainly under the Tobago House of Assembly as expenditure was less than the revised estimate of \$78 million since a number of non-cash transactions were not brought to account by the end of the fiscal year. This also occurred within the Local Government Bodies and in the Cipriani College of Labour & Co-operative Studies.

Capital expenditure was \$313 million lower than expended. This was comprised of \$244 million in the Consolidated Fund and \$69 million at the IDF, again, due to delays in the processing of paperwork which do not catch the end of year on the 30th of September.

Madam Speaker, having given these details I wish to reiterate or to make the point that this matter that we are about today is the closing of accounts for fiscal 2016. It has absolutely nothing to do with expenditure for 2017. Nothing to do with 2017! So I would urge hon. Members opposite not to become embroiled in questions or issues. I am urging hon. Members opposite, you can be as irrelevant as you wish to be, but this debate is about the closing of accounts for last year. It has nothing to do with this year. And I can assure you, I can assure hon. Members opposite—this is not a threat, this is a warning—that if Members opposite decide to speak about fiscal 2017, I will be the first to get up and cite Standing Order

48(1). I beg to move, Madam Speaker. [*Desk thumping*]

Question proposed.

Dr. Bhoendradatt Tewarie (*Caroni Central*): [*Desk thumping*] Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. I stand to make a response to the Minister of Finance and to contribute to this Bill to vary the appropriation of the sum the issue of which was authorized by the Appropriation (Financial Year 2016), Act, 2015 and varied by Finance (Variation of Appropriation) (Financial Year 2016), Bill, 2016.

The Minister closed by talking about the fact that his presentation and the Bill before us has to do with the closing of accounts for 2016, Madam Speaker, and issued a warning indicating that he will stand to invoke 48(1) under the Standing Orders should we venture into the area of 2017.

But I want to say that in the presentation of this Bill what we have in tangible form in the form of documentation is the Finance (Variation of Appropriation) (Financial year 2016), Bill, 2017; we have that before us. We have, having attended to the matter on the last occasion that we met, I think it was Friday the 13th, the First Report of the Standing Finance Committee of the House of Representatives on the consideration of proposals for the Variation of Appropriation for the Fiscal Year, 2016. And that report was actually laid in this House formally today although it was circulated before. And we have related to that the agenda for the second meeting of the Standing Finance Committee of the 2017 Session of the House of Representatives of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago which was held on January 13th.

The presentation by the Minister, while he referred to these documents, he introduced a lot of information that is not documented anywhere. He introduced the information simply by verbalizing very, very large numbers of numbers having

to do with: income; having to do with expenditure; having to do with change in deficit anticipation based on those varied numbers—and we are hearing this for the first time. We have no numbers that we can look at.

And I want to ask, Madam Speaker, if you would please arrange for the Minister's speech to be circulated while I am speaking [*Desk thumping*] so that other Members who follow me might have the opportunity to look at those numbers. Because I took notes of the more important numbers and I have them with me. But most of the numbers I could not spend my time chasing down those numbers that he was talking about. And that is the kind of sleight-of-hand presentation that I have referred to in the past, while he gets up to admonish us on how we must behave, [*Desk thumping*] that we are accustomed to in this House.

So, he comes here with all the 2016 numbers which only he has on paper—and only he has in his head—which paper, he is the only person, I assume, unless he took this matter to Cabinet who has that financial information. [*Interruption*] I am not in Government, but I was, I know how it works. Right? I think you have a little experience too, so you know when you are deceptive what you are doing. So, he brings the numbers here and we now have to deal with these numbers.

But I want to deal with the Bill before the House and I will refer to the numbers that he mentioned earlier and I want to start by looking at the Bill itself. I want to point out that the Bill, as the Minister pointed out, has to do with the just under \$500 million that was actually transferred from one Ministry—[*Interruption*]

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: Madam Speaker, may I ask a question, please? Would you give way? I would just like to ask a question.

Dr. B. Tewarie: To whom?

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: To the Speaker. Madam Speaker, I do not know if we are—I am not sure of the procedure. Because right now we are doing the Report of the Standing Finance Committee. I do not know if we are anticipating by referring to the Bill. I am not sure and I am asking for your guidance, please. I am just asking a question.

Madam Speaker: Hon. Members, what is before the House is the question of the report. And I will just ask, while I know we will eventually go to the Bill and they may cover the same subject matter, I will just ask the Member to be guided. And I am sure your contribution as it is could be tailored towards this.

Dr. B. Tewarie: But, Madam Speaker, I will do whatever you ask. But are we going to have two debates today on these matters?

Madam Speaker: Members, no Motion was moved to discuss both matters together. So this is not what my ruling is. This is the order that is followed unless the both sides come to an agreement.

Dr. B. Tewarie: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. So I will deal, therefore, with the Report of the Standing Finance Committee.

And in the Report of the Standing Finance Committee the first point that I wish to make is that, under Transfers on page 10, 21 Item, the report indicates:

“The Committee noted that the Minister of Finance approved the transfer of funds in the sum of \$1,019,704,671 between Sub-Heads under the same Head of Expenditure. These transfers reflect changed circumstances in Ministries and Departments and a consequential re-ordering of priorities.”

Now, the reason I mentioned that is because it deals not just with the matters that have to do with the movement from one Ministry to another, Ministry of Energy and Energy Industries to the Ministry of Social Development and Family Services

and the movement of the Ministry of Communications to be conjoined with the Ministry of Public Administration. But it also has to do with Items moved from one part of an existing Ministry to another part of the same existing Ministry.

And the Minister went into some explanation of that, tracing it back to 1988 when a decision was made, et cetera.

But what it means, therefore, is that we are dealing with variations not of a sum between \$400 million and \$500 million, but in fact a sum totalling over a billion dollars in this particular report. The Minister talks about the decrease in energy of \$370 million—yes, \$370,497,277—and the same amount is transferred. So you have the decrease there and you have the other decrease of \$120,781,446 from the Ministry of Communications.

Now, the Minister explains that—and then of course, he explains the increase, the same numbers, which is \$120,781,446 going to the Ministry of Public Administration and Communications when they came together, and then going to the Ministry of Social Development and Family Services from the Ministry of Energy and Energy Industries, \$370,497,277.

Now, in making these transfers the Minister talked about the fact that the price of oil and, therefore, the demand for the subsidies had a relationship to the savings that accrued. And he then explained where the money went in social services.

3.30 p.m.

And the question on the issue of the Ministry of Communications, he indicated that it was just transfer of the Ministry and therefore the money went with it. And this is fine because the explanations in the notes, that is to say in the report, are straightforward and good, and we do not necessarily have any problems

with the explanation of these things. What I do want to emphasize though is that in the verbatim notes item 6 on Appendix II, page 13, it reads:

“The committee is being asked to note that the Minister of Finance has approved the transfer of funds in the sums of \$1,019,704,671 between Sub Heads under the same Head of expenditure for fiscal year 2016.”

And therefore, although ministerial authority is granted to these things, the matter is before Parliament, and some of these things I want to comment on as I proceed.

Mr. Imbert: Like you nervous?

Dr. B. Tewarie: I am not nervous. Do not get nervous, you know how you like to get nervous on the other side.

Mr. Imbert: I am not speaking to you.

Dr. B. Tewarie: But I can hear you.

One of the things, given the documents that we have here, that I do not understand though, is let us say under the Heads, and Item, and Sub-Item in Appendix III, in the “Schedule relating to the Variation of Estimates 2016”, you have a change here, for instance, under Public Administration and Communications, under Personnel Expenditure, and you have a change from an increase of \$14,139,254 for Personnel Expenditure, and when I look at the numbers below I do not see any changes between the numbers on the left hand side and the numbers of the right hand side. So that I do not know for instance how the increase of \$14,139,254, how that lines up with the numbers below. I find the same thing under the Sub-Head, Goods and Services, which is on page 21, where there is an increase of \$14,346,411, and when I look at the left hand side and the right hand side below, I do not see a variation in the individual lines as I go down the column.

And if the Minister could simply explain, perhaps I missed something, I think it happens in two instances, it does not happen everywhere. I do not know if it is a typo, if it is a mistake, if I am misunderstanding something, and I just wanted a clarification, an explanation on that. So, I simply leave that for the response of the Minister.

Now, the question that we need to ask, besides the sums that have been reallocated—that have been varied, and therefore reallocated, the question that we have to ask is, what is the value of doing this? Because all of this is being varied in the context of a budget, and I know that the Minister said that this was being done for 2016, all of this is being done in the context of a budget, and what did it help the Government to achieve in Public Administration, in Communications and Social Development? I think it is reasonable to ask that, if you have a transfer of money, if you have a reallocation, and the Minister mentioned certain words here. He said restructuring. There was no restructuring of the Ministry of Public Administration. They simply took the Communications and added it on to it. I do not know if it is still there under Public Administration, but the point is that they added to the Ministry, I do not think that there was any restructuring, and I do not know that if moving the money to the new Ministry was meant to achieve anything. And, if it was supposed to achieve something, I would like to know what it was meant to achieve.

The Minister also mentioned the issue of reordering of priorities. I do not see the allocation of money here having to do with reordering of priorities. They had a situation in which they paid money from the Treasury in advance to pay for old age pension and other matters, and they then had to find the money somewhere to make it up. Because you needed 13 allocations over the course of a 12-month year,

rather than 12 allocations. And what he did was he simply got the savings from the subsidies not spent in the energy sector, because of variation in the price of oil, and he allocated the money there. There was no reordering of priorities. The priorities were set in the budget, and it was simply a question of finding the money to do this.

And the Minister then outlines the issue of income and expenditure in relation to the budget, and he takes us to the point where he indicates that the actual revenue was \$108 million lower, being now 44.75 instead of 44.94, and he indicates that the expenditure actual was 52.4-something. I did not get what the something was, but he indicated that it was \$171 million higher than actually projected, and it was projected at 52.23. All of that was, of course, the projections were in the last budget speech that he presented to us here. Now, there are some things, really, that need explanation. For instance, in the actual expenditure he indicated that one of the reasons for the increase in expenditure—I do not know if I got him right, and I stand to be corrected if I am wrong, but I heard him say managerial fees. So, I really want to know what those managerial fees are, and what it is they were managing, and what levels of efficiency were achieved by the expenditure of what would be a significant enough sum to increase the expenditure by part of \$171 million in 2016.

Therefore, as I said, I have a liability by not being able to deal with the numbers in front of my eyes, and not having the opportunity to reflect on the numbers as presented by the Minister of Finance today, but certain things do jump out, and we know that it is 2016, but these things have implications for 2017, and manner of proceeding. Because in terms of 2016 and what the expenditure originally projected at \$63.49 billion, and eventually projected at 52.23, actualized

as 52.4, according to the Minister. All of these numbers we need to interrogate properly, the question that we have to ask is, what did this 2016 budget achieve? And I think that that is a legitimate question as we go into the second month of 2017—the 2016 budget would have ended in September 2016, and we are now four months into the expenditure and the income generation of the 2017 budget, and I want to indicate what is happening in terms of the economy of Trinidad and Tobago. I want to say that based on 2016 performance, we did not end 2016, nor have we entered 2017 with any confidence in the economic future [*Desk thumping*] of Trinidad and Tobago.

I have here May 31st, 2016, where the Central Bank lowers 2016 economic forecast, and I have a story here coming out of the Central Bank articulation about what is happening to Trinidad and Tobago. It says:

“The Trinidad and Tobago economy will contract even more than the -2.3 per cent, the Central Bank of Trinidad and Tobago forecast just over a month ago. The Central Bank of Trinidad and Tobago...said its May 27th 2016 Monetary Policy Report...“Early available information on domestic energy production as well the revised fiscal outlook announced in April 2016, support the Bank’s initial projections in March 2016 of a contraction in the order of 2.5 per cent for the whole of 2016 and lower foreign exchange earnings. A gradual revival of growth is anticipated in 2017”— et cetera— “beyond as the energy production and global energy prices pick up...”

So, they are basing any hope in 2017 on increased prices and on increased production. But they are forecasting very bad things for Trinidad and Tobago. And I want to say that since that report came out we have now had the benefit of the

first and second quarter reports of 2016. And what it points to is a more than 6 per cent decline minus in the first quarter, and a close to 8 per cent decline in the second quarter. And, I want to say that what that suggests for the third quarter. I am talking about 2016, Madam Speaker, I see you looking at the Standing Orders. I am talking about 2016. [*Desk thumping*] The numbers for quarter one and quarter two of 2016 suggests that quarter three of 2016 is likely to be somewhere between six and nine, because of the fact that you have 6.7 and close to eight, and it suggests that if we get to that point in the third quarter—and I know that these are projections, there is no way that I can be accurate or know for sure, and precisely what is going to happen. It is likely that the fourth quarter could get to as high as even minus 9 per cent.

So, you are looking at a year, 2016, of absolute dismal performance by this Government [*Desk thumping*] variation or no variation, re-appropriation or no re-appropriation. And what it tells us is that we basically, in a situation of deep recession in 2016, and the reason that the Minister of Finance does not want me to say anything about 2017 is because the ultimate question for 2017 since September when they brought the budget here, is what are you going to do to take us out of a 9 per cent 2016 recession? [*Desk thumping*]

So, in 2016, in spite of the moving around of money, and in spite of the reallocation of funds, it made no difference to the creation of a single job, it made no difference to the improved quality of the life of a single citizen, it made no difference to any small percentage of growth in the economy, and this includes every sector of Trinidad and Tobago, because I have the *Review of the Economy* here for 2016, which indicates that not a single sector, energy being the worse, because we know what our situation is with that, both with production and price,

but every other sector including—perhaps the most formidably growing sector in the country over the last five years, that is to say, other than energy, which was the services sector, you have the beginning of deep decline in the services sector in Trinidad and Tobago.

So that every sector is in a mess based on their 2016 management of the budget. And they said—I want to hear what the money was spent on for the management fees, eh, because I want to know what they managed. All right. [*Laughter and desk thumping*] I want to know what they were charged with managing, and how they manage it, and what were the results?

Mr. Charles: They paid for mismanagement.

Dr. B. Tewarie: Okay. I would not read from the Minister's budget speech in 2016, because in his presentation he did make corrections to his own projections, and I will take him at his words, although I have not had a chance to review the numbers.

But, I want to indicate to him that the fundamental question I asked remains the fundamental question with which he has to wrestle. Because, the decline in 2016, and the recession that we have inherited from 2016 flowing into 2017 has nothing to do with other recessions that we have had in Trinidad and Tobago before. Although many of them were related to the price of oil, it is different in that this one is not cyclical because of the nature of the change of the global energy industry. So, it is not a cyclical thing that we are addressing here. And the fundamental question of how you revived the economy, how you move out of recession, how you gain confidence, growth, how you create jobs, how you create the conditions for expansion of exports, et cetera. Those issues really require a different set of answers and need to take into account a different set of variables,

and I have heard no articulation by the Government on anything resembling a solution to the economic crisis that we have in Trinidad and Tobago.

I want to get to some of those issues now in the documents that we examined on Friday the 13th, having to do with the transfer under the various Heads within existing Ministries. So, we have transfers for instance in the Ministry of Education, you have Ministry of Labour and Small Enterprise Development, we have Ministry of Public Administration, and I want to say that a pertinent question for the Ministry of Public Administration is really, what is the role of Public Administration in addressing the role that the Ministries have to play in helping to create the climate—

Madam Speaker: Member for Caroni Central.

Dr. B. Tewarie: Yes.

Madam Speaker: Your original 30 minutes have expired, you are entitled to 15 more minutes, if you intend to avail yourself of it, you may proceed.

Dr. B. Tewarie: Yes, I am very, very grateful, Madam Speaker. I would be happy to use the 15 minutes that I have. [*Desk thumping*]

A pertinent question for Public Administration is, what are we doing with the Ministries if we have, let us say, minus 9 per cent reduction—well, more than 9 per cent reduction, but a minus 9 per cent growth rate, let us say, for the 2016 year—that is what we have inherited—and let us say I am wrong and it is not 9 per cent, it is 7 per cent, or whatever it is, what is the role of the public sector? And what are we doing to allow it to play that role? Because public and private sector have to work together to make any kind of confidence, any kind of growth, any kind of innovation possible. What is the public sector doing to be able to address that?

And in terms of the Trinidad and Tobago Police Service, I think it is important to ask—we have a situation here for instance in which you have transfer of moneys, \$34 million on the left hand side, transferred to the right hand side for various things, travelling and subsistence, uniforms, repairs and maintenance, other contracted services, and so on. I think the pertinent question for the police services and for the Minister under whose portfolio—the police service—resides, is, what are these allocations of sums of money, and variations of where these sums of money lie? How are they going to make a difference in the terrible situation that we have here in terms of murders in Trinidad and Tobago? How are they going to make a difference?

I think four people were killed last night. I think 461 people were killed last year. In my own constituency in one night “they shoot up six people, three ah dem dead”, and in this situation I do not want to mention the young girls that have been brutalized, and I do not want to make this an issue about crime. But if we are dealing with police, the question for the police, the question for National Security Ministry is really what are we doing about this? How are we arresting it? How are reversing it? How are we reducing it? How are we making the place safer? How are we detecting the crimes? How are we bringing people to justice? And how are we setting the stage for security and peace in the society?

I move on now to the Ministry of Planning and Development, and the one issue I have has to do with the movement of \$9,959,036 to various Heads in which expenditure was needed, and I have no problems with the things that were spent on, they seem reasonable, to me. But what I have a problem with is the fact that this \$9,959,036 was actually taken from the settlement money for cane farmers in Trinidad and Tobago. I have a problem with that. And the explanation of it—I

want to read the whole explanation. The explanation for it is that—sorry, Madam Speaker, I am just trying to find this here—is that the funds were needed for so and so, and as I said I have no problem with the reason why the funds were taken. The problem I have is from whom they were taken, and why were they taken from those people, and the reason for savings is given as the total actual payments made in respect of settlement to cane farmers, fell below the sum allocated for fiscal 2016.

You know what that means, Madam Speaker? What that really means, translated from the English into common sense language, is that the money that they allocated for cane farmers came with such requirements, which, in fact, demanded that the cane farmer if he was to get his money—and I want to say this is the reduced sum from the \$8 million provided by European Union, and which does not take into account the moneys committed to by the Government of Trinidad and Tobago, and I assume continuity in Government, that these moneys were made available in terms of a public statement to the cane farmers, but with the conditionality that they were to sign a document indicating that they are giving up any rights to any further sums of money which were committed by the Government of Trinidad and Tobago, and to which the cane farms would have had a legitimate expectation that a government commitment would have been honoured.

So, because they asked them to sign away the rest of their money, they did not come to take their money. So this money remained lying fallow, so to speak, to use an agricultural term, and basically it was made available to that. So, I am not querying where the money was moved to, and why it was done. As I said, it may be quite legitimate, and I do not have a problem with that, but I have a real

problem with this money being taken from the cane farmers. And, I want to say, Madam Speaker, that when you look at the information that is available from the documents here, that is to say the documents Friday and today, you will also see that there was significant under-expenditure in the Infrastructure Development Funds, and in the Ministry of Social Development and Family Services' report you would see that some of the development work had not in fact taken place. And what this means, therefore, is not only that the recurrent income and expenditure in a sense have been skewed to no achievement, but that the Public Sector Investment Programme on which the Infrastructure Development Fund is a critical part, is likely to have been—basically it is a non-performing sector of the economy, the Public Sector Investment Programme in 2016, and given what has happened over the last four months, we are likely to see a recurrence of that again in 2017.

So, when you look—I had brought this Draft Estimates of Revenue for the financial year 2017, which is really '16/'17, and falls outside of the remit of the matter here, simply to ask the Minister, what was going on in terms of income and expenditure over these four months? So, I will raise the question, understanding that it is his option to answer, or not to answer, given the nature of the documents and circumscription of the debate today. And I want to say that in January 2017, having seen what has happened under the 2016 budget, and knowing for a fact, and feeling in the economy, and in the society, what is happening in the country during the first four months of 2017 as we approach carnival, I want to say that Trinidad and Tobago economically and financially is in a very, very bad place. [*Desk thumping*]

I want to say as well that we are in a very bad place because of, in my view, ineffective management, and a failure to make meaningful and strategic decisions.

And I want to tell the Government that the more you operate Hamlet-like, postponing decisions and second guessing yourself, and not wanting to make mistakes, and therefore to do everything right, the more you are likely to do nothing with months and months passing before you. [*Desk thumping*] And months and months of doing nothing will result in nothing happening. Recently, there were certain things opened by this Government. For instance they opened the Courts facility in Freeport. I want to say the foundation for that and all the work for it, and the facilitation was done by our Government. [*Desk thumping*] Recently we went to the C3 complex where they opened Movietowne. I want to say that the work for that and all the work that went in was done by our Government. [*Desk thumping*]

4.00 p.m.

I want to say, basically what you have found and whether we go to police stations which are in the public sector and I know the Government wants to suppress certain government things, like the Aquatic Centre and the Couva Children's Hospital and so on, but it is hard to suppress what the private sector is doing. And it is manifesting itself, and all the things you say we did bad and we did not do it, the point is that they are coming out. They are coming up [*Desk thumping*] and everybody is seeing.

Hon. Member: "Dey taking credit for it."

Dr. B. Tewarie: Now, on the 25th of this month I have been invited and I am unable to go because I have a Committee meeting here in Parliament which I must attend. But on the 25th of this month you are going to have the COSTATT Campus in Central Trinidad. [*Desk thumping*] So we might have made mistakes, all right, but we did things, we did things for the people. [*Desk thumping*] We were not

afraid to make decisions and we were not afraid to make decisions that would redound to the benefit of the country. [*Desk thumping*] And I would say to the Minister of Finance and the Government of the other side, stop just juggling numbers and doing things on paper and try and do some work that would benefit the country. Thank you very much. [*Desk thumping*]

The Minister of Public Administration and Communications (Hon. Maxie Cuffie): Thank you, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, yesterday I went to the opening of the IT Symposium by the Ministry of Planning and Development. I took note that the Minister of Planning and Development in her address to the audience at the Arthur Lok Jack Auditorium, mentioned the work that had been done by the Member for Caroni Central, her predecessor in that portfolio, and that is the way we do things. We give credit where it is due. So that when the Member talks about all the things that we have completed and opened that was started under the previous administration, that is what a responsible Government would do. [*Desk thumping*]

An irresponsible Government is one that will look at the Government Campus and leave it unopened for five years. [*Desk thumping*] An irresponsible Government would look at the Brian Lara Stadium and leave it unfinished for five years. [*Desk thumping*] So I thank the Member for Caroni Central for recognizing—[*Crosstalk*]—I am coming to your constituency just now—that we are a responsible Government and we are about the people's business. [*Desk thumping*]

Now, I thought actually that this was a simple report. We do this every year, four months after the close of the financial year.

Mr. Imbert: They did it five times.

Hon. M. Cuffie: Precisely. And I remember when we were in Opposition we actually supported the People’s Partnership budget. Every Member who was then on the PNM Benches got up and voted for the budget because we were a responsible Opposition. [*Desk thumping*] The problem is we are faced with a most irresponsible Opposition, [*Desk thumping*] who from the very first day announced that they were going to oppose us at every turn, that they will support nothing that we do. In fact, there is a calypso about you all, you know, the one by Maximus Dan, MX Prime. It says:

“The city could bun’ down, we jammin still”—[*Interruption*]

Mr. Karim: “Sing it nah”, sing it.

Hon. M. Cuffie: “The building could fall down, we jammin still.

Recession doh bother we, promote a fete and you will see, we go party to the full extreme

Oh God, the Treasury could bun’ down, we jamming still

Economy could fall down, we jammin still”

So the Member for Caroni Central continued with the “jammin”. [*Crosstalk and laughter*] He recognizes—now he read the whole Central Bank Report. He recognizes the great peril that we face as an economy, the tremendous burdens that we have had to inherit, but still, “he jammin, he jammin”.

Now, the Member claims that he did not get the figures from the Minister of Finance. Now I sat here and listened to the Minister of Finance, I took notes. He said, revenue was \$44.94 billion, expenditure was \$52.23 billion and there was a deficit of \$7.6 billion. So after you get those figures I do not understand how you cannot understand why we needed to contract in terms of the expenditure and why we needed to realign, restructure and reduce expenditure in the budget. And that is what we did with the merger of the Ministry of Communications and the Ministry

of Public Administration. [*Crosstalk*] Give me time; I will explain it to you, right.

Now, I realized that people on that Bench do not know what the Ministry of Communications does. [*Crosstalk and laughter*] I know you all do not know, you know. Because under the People's Partnership you had five Ministers of Communications. Now you started with the Member for Siparia who was the first Minister of Communications. After a year she fired herself. So she was followed by the Member for Tabaquite, I think, and then Sen. Jamal Mohammed, Sen. Gerald Hadeed and the last one was the Minister Vasant Bharath. [*Crosstalk*]

Hon. Member: And they were all very good.

Hon. M. Cuffie: Well, they must be very good because you had five of them. So let me give you the portfolio responsibilities of the—[*Interruption*]

Dr. Tewarie: Madam Speaker, might I raise an issue under 48(1). [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker: Member, under 48(1)?

Dr. Tewarie: Yes.

Madam Speaker: Member, could you remember the Motion that is before us. This is on the report. [*Crosstalk*] Members, I am on my legs—[*Interruption*]

Hon. Member: Sorry.

Madam Speaker: I do appreciate the spirit of camaraderie that exists, but let us please respect the Standing Orders. Member, please, I have allowed you some latitude if you could get to the matter before us, please.

Hon. M. Cuffie: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Actually, I was really speaking to the reduction from the Ministry of Communications and the funds assigned to the Ministry of Public Administration and Communications and trying to explain how that reduction came to pass. Because the Ministry of Communications as we had it,

was really based, when we got into office, on the estimates that were prepared under the previous administration. And those estimates were significantly bloated. So that under that administration we had estimates really intended for an election campaign and the Ministry of Communications then was solely about campaigning for elections.

Now, I saw a report, and the Member for Naparima would be interested in this, it is about the Ministry of Communications and the expenditure just before the 2016 budget. And what they found was that—[*Crosstalk*] The point I am making is that the 2016 budget was based on the expenditure in 2015. So the allocations that were made were based on that historical pattern and the pattern of expenditure in 2015 was based on the election and election spending. So that at CNMG, for example, which falls under the Minister of Communications there was a project called National Conversation Initiative.

Now, this is a project that was initiated by the Member for Naparima—

Mr. Charles: Me!

Hon. M. Cuffie:—and the document I have seen shows that the Member for Naparima, along with other party officials, was instrumental in having CNMG, which falls under the Ministry of Communications, expend sums toward a national campaign that was—[*Crosstalk*]

Miss Ramdial: Madam Speaker, 48(1).

Madam Speaker: Member for La Horquetta/Talparo, please continue.

Hon. M. Cuffie: Thank you, Madam Speaker. So that what they did was—let me read—I would not read the name of the Minister but he explained that a meeting in 2014 with Mr. Rodney Charles, Mr. Ken Ali concerning social media content for a campaign which allowed persons to take part in voting polls on the performance of

the Prime Minister, People's Partnership, the campaign was referred to as the National Conversation. [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Charles: Madam Speaker, 48(5).

Hon. M. Cuffie: Now, this is a programme undertaken by the state, media, broadcasting.

Mr. Charles: What is the source of that letter and the secretary?

Madam Speaker: Members, if we could please settle down and comply with the Standing Orders, particularly Standing Order 53. Member for La Horquetta/Talparo, please continue.

Hon. M. Cuffie: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Now, the report says, CNMG's finance department confirmed for the National Conversation received additional funding to the value \$5 million from the nine Ministries, a total, \$4,849,715.59 before VAT was spent on this initiative. This is an initiative geared towards the campaign by the People's Partnership Government and I have here a letter written by the CEO of CNMG to the then Minister of Communications asking that funds be procured for this initiative and as part of the CNMG communications outreach plan. Now CNMG is a television station with some radio stations. But they had a plan to undertake projects and medium management of the National Conversation to promote the Prime Minister. The letter is dated June 24, 2014. [*Crosstalk*] The point I am making is that the 2016 allocation, the 2016 budget for the Ministry of Communications was filled with these kinds of things. So when we got there—

Hon. Member: We paid that in 2016.

Hon. M. Cuffie: Yeah. Actually the reason I got this report is because the people have come—[*Laughter*]

Hon. Member: He now get the reason.

Hon. M. Cuffie: No, no. They did not get all their money. So—[*Interruption*]

Madam Speaker: I am on my legs. Member for La Horquetta/Talparo, maybe you could address your contribution to the Chair and—so to avoid some of the answering to the crosstalk so we can get on with the business of the people.

Hon. M. Cuffie: Thank you, Madam Speaker, I will not be side tracked. So the people have now come for their money from the 2016 budget and CNMG said, this is not part of our records and then they said, well, the Member for Naparima—to cut a long story short, the people will be contacting the Member for Naparima and taking the matter to court because CNMG will not be paying.

Mr. Charles: Madam Speaker, Standing Order 48(1). We are discussing expenditure in 2016. What does a meeting in 2015—[*Interruption*]

Madam Speaker: Member! Member, you have raised the Standing Order and you are not allowed to develop a point. Member for La Horquetta/Talparo, I understand the context and therefore if you could proceed.

Hon. M. Cuffie: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Now, the problem we have with the budget in the Ministry of Communication that was geared towards the election was that we need to get it leaner, trimmer and we did that by pairing it with the Ministry of Public Administration and Communications.

Now, the Member for Caroni Central raised the matter of crime and like the Member for Caroni East at every debate we hear about the crime situation and how the Government does not attend to it. On Sunday I was listening to the news, the 12 o'clock news on i95.5 and I heard the Member for Pointe-à-Pierre talking about the crime situation and in fact—

Mr. Lee: Madam Speaker, 48(1).

Madam Speaker: Member for La Horquetta/Talparo, if you are just responding to

something that was raised by the Member for Caroni Central, I would allow it but this is not a debate on crime.

Hon. M. Cuffie: Madam Speaker, I am responding to what was raised by the Member for Caroni Central. And the point I am making is that they make a significant noise about the crime situation and at every point they used crime for political purposes and like the Member for Caroni Central raised it here today, the Member for Caroni East raised it here today and the Member for Pointe-à-Pierre was on the radio on Sunday raising the same—[*Interruption*]

Mr. Lee: Madam Speaker, 48(1).

Madam Speaker: Member for La Horquetta/Talparo as I said, if you are responding to something there I will allow. I will not allow you to widen this debate with crime.

Hon. M. Cuffie: Thank you, Madam Speaker, I am so guided. The point is, you know, on last Monday there was a meeting in the Caroni Central constituency. The police held a meeting in the Member for Caroni Central constituency, the Member who talked about the three people who were killed in his constituency and at that meeting by the police—[*Crosstalk*—no, they invited everybody. They passed, loud speakers around, people from Caroni Central, Caroni East—[*Interruption*]

Dr. Tewarie: No, no. Just by way of information, I was not aware of the meeting and I was called at 6.30 and I could not go to that meeting.

Hon. M. Cuffie: Madam Speaker, okay. My point is, I was there—[*Interruption*]

Madam Speaker: Members, could we please contain our eagerness and abide by the Standing Orders, please. I would not entertain all of this crosstalk and shouting across the room. Member for La Horquetta/Talparo.

Hon. M. Cuffie: Madam Speaker, the point I am making is that the Member for

Caroni Central, talking about crime in central. The police called a meeting to discuss the issue, the Member for Caroni Central was not there. He said he got late notice. I take it at face value. The Member for Caroni Central was late, the Member for Caroni East was not there, the Member for Tabaquite was not there and—[*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Speaker: Member for La Horquetta/Talparo, please continue and move on and relate it to the report, please.

Hon. M. Cuffie: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, what we are doing, really, is governing the country in a difficult economic situation, a situation where we have had a significant—[*Crosstalk*] Madam Speaker, I am constantly being disturbed by the droning from the Member for Couva South. [*Crosstalk and laughter*]

Madam Speaker, the fact of the matter is, as we seek to restructure and re-engineer this economy, we need to have all the country behind us and to have the kind of support that a country in crisis requires. And one of the ways that we need to do that is by ensuring that we could turn unnecessary expenditure and that we spend every cent that we have on the right things.

Now, whenever I hear about spending on communications I recognize that people do not understand the nature of communications and on that side they spent a lot of money and that is why the communications budget was so large. They spent a lot of money on ads, advertisement, radio programmes. We have not done that. And there was a report in May. [*Crosstalk*]

Hon. Member: It is 2016, you know.

Hon. M. Cuffie: It is 2016. Friday, May 20, 2016, appeared in the *Guardian* and the report basically said that under the Partnership from May to September 2015,

they spent 2.4 times the amount of money that the PNM spent on advertising. Somebody else did an estimate and the People's Partnership spent a ratio of 6:1 in terms of advertising. And for all that expenditure they got no returns for it. They still lost the election and they still were not able—[*Interruption*]

Mr. Lee: Madam Speaker, Madam Speaker—[*Interruption*]

Hon. M. Cuffie: I am making the point, Madam Speaker, that when we talk about communications—[*Interruption*]

Mr. Lee: I am guided by 55(b), please.

Madam Speaker: Member for Pointe-a-Pierre, you have raised an objection under what Standing Order?

Mr. Lee: I am looking for your guidance under Standing Order 55(b), Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker: Standing Order 55(1)(b)?

Mr. Lee: Yeah.

Madam Speaker: No, I will allow the Member for La Horquetta/Talparo to continue.

Hon. M. Cuffie: Madam Speaker, I understand—[*Interruption*]

Dr. Moonilal: Madam Speaker, 48(6). Madam Speaker, he said, we stole an election. What is wrong with you?

Madam Speaker: Member for La Horquetta/Talparo, I think you could rephrase that and move on please.

Hon. M. Cuffie: Madam Speaker, I did not—I think it is the Member for Naparima who spoke about stealing an election. But I understand. They cannot take the jamming. In the sums that we have been able to save at the Ministry of Public Administration and Communications, we were able to initiate the project

putting Wi-Fi on buses.

Now I know the Member for Caroni Central will say that is another project that was conceived by them which they did not execute and which we saw value in and we got it executed expeditiously. And the interesting thing about that project, now, under us it cost \$113,000. Under them it would have cost a few millions. But that project, by putting Wi-Fi on 13 buses, has significantly changed the transportation landscape. I do not know if you know that now you have Wi-Fi on maxi-taxis. [*Crosstalk*]

Madam Speaker, I understand that those on the other side cannot accept the fact that they are in Opposition, likely to remain there for a considerable length of time and we will either do it with you or we would do it without you, but we have the responsibility to guide Trinidad and Tobago out of the economic malaise in which you left this Government—[*Desk thumping*] And we intend to do that smoothly, carefully and by communicating to the people of Trinidad and Tobago that we have a plan, we are in charge and that we will get us out of this. Madam Speaker, I thank you. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker: Members, I would like to hear the contribution from the Member of La Horquetta/Talparo. The behaviour of some Members here is bordering on being unparliamentary and I am sure that is not intended, so if we can, please, respect the decorum of this House. Member for La Horquetta/Talparo.

Hon. M. Cuffie: Madam Speaker, I had concluded my contribution. [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. Member: “Yuh finish before you start.”

Dr. Lackram Bodoie (Fyzabad): [*Desk thumping*] Thank you very much, Madam Speaker, for the opportunity to contribute to this Motion which is a Motion laid

before us today to:

“...adopt the First Report of the Standing Finance Committee of the House of Representatives for the Second Session (2016/2017), Eleventh Parliament on the consideration of proposals for the Variation of Appropriation for the fiscal year 2016.”

Madam Speaker, the Minister of Finance has advised this House that the sum of \$120,781,446 transferred to the Ministry of Public Administration and Communications was a simple transfer of the balance from the Ministry of Communications when that Ministry was merged with the Ministry of Public Administration. And this is published in the *Trinidad and Tobago Gazette*, dated March 17, 2016.

Madam Speaker, in perusing that document and looking at the figures, this allocation would have meant, according to the figures provided, that the Ministry of Public Administration and Communications would have spent just over \$1.3 billion in 2016. The question then, Madam Speaker, that I would like us to address ourselves to in this House is really, what value would this expenditure have provided for the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago? Because I think really that is the question.

Indeed, Madam Speaker, the question that springs to mind immediately is, what is the state of government communication? When one peruses the *Gazette* notification that combined both Ministries, Communications and Public Administration, we see listed here under the Schedule, which would be the responsibility for the Minister of Public Administration and Communications, listed amongst his many responsibilities would be the public service, public service transformation, government information. So I just want to address myself to the

issue of government information and the whole issue of communication and the hon. Member for La Horquetta/Talparo spoke about a National Conversation Initiative. But, Madam Speaker, I think in a situation in which we find ourselves, communication and relating to the population is extremely important.

4.30 p.m.

The Minister seemed to have indicated—he was trying to measure the value of the expenditure and communication in terms of whether you won an election or not. I beg to differ. I do not think that is the point. And this point is really made here in—and if you permit me to quote and to draw your attention to a commentary in today's *Guardian* newspaper—and this commentary is by Raymond Ramcharitar. The headline says:

“So much depends upon Maxie Cuffie”

Hon. Member: He is a messenger with no message.

Mr. R. Paray: And this commentary is very, very instructive because what it says—and goes to say that, and I quote:

Something is very strange about government communications.

And this is in the context of a situation where—and again I quote, and these are his words:

“The population is stressed and terrified by just watching the news and reading the newspapers.”

Mrs. Persad-Bissessar SC: Because of Maxie Cuffie?

Mr. R. Paray: No. [*Laughter and crosstalk*]

“So much depends upon Maxie Cuffie

Now they're dealing with the possibility of job loss and looking after their families.”

And the point that is made in this commentary, Madam Speaker, is that regardless of the situation, but especially now that we are in a very difficult situation with the economy with citizens facing job loss on a daily basis, with the increasing crime—and you know, we say that crime is not important, but, you know, just an hour before this sitting I got a call from one of my constituents, very disturbed, where his house was shot up last night, a ransom was demanded for the release of his wife. I mean, that is very, very distressing. Unfortunately, I was already here in the Parliament—

Madam Speaker: Member, this is not a debate on crime, so I would ask you to get back on track. I was understanding where you were going until you digressed. Please.

Mr. R. Paray: Thank you, Madam Speaker. But the point I was making—I will be guided—was that we are in a situation where it is difficult, and I just use crime, I use the economy, I use job loss, I use the other situations that we are facing, and I agree with the Member for La Horquetta/Talparo that we have difficult circumstances to manage, but I think what is important is the way the Government communicates the situation. There has been absolutely no dialogue or little dialogue about the plans of the Government; how they are treating with the situation.

Again, if you can permit me to read from this commentary—and I quote.

“To put it as simply as possible: if people feel confident the Government is working (even ineptly)”—and these are not my words—“to solve the problems, and not cackling with...glee as they impose austerity, maybe they’ll feel confident enough to not panic and spirit their capital away.”

So I just make that point, Madam Speaker, that the communication is very, very

important. And in fact a national conversation initiative might be a good idea for this Government to adopt in terms of communicating to the population.

So, Madam Speaker, in terms of the expenditure, I would just want to look at the expenditure with regard to CNMG and GISL and to note that if one looks at the expenditure for the entire year of 2016, we would have seen \$18 million expended on CNMG, \$18 million expended on GISL. And I must say I am a little bit disappointed in the contribution of the Member for La Horquetta/Talparo. I know he had distractions, but I really was hoping and expecting that, perhaps, he would have used his time to tell us a bit more about what was happening in terms of the Ministry of Public Administration and Communications.

But be that as it may, I would still pose a few questions which, hopefully, those on the other side will find the opportunity to address and to give us some answers on this side. You know, Madam Speaker, for some time now the Minister of Public Administration and Communications has been talking about the future status and operations of the state-owned CNMG, and I am sure the population is wondering what the state of play is on this matter. And if you will permit me, Madam Speaker, again to quote from a newspaper report on December 22, 2015, and there is a caption here of the hon. Minister, and I quote:

“One of the first mandates of the recently-appointed Board of the Caribbean New Media Group/Government Information Services Limited...given by line Minister”—the hon. Maxie—“Cuffie, was to coordinate a public consultation on the role of State media in Trinidad and Tobago.

‘The Board, which was chaired by Helen Drayton, completed this mandate and the public consultation was held from November 2-8.’”

So I ask the hon. Minister, Madam Speaker, if he can, perhaps, update the

population, through this House, on the status of this consultation and where, in fact, this report has reached because this report certainly has not been laid in the Parliament, and I was not able to get access to this report. So that is something that perhaps we can have in terms of the guidance going forward.

And again, the question that some of us would have is that: is there a proposal to effect a merger of CNMG and the Government Information Services Limited? I think the other question that needs to be addressed and to be answered is that, really, what is the business of the State in operating a commercial television station? Especially when we have a situation where other media organizations, in the face of the economic downturn, are perhaps having survival challenges in terms of advertising revenue, and so on. So I think that is something that we would like to, Minister, get your opinion on.

So the other aspect of the Ministry that the Minister is responsible for would be the issue of public service and the situation that we currently are in. Madam Speaker, it is no secret that on a daily basis many of our citizens continue to experience hardship and inconvenience in trying to access services at many public institutions and agencies. It is also well known that many of our public servants work in conditions that are less than ideal and yet they are expected to provide a high quality service.

So what, really, do our citizens think about the services that are offered by public entities and organizations? And if you will permit me, Madam Speaker, to refer to a Market and Opinion Research International, so-called MORI, Caribbean Limited poll in February 2010, which was done on behalf of the Ministry of Public Administration and Communications on the public and civil service with regard to the satisfaction level of citizens when they access public services. I would just give

some figures here. These were some of the things that were sampled: Delivering poor service, 53 per cent; slow, 49 per cent; corrupt, 83 per cent; unsatisfactory, 31 per cent; impolite, 27 per cent; inadequate, 18 per cent; unaccountable, 14 per cent; efficient, a mere 11 per cent.

And I just bring to the attention of the House, that poll because, you know, Madam Speaker, there are several divisions within the Ministry of Public Administration and Communications with names that are full of promise. We have the Public Service Academy, we have the Public Management Consulting Division and we have one called the Public Service Transformation Division. And, really and truly, the question is, you know, how far along are we in terms of the training of the public services?

And, again, I would have expected and anticipated that we would have heard what measures were taken, you know, what was done in 2016 with that expenditure to train, to re-skill and the sort of retooling that is required, and something that should—you know, to increase the competency of our public servants which will lead to better customer service, improve service delivery and, of course, the decreased administrative bureaucracy that is important for us to function, especially in these difficult times.

So, you know, I am asking that—and I am also asking: can the Minister indicate—because we also had sight or heard of an initiative where there was going to be a transformation and the creation of what are called Management Support Officers, and this was really to be a 21st Century cadre of public service workers who will replace the existing clerks, more skilled, more trained and so on. So, again, I look forward to some response from the Minister.

I really thought, Minister, that you would have given those responses. I

know you were distracted and you went in one direction but, hopefully, we will get those answers. And, of course, we are looking to what the Ministry is doing in terms of increasing efficiency and productivity, in terms of flexitime, flexi-desking, which would make better use of limited resources and increase convenience for workers. And, of course, one of the other things that is very, very important as we go forward, is the issue of performance measurement. So, really, are we going to be looking at an output-based performance measurement, as opposed to just the mere clocking of eight hours at work on a daily basis? So we need to look at those issues as we go forward.

Madam Speaker, I would now want to address the issue of the eGovernment and the single electronic window. My colleague, the Member for Caroni Central, would have indicated what is required in terms of doing business in Trinidad and Tobago, making ease of business. We also would be looking at a situation—*[Interruption]* it really is important in terms of having a single platform to communicate within ministries and between ministries. And I just want to give one example here, which would be the issue of medical records in health institutions, for example, where, if we have that electronic window, Madam Speaker, you can have the easy transferability of medical records which would make it important and easier for patient care.

So, Madam Speaker, in terms of where we are—and I did quote a poll of 2010, but we are in 2017 and the question is really: are we getting any better service from the public service in 2017 than we did in 2010? And if you again will permit me to quote from the *Trinidad Guardian* of yesterday—*[Interruption]* My colleague is reminding me of which offices—the licensing office.

And this heading here is the *Trinidad Guardian*:

Standing Finance Committee Report
(Adoption)
Mr. R. Paray (cont'd)

2017.01.18

“People in region have poor view on quality of public service.”

This is a publication yesterday—yesterday’s newspaper, *Trinidad Guardian*.
And it says, basically, that:

“The Inter-American Development Bank (IDB) says it has conducted studies which show the low regard citizens—”

Mr. Cuffie: Would the Member give way? Member for Fyzabad, could you say—I know of the study. Could you say when it was conducted?

Mr. R. Paray: I did try to get the studies. They are not yet available. This is just a report on the studies.

Mr. Cuffie: When was it—?

Mr. R. Paray: It was published in yesterday’s newspaper. But point is, Member, it really does not matter. The point I am making is that we cannot politicize this. We have had challenges going back years. [*Interruption*] No, no, but we have had challenges going back years. I was just comparing 2010 to 2016, where we are right now. [*Interruption*] No, but the point I am making—and if you look at the results—if we are looking at the results, then we need to examine if what we are doing is the correct thing, and this is across governments. This is the point I am making. And as long as we continue to take it in that way, Madam Speaker—

I was saying that the IDB report says that:

“...studies show the low regard citizens in Latin America and the Caribbean have for the quality of public services they receive.”

And they looked at satisfaction levels in several countries, including Trinidad and Tobago, and they produced two reports from this.

“In the first report titled ‘Simplifying Lives: Quality and Satisfaction with Public Service’”—“give a low rating to common government procedures

such as getting a doctor's appointment or reporting a robbery..."

In fact, what they did—the survey indicated—they looked at six common procedures. They looked at getting disability benefits; getting a doctor's appointment in the public health system; reporting a robbery; registering for a birth certificate; registering a child in a public school and renewing an identification document. And interesting—and, well, unfortunately—in terms of the rating, Trinidad and Tobago got the lowest rating, with 4.6 when you measure out of 10.

Hon. Member: 2016—it has gotten worse.

Mr. R. Paray: You know, 2015/2016. The point I am making is that we have a long way to go, Madam Speaker. So, Madam Speaker, I thought I would make those points and to indicate that in terms of the expenditure that we would have incurred in the Ministry of Public Administration and Communications, whether we really would have gotten value for money, and really, where are we in terms of transforming the very important public service.

With those few words, Madam Speaker, I thank you. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker: Hon. Members, you would observe that the time is 4.46. I believe the Leader of the House and the Whip had agreed for us to sit until 5.00 because we started at 2.30, so that we would have taken the suspension at 5.00. Might I ask, Member for Cumuto/Manzanilla, are you going to exceed the 15 minutes?

Hon. Member: Who is on your side—?

Madam Speaker: I recognized—I saw the Member for Cumuto/Manzanilla. Are you going to be longer than 15 minutes? You will be taking the full 30 minutes?

Mrs. Newallo-Hosein: Yes.

Madam Speaker: Okay. So that I will allow you to start and we will then take the

tea break at five o'clock. [*Desk thumping*]

Mrs. Christine-Newallo-Hosein (*Cumuto/Manzanilla*): Thank you, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, on Friday the Standing Finance Committee sat here and we were told to note that they were going to be—we were to note the following final review. We were not asked to approve or anything, just to note. And as such, in noting it, the Minister of Finance indicated that as a result of the decline in oil prices in the international market and its ensuing impact on petroleum product prices, there was a significant reduction in subsidy, thereby creating a savings, and therefore the variation was applied of \$370,497,277 towards the Ministry. And before I even go on to the Ministry of Social Development and Family Services, I was very concerned as to—with all these savings—what measures are being put in place to adequately address the decreasing income to gas stations? As we have read in the newspapers and seen on the media that a number gas stations have been closing down as a result of a reduction in their expenditure, and as such, there is a cause for concern that there may be a fuel crisis in the country to motorists. So I would like the Minister to really indicate if, at all, any consideration has been given to gas stations with this increase.

Madam Speaker: Member, remember we are talking about the fiscal year 2015/2016.

Mrs. C. Newallo-Hosein: Yes.

Madam Speaker: Okay. Thanks.

Mrs. C. Newallo-Hosein: This happened during the 2016, and it was a question that I had addressed at that point as well.

Continuing to the matter before us, Madam Speaker, we saw that there was—with the variation, the reasoning given in the report was that in accordance

with the—transfers reflected changed circumstances in the Ministries and particularly for the Ministry of Social Development and Family Services, it was indicated that the reasons for transfer was, one, to provide for the shortfall in allocation with respect of the sub-items: disability grants and senior citizens grant, as a result of an increase in rates as well as the increase in the number of persons eligible to access the grants, which totalled \$30,040 million. The second was to settle outstanding commitments to key stakeholders in the sum of \$11,900,000, and of course, finally to facilitate the payment of arrears of salaries and cost-of-living allowance to monthly paid and hourly and daily-rated employees.

Then you have, coming down in the report, reasons for savings. And it says that savings have been realized due to non-receipt of work sheets from other units quantifying arrears owed public officers for the period 2011 to 2013. Additionally, vacant positions were not filled in fiscal 2016 in a sum of \$7.5 million. And the justification was that these savings were realized since a policy decision was taken by the Ministry to suppress expenditure under the following sub items which were: other social programmes, non-profit institutions; non-profit institutions, other, social family and, of course, the National Social Development Programme.

And, Madam Speaker, the section entitled: “Reasons for Savings” really was very disturbing, as no worksheets quantifying arrears owed to public officers had been received. At least that is the reason. Madam Speaker, it is imperative that the question as to the possible existence of these worksheets be asked. Is it that the Minister, the Permanent Secretary and the accounting department did all that was necessary to facilitate the preparation of such worksheets? Or, can we be given the assurance that if these worksheets were to be submitted, that the Minister would give the undertaking to have them paid within a reasonable timeframe? And in the

instance of such, where will the money come from to pay these arrears?

Madam Speaker, in keeping with the report, we have the senior citizens grant and the schedule of variation of estimates increased to \$292,317,156. And if we were to just use the current grant value of \$3,500 per citizen, it meant, therefore, Madam Speaker, that approximately, in working out an estimate, that close to 7,000 senior citizens would not have received their assistance for every month in 2016 and that is very concerning. Because what we are trying to say is that in suppressing the figures for this period that a number of persons would have been denied their pension. And I am dealing with—right here, right now—the senior citizens' pension.

And when we brought questions to the House of a number of persons who had actually articulated that they had not received their pensions, there was not any answer forthcoming, except to say that the cheques would be in the mail and it would be forthcoming at some time, when, in fact, according to this “Reasons for Savings” a lot of the programmes were, in fact, suppressed, and therefore, you brought undue hardship to a number of senior citizens.

In addition to that, Madam Speaker, a number of persons are looking on and trying to establish, with all these savings, you know, throughout—we looked at the budget and we sat down here and we were able to ask questions. Of course, we did not receive the answers, and we are seeing now that with all the cuts that they have made, if you look at each of the figures that they have attached variations, the figures were, in fact, increased to the very amount that it was decreased by for that 12-month period, which in 13th month of October that we were told by the hon. Minister of Finance is what we are dealing with because we have to pay back the Treasury.

We understand all of that, but at the end of the day, Madam Speaker, the people who depend on these grants to survive on a daily basis do not understand that. They do not understand and they cannot relate to the fact that the Minister can come here in January of 2017 to indicate well, this is what happened last year and this is why. And, Madam Speaker, what is being put in place to take care of the shortfall? Because also in this report it speaks about the increase in rates. Now, I know that the hon. Minister had indicated in his 2015 budget that they were going to increase the ceiling of the old age pension from \$3,500 to \$5,000. A number of persons have not been re-evaluated to see if they have qualified for that increase and, as such therefore, it means that there will be a further deficit in the expenditure. So is this being taken into account for the fiscal year that we are speaking about?

Let me speak about the proposed variances for social assistance grant, which was increased by \$33, 818,880. If we have to look at what is the average grant—the amount—it is an average of \$1,100 per grant, and that is per person. That means if we have to look at the variances, that nearly 2,820 persons would not have received their assistance every month in 2016. And this comes back again, Madam Speaker, to the fact that many of us here, when our constituents come to us and indicate that there has been a cut in their grant and we bring the concerns, again, there was not a forthcoming answer. Now we see why, and now we understand why. But we cannot agree to it. It is after the fact.

I think, Madam Speaker, you made it very clear on Friday that we are not here to agree to anything; we are just here to note, and we have noted it. And as such, we are very concerned as to what will happen in this fiscal year. Will there be another shortfall? Will persons not get their moneys, as what happened last

year? Will there be sufficient funds for it? Because you are speaking about putting in place for an increase in rates; you are putting in place for an increase in the number of persons eligible to access grants, but there is not anything in place, as far as I am aware—because the figures that you actually cut it by last year are, in fact, the same amount that are being increased by—the exact figures.

Then we have the disability grant which was increased by \$44,361,241, and this grant is approximately \$1,800 which translates to roughly 2,050 citizens who would not have received their grants every month in 2016. And so I want to ask again: how can we reconcile this with the population? Because the population is very concerned as to what they hear in the Parliament now. They do not know if they can trust whatever comes out of the mouths of the politicians, particularly the Government. [*Desk thumping*]

So, Madam Speaker, I am here, just as my colleagues on this side of the Bench—we are here representing not only our constituents, but the persons on the other side who cannot get answers who are in the constituency offices of the Government. [*Desk thumping*] So, Madam Speaker, I know that we are here; we are limited to the report. I am going to stick to the report and all these are in the report, in case the hon. Minister wants to quote 48(1), because I am very relevant and very on target as to what is happenings in this report.

Madam Speaker: Hon. Members, this House is now suspended until 5.30.

5.00 p.m.: *Sitting suspended.*

5.30 p.m.: *Sitting resumed.*

Madam Speaker: Member for Cumuto/Manzanilla, you have 17 more minutes of your original time.

Mrs. C. Newallo-Hosein: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I spoke about the senior

citizens' grant, the public assistance grant, disability grant and, Madam Speaker, we have come, on this side, to recognize that everything that we stated as priority projects necessary for the development of the country and the citizenry, this Government condemned in all their budget statements. But interestingly, now we are seeing that those very same projects have been listed for increases in the proposed variances. Therefore, they have explicitly verified that we, under the People's Partnership, were on the right track from the very beginning. [*Desk thumping*]

Whilst it may not be of best parliamentary terms, my inclination is still to say to those on the other side, "we told you so"; we told you that. Anyway, Madam Speaker, the Government, led by the Minister of Finance, attempted to prove to the nation that they were able to reduce expenditure by cutting and slashing everything, but now they have brought it back again, all those things that they have slashed, as though we, the parliamentarians and the citizenry outside, would not recognize that the very same projects and programmes that this Government decried mere months ago are being reintroduced and probably under another name and I will show you how.

I continue to the contract employment and short-term employment. Items 16 and 22 Contract Employment and Short-term Employment raised serious red flags. In the earlier debates and in this same schedule, the absence of incumbents in these posts and savings on short-term personnel were cited as the reason for savings. Yet now, we see a combined \$8.4 million allocation. I remember asking in this august House, the Government—with the reduction of allocation to staffing, how was the Ministry going to function? As a matter of fact, a number of programmes could not be implemented, field visits could not be conducted as a result of the short staff,

and therefore, it was given—as a matter of fact, I remember in 2015, Madam Speaker, I was right here on this side of the House when I was told that under the PP Government we employed too many persons and that we had to remove and reduce, and they did do. Now, the programmes cannot be implemented and here we are back to square one where we were in 2015.

So it implies to me, Madam Speaker, that this is not a saving, but the employment of staff crucial to the efficient and effective delivery of services were deferred, to the detriment of citizens outside who depend on grants for their survival, and those citizens have suffered tremendously since this PNM came into Government.

Madam Speaker, weekly checks to the website of the Ministry, the National Employment Service, the Service Commission Departments, all turned up empty for such career opportunities. So we are asking a question: when will these positions be advertised; if they will ever be advertised? Even my constituents of Cumuto/Manzanilla will ever have a fair chance of obtaining gainful employment in any of these departments; and what are the differences, what will be the difference in the functions between a contract worker and a short-term employee? I was lambasted, Madam Speaker. I was lambasted for those same short-term posts that they are now increasing.

Just last Friday the Minister of Labour and Small Enterprise Development admitted ignorance to the number of former ArcelorMittal employees reintegrated into Employ Trinbago—that is, via her Ministry's flagship programme. Yet, we are to believe that they care for those persons being retrenched, or for the 200 that we heard will be receiving VSEP packages from RBC.

Madam Speaker, we the people, we ask on behalf of our constituents, we ask

for straightforward answers. We do not need additional requests for deferrals, we do not want empty promises to provide information. The people are demanding to know that their Government is working to protect them, and so do we, and protection in terms of putting the necessary grants in place that will ensure their survival. It is going to increase as long as we have a decline and a reduced workforce. There is going to be an increase for a need for services from the Ministry of Social Development and Family Services.

Madam Speaker, concerning the development projects, this administration again has become known for its grand speeches and misleading promises that remain largely unfulfilled. There is a promise of transparency, yet when questioned by the Opposition, there is always an attempt to cower and flee at the first instance, whether it is to be running from the Prime Minister's Questions, or deflecting the usual questions by saying file a new one. We are not asking on behalf of ourselves. We are asking on behalf of the constituents that each of us represent. We are asking on their behalf. Any question we bring here is not because we want to do it for ourselves. It is because we represent our constituency.

So when it is a grant has been withdrawn and there is no reasonable explanation, we come here and we ask, and therefore, this is the medium for us, as Parliamentarians, to engage the Government and to ask what your policies are, have they changed, why, is there discrimination in the process in which it is being done? Even the assistance programme which we have here, for Christmas we were told we were not going to get any food cards, then we got a call and we got. And then we heard that some offices—*[Interruption]*

Madam Speaker: Member, remember we are not in this current fiscal year. So I have allowed you some breadth, but please let us talk to the report that we are

seeking to adopt for fiscal 2016.

Mrs. C. Newallo-Hosein: Thank you, Madam Speaker. So we are concerned about whether there is equity in the system, how things are done in terms of when persons are pulled off as indicated with the other programmes.

Project 044: the Establishment of Social Displacement Centres. This vote has been primarily for the Queen Street project since 2008, but this project was deemed unsuitable and shut down by the Ministry, and that was said and done in the first quarter of the fiscal 2016. So, Madam Speaker, it begs the question, what is \$3.8 million being allocated for? Has an alternative location been identified? And as such, you know, what, where, how are these moneys going to be disbursed and for what purpose? Because you know, Madam Speaker, we have heard time and time again the budget, \$60 billion, and there is nothing that we can see for it. We want to see something. The people want to see development, they want to see productivity, they want to see action for their money.

Project 102: Toco Home for Senior Citizens. This home was completed and renovated, and renovations were done in fiscal 2016. So I do not understand what accounts for the allocation for an extension annex, and therefore, the Minister will have to explain Project 102.

Project 107: Governance Service Centres. How is this different from the ttconnect, iGovTT, whose mandate, by the way, is to provide a more accessible platform for government services? I remember during our tenure that iGov had partnered with the Ministry, and therefore, there was no need for us to develop these service centres because of the fact that iGov had the responsibility for that, and therefore, we are asking why is there moneys allocated in that section?

Then we have the Project 112: The Street Dweller Rehabilitation Re-

integration Project. Madam Speaker, this vote was created in 2012 for the Inter Agency Unit, and is specifically for the operations of the CSDP, which is the Centre for Socially Displaced Persons. We are asking, why is there an additional \$2.8 million? The reason why I am asking that is because I have been informed that there are proposals for this centre to be dismantled. So we are asking: is it that you are going to be introducing another centre to assist with the street dweller rehabilitation and reintegration project; and if so, where, how soon it would be started; is it going to be transitional?

And so, all these questions are begging for answers and we are not getting it, because we bring the questions and sometimes they are not even answered. So much so, the Member for Oropouche East had to raise a Standing Order to demand that the Minister of Housing and Urban Development respond to his questions.

Project 037: Ministry of the People—Establishment of Unit. I would like the line Minister when she contributes to this august House to help us to understand what is this unit being established for, what will it accomplish? Because as I am aware, several units have been shut down and merged as a result due to limited funding and streamlining mandates. So therefore, why is this unit being established and for what purpose?

Madam Speaker, in concluding, we have looked very closely, examining these estimates and the subsequent proposed variations and they reveal that everything that this administration boasted about, they had actually cut down on; everything that they claimed that they were spending unnecessarily, on everything they initially cut in October, has been increased to almost the same value that it has been cut, both recurrent and development expenditure.

Madam Speaker, after all those days and nights, poring over all these

estimates in October 2016 in this same Chamber, my constituents, and the population by extension, of Trinidad and Tobago, are inclined to believe—and I have been told so—that there is a grand and exaggerated attempt to mislead the population. [*Desk thumping*] And so as such, I want to come back to Friday, when hon. Prime Minister had spoken to us in the House about conducting ourselves and so forth, and I think that is what the population wants.

They want us to be able to bring the data and to explain, and to help clarify where there is no clarity. And to think that these figures were deliberately slashed, and these figures cut for the sake of the October budget, only to come back now and raise the very same figures to exactly what it was before does not sound very nice in the public's ear. It does not. I have been there because I sit with my constituents and I listen to them, and not just in Cumuto/Manzanilla but throughout the country.

And so, I have made my case very clear. There are many issues raised and it has not occurred for the first time in the Ministry. Projects have obviously been duplicated and then shut down as the way to give a smokescreen of savings. There are questions to be answered. The social fabric continues to be ripped by the lack of cohesion and fortitude in the operations of this Government. And as such, in no way and nowhere else in the world can a Government cut grants, reduce without logic and expect society to operate as normal.

So, Madam Speaker, I just want to conclude by saying, if the PNM cannot get it right, the UNC can take over Government anytime soon. [*Desk thumping*]

The Minister of Social Development and Family Services (Hon. Cherrie-Ann Crichlow-Cockburn): Thank you, Madam Speaker. [*Desk thumping*] Madam Speaker, I thank you for the opportunity to present this afternoon on the

appropriation Bill, and my main activity here today would be to indicate why the Ministry of Social Development and Family Services would have found it necessary to get resources to the tune of \$370,497,277 for the encashment of cheques for the senior citizens' pension, the disability grant and the public assistance grant cheques.

Madam Speaker, the People's National Movement has always taken the stance of being a caring Government [*Desk thumping*] and believes that the State's role in protecting and caring for the elderly, for children, for persons with disabilities and for other vulnerable groups in society which includes the poor and the indigent, and it is because of this stance that the Ministry would have found it necessary to acquire the additional funding.

Now, the Ministry of Social Development and Family Services, our core responsibility is the delivery of social services including income support. What the Ministry does is to provide a safety net for the poor and indigent and the vulnerable in our society, and because of this we are responsible for three of the major social protection programmes—senior citizens pension, the disability grant and the public assistance grant—and those programmes are all part of our poverty reduction strategy. Madam Speaker, just to let you and this august House and the public of Trinidad and Tobago know, that as at the end of September 2016 we were providing grants to 90,800 persons. We were providing them with the senior citizens' pension; 24,058 persons were receiving the disability grant; and 25,906 families, inclusive of 1,177 children with disabilities, were receiving the public assistance grant.

Now, Madam Speaker, in terms of the senior citizens' pension, the elderly citizens in our society are a treasure to this society. Why do I say they are a

treasure? It is because of the wealth of knowledge that they possess, the fact that they would have experienced a myriad of things in society and they can impart their knowledge to our youth, they can be mentors for the youth, they can share their values with the youth and so help to build a better society. They would also have worked very hard over the years to develop our community and our country, and now, Madam Speaker, most of these elderly persons are retired and as we are all aware, living on a retirement pension—the pension is significantly less than what you would have earned when you were working.

And so, we are now required to take care of the elderly in our society, and because of this, Madam Speaker, the PNM in its manifesto would have committed to within the first year to implementing a number of measures that would provide relief to those most in need within a reasonable time frame. In order to have achieved this, what we would have done, we would have reviewed the national insurance system and what was then call the old-age pension, with a view to increasing the cap and the pension payment, and putting more money into the hands of our economically disadvantaged citizens so that they would have had more money available to them for the basic things that they need in society.

Now, some of the immediate results of having put a cap on the pensions and adjusting the schedule was that the statutory limit to qualify for the maximum pension moved from less than or equal to \$500 to less than or equal to \$1,500, and what this did was to increase the numbers of persons who qualified to the maximum pension of \$3,500 by 6,618 persons. The statutory limit to qualify for the senior citizens' pension also increased from \$3,500 to \$4,500, and what this did is to bring on 1,432 persons who could not have qualified previously.

In addition, Madam Speaker, in 2016, we had 9,058 new pensioners coming

on to the system and because of the adjustment in the schedule, an immediate increase in pension was paid to 28,000 persons. What this would have meant is that there would have been a substantial increase in our senior citizens' pension bill, and that is the primary reason for us having to go to the Minister of Finance and the Cabinet to request additional funding in the sum of \$370,497,277.

Now, Madam Speaker, as a responsible Government and a responsible Ministry, we would have budgeted for 13 months. So initially, we would have budgeted with the expectation that funds would have been available to pay these benefits in October, because we pay our benefits on the first of the month. But again, as I indicated before, because of these increases and the additional persons coming on to the system, as at August we would have recognized that there was going to be a shortfall in revenue. During September, we were able to make up this shortfall by the transfer of sums under the Ministry's head, but that could not have been realized for October so we would have approached Cabinet and the Minister of Finance, and we would have had an advance of the \$370,497,277. [*Desk thumping*]

Now, Madam Speaker, the Member on the other side would have asked the question when we were before the committee about persons not being paid their pensions, and I would have indicated that for the 15 months that the PNM would have been in power all of those benefits were paid on time and to the persons eligible for those payments. [*Desk thumping*]

I sat here this afternoon and again the Member for Cumuto/Manzanilla would have indicated that 7,000 senior citizens would not have received pension due to the suppression of figures. I do not know what figure she would have been looking at. I am at a total loss because the reason the Ministry would have sought

the increase was to ensure payment to all of our grant recipients. We all live in Trinidad and Tobago and if there was ever a situation, where as much as 7,000 people were not paid their senior citizens' pension, we would all know because there would have been a huge public outcry.

Madam Speaker, I think what the Member would have done if she would have done her simple maths, and she would have looked at the figures, and she would have looked at \$44,361,241, and she would have divided it by the \$1,800, and then she would have assumed there was a shortfall. That is the furthest thing from the truth. If you divide \$44,361,241 by \$1,800, which is what is paid as a disability grant, you will get a figure roughly of twenty-something thousand.

Now, the number of persons who are paid disability grant every month is 24,058. So what that clearly establishes is that the figures that are reflected here is the total sum paid to our beneficiaries in the different categories every month. It does not reflect any situation where persons—2,000 not receiving disability grant and 7,000 not receiving senior citizen pension—Madam Speaker, nothing is further from the truth; and I want to assure the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago that all persons who were eligible for these grants and pension, and who have been paid those grants and pension, there was never a situation where any payment would have been missed. All payments would have been effected to the persons who were eligible on time and in the correct amounts.

The Member also spoke in terms about the vacant positions and the fact that she would have seen funds allocated to short-term. Madam Speaker, under the People's Partnership, approval would have been given for a six-year plan for the Ministry. At that time it would have been the Ministry of the People and Social Development. That plan makes provision for over 600 positions. So there would

have been over 600 vacancies. There is no way that we could have filled all of those vacancies during 2016. So what was done, some of those—positions have been advertised and interviews have been held, but we were not in a position where we could have adequately advertised and filled vacancies for all of those positions.

So what was done previously, and what is still being done until we are able to correct the situation, is that persons were brought in on short-term to provide the necessary services. And I want to assure this House, and the people of Trinidad and Tobago, that at no time was there a situation where we would have been below the required staff strength and that our delivery of service to the public would have been compromised because we had insufficient numbers. What I can say to this House is that our service would have been compromised because there may be persons currently employed—who would have been employed previously and are still with us—who may not have the necessary capacity, some of them may not have the necessary competencies or knowledge, and some of them would not have had the qualification.

What you find in the Ministry at this point in time—because as we are in process of doing interviews and you are looking at people's past performance and how they would have come in to the Ministry—what is being discovered is that a number of people in senior critical positions came in to the Ministry without the position being advertised, without interviews being held, and in some instances when you look at the person's résumé you recognize that they are not a proper fit for the position.

So where the Ministry's capacity would have been compromised to serve the public would have been because there were situations where persons were employed by Ministers and others who did not have the necessary skills,

competencies or qualifications for the positions. Madam Speaker, I want to re-emphasize that. It is not about the Ministry reducing its staff strength, it is about in some instances the quality of staff that we have in the Ministry, and I also want to make it clear this is in the minority. This is not in the majority.

The hon. Minister would also have indicated that at the Ministry of Social Development and Family Services we have cut a number of grants. Madam Speaker, we administer 13 grants and they are all still being administered. I think what the Member would have misunderstood, which I do not believe she should have because she functioned as the Minister in the Ministry, is that under other social programmes, what we speak about there, we speak about seminars, outreach programmes, training. That does not refer to the core grants that are administered by the Ministry of Social Development and Family Services.

So to indicate to this House and the public that we would have cut grants is totally erroneous. What we would have done is having to operate in straitened economic situations where there is need to cut. There would have been need to cut expenditure and get value for money. We would have looked at the programmes planned, the seminars planned, the outreach programmes planned, and we would have revisited the manner in which it was done. For example, you may be hosting a seminar or a walkathon, instead of purchasing 2,000 T-shirts and 2,000 cups and 2,000 bags as souvenirs, what we would have done is we would have identified a colour and asked participants to wear a particular colour.

Hon. Member: Red.

Hon. C. Crichlow-Cockburn: Red, of course.

And that would have been the manner in which we would have reduced our expenditure and that is why we would have realized savings. So I just want to

make it abundantly clear to this House and Trinidad and Tobago that the Ministry of Social Development and Family Services, we have not cut any of our grants. What we have done is we have sought to streamline what we do and to operate more efficiently, effectively and in a cost-effective manner.

6.00 p.m.

The hon. Member would also have made reference to the fact that worksheets could not have been provided and there was concern that persons who were due an arrears would not get it because this would have happened. Madam Speaker, this particular expenditure under Salaries and COLA refers to those persons who are employed with the Ministry of Gender which was transferred under the Office of the Prime Minister. Now, because the budget would have been approved prior to this transfer, the Head remained with the Ministry of Social Development and Family Services for some time, and when we were trying to regularize this, they were not in a position to provide the necessary details at the point in time and so the cost would have been covered otherwise. So it is not a matter of these persons would not be able to be paid when the time comes but it was just a matter of at the point in time when we were looking at streamlining and regularizing the accounts, this is what was done.

Madam Speaker, I now want to just look at the persons with disabilities. Currently, there are approximately 52,000 persons living in Trinidad and Tobago who have a disability of some kind. Now 46.25 per cent or 24,058 of those persons receive a disability grant from the Ministry of Social Development and Family Services, and this is because, in most instances, they are unable to work. So they are dependent on that grant for almost their very existence. And so, Madam Speaker, in addition to ensure that these persons are provided with income support,

that is why we would have gone and we would have gotten the necessary additional funds. And I think it is very important for us in this House to understand that this Ministry of Social Development and Family Services and this Government takes its responsibilities, particularly to our poor and vulnerable persons in society, very seriously! [*Desk thumping*] So there is no way, Madam Speaker, that we would have taken any actions that would have jeopardized the payment of pensions and grants to these persons.

As a matter of fact, because we recognize that we have a lot of things to do to support and assist these persons, we have over the 2016 period paid \$35.5 million in subventions to NGOs, CBOs, FBOs and statutory bodies that provide services to persons with disabilities. And I am saying all of this, Madam Speaker, to elaborate and to stress the point that this Government will ensure that we take care of the poor and vulnerable in our society. [*Desk thumping*]

The third area that would have caused us to seek additional funding was the Public Assistance Grant. Now this is a grant that is paid to children with special needs, it is also paid to children whose parents may have died or are incarcerated. All of us in this House, if we just reflect on the last year, we would recognize how many persons would have been murdered, many of them parents. So there are a number of children living in Trinidad and Tobago who either would have lost a parent or both parents or would have a parent who is incarcerated.

This Government believes that it has a responsibility to ensure that those persons are taken care off and this Public Assistance Grant assists in doing that. So there is no way—and I would reemphasize this during my entire discourse—that this Government would anything to jeopardize the payments of these grants to these persons. These are vulnerable people, these are the children that we have to

ensure are taken care off and we do that. And so, Madam Speaker, the allocation for those three programmes for 2016 was \$4.2 billion and because as at August, we would have recognized that we would have already spent \$4.1 billion, and that we needed to have the additional \$370 million, we would have approached Cabinet and the Minister of Finance for additional funding which was provided.

Madam Speaker, I now want to take the opportunity, just before I close, to deal with some comments of the honourable speaker for Cumuto/Manzanilla where she would have spoken in terms of the development programmes. Madam Speaker, she would have made reference to—*[Interruption]* The Member—sorry, I am ever so sorry, Madam Speaker. No disrespect intended, hon. Member for Cumuto/Manzanilla. Reference would have been made to the establishment of social displacement centres. Now, under the previous Government, they would have identified the building at Queen Street for the establishment of a social displacement centre. Unfortunately, however, when we would have attempted to start the procedure to have that building outfitted for the purpose for which it was intended, it was discovered that the building was structurally unsound. In those circumstances, the Government funds could not have been spent to continue with that project and so the project was discontinued.

In terms, we have here the development centre for persons with challenges. This is what we normally refer to as the National Enrichment Centre. And as I would have said in this House time and again, while this is a priority project because it is supposed to assist the persons with disabilities in our society, we have not been able to complete that project and operationalize it because when this project was embarked on, first to begin, it was not built to design, in addition to which the statutory approvals required have not been secured. The building is

supposed to be built for persons with disabilities but there is an elevator that cannot accommodate a wheelchair, and there were a myriad of problems with that building and that is why that project has not been completed. So it has nothing to do with the lack of management skills of the Members on this side. It simply has to do that the previous administration, who would have been the ones who would have embarked on this project, did not take the necessary action that needed to be taken. They did not ensure that there was a project manager and that the project was a project that could have been brought to fruition easily.

Comments were also made in terms of the Street Dwellers Rehabilitation and Re-Integration Project. Now this is the project at Riverside Plaza and it is the only building in Port of Spain where our socially displaced can be housed, where they can be assessed and where rehabilitation can take place. And so, Madam Speaker, this is a project that we have continued because it is one that is absolutely necessary because if this project is discontinued, it means that over 180 socially displaced persons would be back on the streets of Port of Spain. So while there is a savings reflected of \$2.8 million, it is simply because the major part of the project is taking place currently in 2017 and would not have been completed in 2016. So it is not that the project is going to be abandoned, it is simply that at the point in time, at the end of 2016, we would have gotten to the point where we would had the designs done for the redoing of the electrical and the refurbishment of that building.

Some of the other projects identified here are projects that would have been in keeping with the People's Partnership policy position that are not in line with the People's National Movement's policies and position and that is why they would have been placed on hold or discontinued. It has nothing to do with the

inability of the persons on this side to manage these projects.

And so, Madam Speaker, in closing, I just want to emphasize the fact that the Ministry of Social Development and Family Services would have found it necessary to secure additional resources to the tune of \$370,497,277 to ensure that our senior citizens, our persons with disabilities and those persons who receive the public assistance, our poor, indigent and vulnerable, would have received their payment in October 2016.

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

Dr. Tim Gopeesingh (*Caroni East*): Thank you, Madam Speaker. I rise to make a short intervention on this variation and appropriation note for fiscal 2016, and I will go straight to the presentation from the Minister of Finance and seek some clarification and answers in relation to some of the numeric values that he gave and some of the figures he quoted. And I want to reemphasize the point that my colleague made, that he gave a lot of fiscal information in a number of areas that are wide and if we were privileged to have that information before, possibly last Friday, we might have been able to make some more contribution on the areas which he mentioned. But if we are to focus now—so it is a bit sad that we had not been privileged to get that information so we can comment on them as we were here now and we might not get another opportunity to do so.

The other point is that this comes in conjunction with a finance Bill and the Members on that side, the Minister of Finance had the opportunity to bring both Bills together, the note and the Bill together, under special Standing Orders and he did not do so and that shows some degree of incompetence and incapacity in terms of the governance aspect on the other side, and this is what the general population is seeing far and wide. This aspect of their governance seems to be very

pervasive, inability and incapacity to do the things that are required for proper governance.

Let me go straight to the issue of his statements on the expenditure and the revenue and to correlate that with figures that are given from the draft estimates for Trinidad and Tobago for financial year with the estimates for 2016 and the revised estimates for 2016, according to the yellow or brown books that we were given at the beginning of this fiscal year in the Finance Bill of 2016 for 2016/2017. The expenditure he stated was \$52.2 billion and he had stated that the projected expenditure was \$63.49 billion. I was able to write that down. But in the book that was presented to us in Parliament, in September—well for the presentation of the 2016/2017 Finance Bill, that has in it 2016 estimates and 2016 revised estimates, and the revised estimates for 2016, according to this book, has for the expenditure, \$55.727 billion but the Minister stated \$52.2 billion.

So here on one hand, the revised estimates for 2016, according to the book, \$55.727 and this expenditure, he is saying is \$52.2 billion and he went to pains to say that he is tired of hearing other people saying that they spent more than what he is saying, at \$52 billion but we need some clarification from the hon. Minister. What is the true expense? Is it the revised estimates for 2016 according to the book, \$55.727 or is it \$52.2 billion? And if it is \$52.2 billion, does that include the total capital of \$3.162 billion? So what is the information—the correct information for us to appreciate as a population based on what the Minister of Finance is giving? Is it \$52.2 billion that is expenditure or \$55.727 billion? So that is the first question based on this.

Then, he speaks about revenue. The revenue, he said, was estimated for 2016 to be \$60 billion. I copied this down. Then they revised the estimate again

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and the estimated revenue was supposed to be \$44.94 billion, but he actually collected—the Ministry of Finance collected \$44.75 billion and then the deficit, he said, was \$7.6 billion, and all the data for 2016 not finalized as yet. So according to that, the deficit for 2016 is about 16 per cent of the revenue. So he said the estimated revenue was \$44.94 billion and the actual revenue collected was \$44.75 billion, let us say around \$44 billion.

Now we want to ask the hon. Minister of Finance: does this revenue include the income generated from the taking out of approximately \$2.5 billion from the Heritage and Stabilisation Fund which is about, I believe, US \$350 million that was removed? Does it include the \$2 billion on the roadshow or the one-million bond and the money generated from the sale of assets which is totalling close to about \$12 billion? [*Desk thumping*] So does this \$44 billion in revenue that he speaks about, does that include the \$12 billion generated otherwise from borrowings and the Heritage and Stabilisation Fund removal and the roadshow and the sale of assets?

So the Minister will need to tell us—the hon. Minister of Finance—whether this \$44.7 billion includes that \$12 billion or if that \$12 billion is in addition to the \$44 billion which makes it a revenue of \$56 billion. So here it is, if the revenue generated from tax, et cetera and everything else, 44 plus 12, \$56 billion, what has the Government to show from the expenditure of \$55 billion, and the country is asking that time and time again. That for fiscal 2016, the Government of the Rowley-led administration spent, and I would conjure—I would proffer that they spent close to \$56 billion rather than 52. What have they been able to demonstrate to the country for their expenditure? [*Desk thumping*]

When we spent close to \$60 billion, the country was able to see in all the

infrastructural projects what the Kamla Persad-Bissessar-led Government was able to achieve and we do not need to recap that now, the country is aware of it, but the country is asking, well here it is the hon. Prime Minister, Rowley-led Government spending close to \$56 billion and has nothing to show for it. Where did the money go? And when they claim that they had not been getting funding and finance, they had not been receiving revenues, they, in fact, received \$44 billion in revenue and another \$12 billion in revenue. So they received close to \$56 billion in revenue for fiscal 2016. Receiving \$56 billion and spending \$55 billion but still having a deficit of \$7.6 billion. The hon. Minister of Finance has some mathematical irregularities in his calculations and poor presentation to the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago.

Madam Speaker, I will go directly to the next point and that goes from the report on page 22, funds were required to bring to account debit advices for the period January to September 2016 in respect of interest charged on the overdraft under the Sub-Item Interest and Overdrafts \$712,299,169, and below that Reasons for Savings:

Expenditure under the Sub-Item Infrastructure Development Fund was lower than anticipated, given that a number of completion certificates were to be finalized and that is equivalent to the \$712,299,169.

Now, that is money that is being paid for interest on overdraft which I will come to, but in 2016, according to the books presented to us, the Infrastructure—I am reading a summary page from the books that were presented to us for the 2016 fiscal year. The estimate for 2016, Part 'A' Consolidated Fund was \$3.467 billion and Part 'B' Infrastructure Development Fund, \$3.532 billion.

So the estimates for the Development Programme were presented in two

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Parts: IDF \$3.5 billion and Consolidated Fund, \$3.467 billion, coming up to almost \$7 billion. Madam Speaker, the revised estimate for the Infrastructure Development Fund, having given an estimate for 2016, was \$3.5 billion, the revised estimate for expenditure was \$1.546 billion meaning they had \$3.5 billion for expenditure on Infrastructure Development Fund but spent only \$1.5 billion. So \$2 billion of the IDF money was not spent whether deliberately or incompetence or incapacity or inability to bring about—[*Interruption*]

Mr. Young: Choose one.

Mr. Indarsingh: All of the above.

Dr. T. Gopeesingh: All of the above—to bring about what is needed to kick start the development of the country for the 2016 fiscal year. But this country waited and waited and waited and continued to inspire, they have not even exhaled yet, they are still waiting for development to start. You had \$3.5 billion for 2016 for the Infrastructure Development Fund, you said you spent \$1.5 billion, from the book. Where was that spent? Tell us and show us where you spent that \$1.5 billion of the Infrastructure Development Fund. We cannot see any infrastructure across this country. Where has it gone? And therefore, you did not have the ability to utilize the others because of the incompetence of the Government to start any project for 2016. [*Desk thumping*] And here it is, you said you spent \$1.5 billion out of the \$3.5 billion, you still had \$2 billion left to utilize, to kick-start the economy or to move the economy forward but you failed to do so. Why? The question is, Madam Speaker, why has this Government continued to suffer the people of Trinidad and Tobago by not creating more employment? Having the ability to move infrastructure forward but lacking the competence and the capability of doing so. For a year, people have suffered and I will come to the issue of the allocations

under the various Ministries for this Infrastructure Development Fund expenditure.

So \$1.5 billion spent, nothing to show for it. Having the \$2 billion more to be spent and do not have the ability and the capacity to spend the money. So this demonstrates convincingly to the national population that is this Rowley-led Government is an incompetent Government. [*Desk thumping*] Very incompetent. They do not seem to know where to go, they do not know where to start and they are all floundering in the middle of nowhere, the middle of nowhere. So 16 months now have passed and the country sees nothing and yet these figures cannot be contradicted. They are here in writing and these are the straight facts. It is in black and white.

So expenditure under the Infrastructure Development Fund, it is an admission. It is an admission by the Minister of Finance in the presentation of this report and note. It was lower than anticipated given that a number of completion certificates were to be finalized—712 million in completion certificates not finalized after 12 months. People worked and just for an example. We had a response to a written question on the PURE Programme for 2016 and the written response showed that there were a number of contractors who did work for the Government—for the people under this Government, and at the end of it, not one cent was paid to the PURE contractors. [*Desk thumping*] Not one cent and the answer is there for us in black and white as well, cannot be contradicted. So they asked people to do work, they have the funding to pay the people and by their own admission, it was lower than anticipated that given a number of completion certificates were not finalized. What gross incompetence, again.

After 12 months, you cannot finalize, complete—[*Interruption*]

Hon. Members: Sixteen, sixteen.

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Dr. T. Gopeesingh: Well, we would ask him about the question for the PURE Programme in 2016. So after 12 months, you cannot complete certificates and you have the Minister of everything having audits upon audits, audits upon audits, could come up with nothing because the audits showed that there was transparency and accountability by the Kamla Persad-Bissessar regime, [*Desk thumping and laughter*] and there was nothing they can find but it is because of spite and vindictiveness and malice that they are suffering the contractors across the country.

Do you know, hon. Minister of Finance and Members on the other side, how much pain and anguish you have caused to people in this country who have utilized their own money to do construction work? They have taken from their pockets, their bank accounts and you all have targeted them and saying “We not paying them”, and that is spite and vindictiveness and malice and you are guilty of that as a Government. Full of incompetence, full of spite, full of malice and full of vindictiveness. [*Desk thumping*] What type of Government is this? Do you want this country to prosper?

Madam Speaker: Member for Caroni East, please relate what you are saying to the Motion before us. Please, thank you.

6.30 p.m.

Dr. T. Gopeesingh: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I am relating it back to the fact that the Minister of Finance has, on page 22 of the report, indicated that non-completion of the certificates, which were not finalized, realized \$712 million of the Infrastructure Development Fund, so they could have used that money for something else. So that money was available to pay the people. You have people from HDC not being paid, people from EFCL not being paid. You have 72 schools that are under construction. You have stopped them. People built 102 new schools

in the country and most of them have not been paid their money as yet. So, what is this Government doing?

Dr. Francis: How many schools you built?

Dr. T. Gopeesingh: One hundred and two new schools we built across the country [*Desk thumping*] and you can see it. We advised them to go on to the website and they will see it. Sixty-three early childhood education centres, 32 primary schools and seven secondary schools and we left 78 schools under construction; many of which they have stopped with their vindictiveness as well. So that is why they have the \$712 million that they could utilize for something else. So they are utilizing it now for something else. “You know what? We ain paying these contractors the \$712 million. We going to use it for something else.” And that is what the Minister of Finance has done.

Where has he paid it to? Interest on overdraft, \$712 million. And he comes here time and again and say “All yuh buss the Treasury. We had overdraft.” But you received \$15 billion just one month after you came into Government. [*Desk thumping*] “So we could not buss no Treasury.” You received that money and you cannot deny that you received close to \$15 billion within a four- to six-week period after you came into office. So this interest that you are speaking about, \$712 million, is interest on what? Interest on overdraft. What is the value of the overdraft that we have to pay \$712 million? The Minister has not told us. We would like to have that information.

Then the Minister must tell us, does that include the interest on the servicing of the debts that is in 2016/2017. Now it is going to be \$7.3 billion in servicing debts. How much debt servicing we had to do in fiscal year 2016? We want that answer. How much interest we paid? And how much does the country owe at the

moment? The country is asking these questions. How much does Trinidad and Tobago owe at the moment in foreign debt and local debt? No matter where you search in the *Review of the Economy* you are not getting the correct answer.

So, after 16 months of PNM rule we are still confused as a nation and still do not have any information of where we are, as far as the economy is concerned. They know that the economy is terrible at the moment and this is why they are afraid to give the answer, because they have the answers but they are not giving them to the nation.

Mr. Imbert: Madam Speaker, 48(1).

Madam Speaker: Member for Caroni East, I again remind you that we are talking about the variation for fiscal 2016 and if you could bring your contribution back in line with that.

Dr. T. Gopeesingh: Thank you for the reminder, Madam Speaker. I am speaking about the interest on the overdraft of \$712 million and whether that includes the interest on the foreign debt and the local debt of Trinidad and Tobago at the moment. What is the present situation as far as debt is concerned? Because from the statements given to us, at the end of fiscal year 2016, we have to service close to \$7.4 billion in debt for 2017. So I move on now, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker, by virtue of this overdraft and the borrowing and having to pay interest on all of that, my colleague indicated, the Member for Caroni Central—[*Interruption and crosstalk*] Madam Speaker, I am getting some nonsensical statements coming from the other side.

Madam Speaker: Member for Caroni East, I know you are quite experienced. You just direct your contribution here. I am sure you could rise above that.

Dr. T. Gopeesingh: Madam Speaker, thank you. I am directing it straight to you. I

would not be bothered by the other side. My colleague from Caroni Central mentioned that we had reached a stage, in terms of the first six months of 2016 were the worst economic decline ever in the history of Trinidad and Tobago. It averaged about 6.7 per cent decline. Now, where did that take us? We went down from a GDP of \$175 billion at the end of fiscal 2015, to a GDP of \$145 billion after the first six months of fiscal 2016. So a \$30 billion drop in the GDP, and that was a 17 per cent reduction in the GDP. As a result of the fall in the GDP, and as a result of the increased debt, the debt to GDP ratio climbed to beyond 60, nearly 61 per cent from 42 per cent when we demitted office in 2015; 19 per cent more rise in the debt to GDP ratio, carrying us to junk status by the financial organizations around the world like Standard & Poor's and Moody's, et cetera. So we are now close to 60 per cent of debt to GDP at junk status.

So can the Minister of Finance go to borrow money? What will be the rate of borrowing in the future for Trinidad and Tobago? And if we do not look carefully, Madam Speaker, we are going to be almost similar to what is happening in Jamaica, where the Jamaican dollar is close to 160 Jamaican dollars to US \$1. And if we do not carefully manage the economy of Trinidad and Tobago, all that the Prime Minister is saying that we do not want the IMF to be here, we do not want the IMF. IMF is already on our doors at the moment, and this Government, the hon. Prime Minister, Rowley-led Government, is taking us faster and faster for IMF to come into Trinidad and Tobago. We urge caution. We urge the population to be aware, and to speak out against the incompetence and the lack of economic management of this country by this administration.

So, Madam Speaker, I just want to raise one issue on the Ministry of Education. The Ministry of Education, the Development Programme expenditure

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funded from the Infrastructure Development Fund was supposed to be \$545 million. In 2016, the revised estimate of expenditure was \$148 million. So \$397 million, part of which is now taken in that \$712 million to pay the overdraft facility, \$397 million in the Ministry of Education Infrastructure Development Fund was not spent. They had the ability to complete the payment for a number of contractors. They specifically targeted contractors and say we are not paying them and they have spitefully not paid them, even after 16 months. That is shameful and disgraceful by any regime. and that is not the way you treat your citizens who have taken their hard-earned money and done what they did for this country. [*Desk thumping*]

So, Madam Speaker, these were some of the points that I wanted to raise. And, therefore, we await some of the answers from the hon. Minister of Finance in his winding up. And then, at the end of the evening I am sure we will have the unrevised notes of his presentation, but we would not have the ability to comment on the other aspects, which we were not able to take the notes as fast as possible; as fast as he spoke about it, and, therefore, we will have to come back on a next occasion when we are dealing with a Finance Bill to speak about what he is saying or make some comments about it subsequently.

At the end of this variation and appropriation for fiscal 2016, it clearly demonstrates, in unambiguous fashion, that this Government has lacked the ability and the competence to deal with the economy of Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*] They have carried this country into economic ruin and they are carrying this country down a slippery and precipitous slope to economic decay and to becoming possibly a failed state as early as they want to bring it to. So, we urge this Government, pull up your boot straps and if you cannot do that and govern this

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country, resign and get out and let us govern. [*Desk thumping*]

The Minister of Finance (Hon. Colm Imbert): Thank you, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, it is really necessary, having listened to the Member for Caroni East, for some Members of this House on the other side who wish to speak about expenditure and income and the Government accounts, to do a crash course in government accounting, because the statements made by the hon. Member are just too pregnant.

Let me try my best to give you a crash course in government accounting. Firstly, if one goes to the *Review of the Economy*, Madam Speaker, Appendix 21, the *Review of the Economy 2016*, Appendix 21, you would see Central Government Fiscal Operations. And on this table, in the *Review of the Economy 2016*, which is a source document from the Budget Division of the Ministry of Finance, you will see the total revenue for the years 2010, 2011, 2012, 2013, 2014, 2015, 2016, and so on. And on this page, Appendix 21, which is page 86, you will see the total revenue and grants for the fiscal year 2016, \$44,944,000.98. It is not \$56 billion. I have absolutely no idea why the Member would state these figures. I do not know where he gets them from. But it demonstrates a complete misunderstanding of government accounting.

If you go to total expenditure, you will see total expenditure, \$52.2349 billion; total revenue, \$44.9418 billion; total expenditure, \$52.2349 billion, with a deficit of, at that time, this was published on 30th September, of \$7.2931 billion. That has been the way in which the Government fiscal accounts has been reported since I have been a Member Parliament, which is for 25 years. Whether it is a UNC Government, a PNM Government, or a PP Government, this is the way the fiscal accounts are reported.

In addition, I was not a Member of Parliament when the NAR was in power, let me try my best. When you are doing a budget, if you pay close attention, you will see that the Appropriation Bill and the figures given in the estimates and the review of the expenditure are slightly different. The reason being, that you do not include in the appropriation capital repayments and sinking fund payments. That is just not done. It is not part of the appropriation because those are charges on the Consolidated Fund and, therefore, you do not appropriate them. So that if you look at the estimates of expenditure, recurrent expenditure, that is, you will see total recurrent expenditure, which is on page ix of the estimates of expenditure for the fiscal year 2016 to 2017, which goes backwards to give you the 2015 actual, 2016 revised, and so on. The recurrent expenditure for 2016, \$49.2 billion.

And then, Madam Speaker, the other thing the Member needs to understand is that the Infrastructure Development Fund is counted within the estimates of recurrent expenditure as part of the appropriation for the Ministry of Finance. So that when you are looking at expenditure on the development programme you have to simply add the appropriation for the Consolidated Fund and if you go to the estimates of the development programme for the financial year 2017, which gives you the 2016 figure, you will see the revised estimate on the development programme for the Consolidated Fund was \$3.162 billion. You add that to the \$49 billion in recurrent expenditure, exclusive of capital repayments and sinking fund, and you get the \$52.2 billion as the expenditure for fiscal 2016. This is the way this Parliament and this Government has done public accounting since 1962. [*Desk thumping*] You do not add capital repayments and sinking fund contributions to your appropriation and the Infrastructure Development Fund is part of recurrent. So you cannot add it to the capital and then add it on to the recurrent to get the total

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expenditure.

Further, Madam Speaker, I heard some questions coming from the hon. Member, and really you need to go and do a crash course, because the Heritage and Stabilisation Fund contains surpluses that have already been appropriated. The only way money can go into the Heritage and Stabilisation Fund, it is part of a past appropriation. And, therefore, when you utilize money from the Heritage and Stabilisation Fund, that goes to an area which in government accounting is called below the line. You have a below the line accounting and above the line accounting. Your financing element of your budget, which is your deficit, because you have revenue and then you have financing to give you your total expenditure. The financing element is your deficit, and that is below the accounting line. So that when you use money from the Heritage and Stabilisation Fund to deal with your expenditure, that goes into your financing component. It is not added to your revenue. So when you take money out of the Heritage and Stabilisation Fund, you cannot count it as revenue because it is already revenue that was already earned in a previous year and has been appropriated. You cannot. That is a mistake that the hon. Member keeps making; that he takes financing items.

For example, the US \$1 billion that we borrowed, that is a financing item. A loan is not revenue. A loan is financing of your budget and, therefore it goes below the line to finance your deficit. So the US \$1 billion financing that we raised is not revenue. The withdrawal from the Heritage and Stabilisation Fund is not revenue. Those are all financing elements. So that, when you are looking at government accounting, there are rules. There are rules for government accounting and your administration, when you were in Government, used the exact same rules. We did not add. We did not double count their infrastructure when we were on the other

side. We did not double count the Infrastructure Development Fund appropriation. We did not take borrowings and count them as income. We do not do that. These are simple things.

So, for the last time, the expenditure for fiscal 2016 was \$52.2 billion and the revenue is as shown, \$44.9 billion, resulting in a deficit of \$7.6 billion. Please go and do a simple course in government accounting. Please, I am begging you, because it is embarrassing to come into this Parliament and hear the same errors being made over and over and over, misunderstanding, misconstruction and it is misinformation going out to the public.

I heard the Member say that we did not utilize a certain part of the Infrastructure Development Fund for the original purpose, so it was available for us to use on something else. That is not true. You could only spend what you earn. If we utilized that \$700 million from the fund, our deficit would have gone up to \$8.3 billion. We cannot just take money that is on paper and spend it.

It is the same thing with the overdraft at the Central Bank. If you are up your overdraft limit, it does not matter what is going on; you cannot spend it. You are not allowed to spend money that you do not have. So if, in the original appropriation, a particular sum was appropriated for capital programme or for Infrastructure Development Fund spending and you do not earn the income that allowed you to expend that money, then you cannot spend it. The money does not exist. Just because you see it on a piece of paper, if you do not earn it you cannot spend it.

So there was no \$700 million in the Infrastructure Development Fund that was available, because it was not spent on projects where there were no completion certificates, to be spent elsewhere. The money did not exist. You have to earn the

money first and that is why I was shocked to hear the hon. Member say that from his calculations the revenue in fiscal 2016 was \$56 billion and the expenditure was \$55 billion, so we had a surplus of \$1 billion. So that all of the international agencies that come and evaluate Trinidad and Tobago, they had to be wrong. The IMF is wrong. The Moody's is wrong. Standard & Poor's is wrong. All the economists at the University of the West Indies, "all ah dem wrong too" because, according to the hon. Member, we had a surplus of \$1 billion in 2016, according to the hon. Member.

It is just embarrassing, Madam Speaker, and I would ask hon. Members, go and learn about government accounting. Understand the financing component of the public budget. Understand the revenue component. Understand the expenditure component. Go and find out what a capital repayment is. Learn what a sinking fund contribution is. [*Desk thumping*] Understand that these things are not part of the expenditure. Go and educate yourselves. Do not come and embarrass yourself here in the Parliament saying these ridiculous things, that we had income of \$56 billion, expenditure of \$55 billion, so that we had surplus of \$1 billion. Do not say these things. They are absurd. Madam Speaker, the statements made by the hon. Member were absurd and it is just sad and it is embarrassing and it is misinformation for the public. It is misinformation. [*Crosstalk*]

So, let me return to the matter at hand. This report that we are looking at was simply examining a request for a variation of appropriation of a particular sum of money, which was required to pay for increased pensions and grants as a result of the policies of this caring PNM Government. [*Desk thumping*]

Because it is we, Madam Speaker, who increased the cap on recipients of old age pensions and NIS pensions. [*Desk thumping*] It is we that increased the cap

from \$4,500 to \$5,000 per month, and, as a result of that, a number of persons came into the system and a number of persons got increased payments, particularly of old age pension, because the NIS pension did not increase but the old age pension component of persons who get the two pension payments went up and I can assure you that the thousands of people who receive this benefit in 2016 were very happy for it and appreciative of the humane and people-centred, people-oriented policies of the People's National Movement Government. [*Desk thumping*] That is why we had additional expenditure in— [*Crosstalk*] Madam Speaker, I am trying my best but it is difficult. Could you, please, ask them to stop shouting across the floor?

Madam Speaker: Member for Diego Martin North/East, I am sure the Members will comply now. Please continue.

Hon. C. Imbert: I certainly hope so. I certainly hope so, because they cannot help their misbehaviour. The fact is, when we point out that we are here, we are here to take savings in the fuel subsidy, do exactly what we said we would do. When we did adjustments in the fuel subsidy, we said we would take those savings and target it to programmes for the poor and the underprivileged. This was a plank of the PNM's policy, that whatever adjustments we make in the fuel subsidy, whatever savings we make there, we will apply those savings to help the poor and the underprivileged and that is exactly what this whole debate is all about, not all this stuff I have heard from the hon. Members opposite, irrelevant stuff.

This debate is about the fact that the PNM increased the cap on pensions for persons who are recipients of both the senior citizens pension and the NIS pension and gave them an extra \$500 in their pocket every month, thousands and thousands of citizens and we had to find the money for that; [*Desk thumping*] for that caring

gesture on the part of the PNM. We had to find the money for it and, therefore, we come here to vary the appropriation, take the savings in the fuel subsidy and apply it to help the poor and the indigent. That is all this debate is all about. It is nothing else and I, therefore, beg to move, Madam Speaker. [*Desk thumping*]

Question put and agreed.

Resolved:

That this House adopt the First Report of the Standing Finance Committee of the House of Representatives for the Second Session (2016/2017), Eleventh Parliament on the consideration of proposals for the Supplementation and Variation of Appropriation for the fiscal year 2016.

**FINANCE (VARIATION OF APPROPRIATION)
(FINANCIAL YEAR 2016) BILL, 2017**

The Minister of Finance (Hon. Colm Imbert): Madam Speaker, I beg to move:

That a Bill to vary the appropriation of the sum the issue of which was authorized by the Appropriation (Financial Year 2016) Act, 2015, and varied by the Finance (Variation of Appropriation) (Financial Year 2016) Bill, 2017, be now read a second time.

Madam Speaker. In the 25 years that I have been a Member of this House, I have observed the convention that when we deal with the Report of the Finance Committee on the variation of an appropriation, there is little or no debate on the actual Bill because all of the matters have already been exhaustively and comprehensively dealt with. I, therefore, beg to move.

Question proposed.

Dr. Roodal Moonilal (Oropouche East): Thank you, very much, Madam Speaker, for the opportunity to contribute to a Bill piloted by the goodly Minister of

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Finance, the Finance (Variation of Appropriation) (Financial Year 2016) Bill, 2017.

Madam Speaker, having heard the comprehensive introduction of the Bill from the Minister, I want to assure you I will not be equally brief but to raise some important issues on the Bill. Because, Madam Speaker, I begin by saying that this is probably the height of incompetence by the Government of Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*] It is my recollection and we have with us seasoned Members like the Members for Chaguanas West, Caroni East, Caroni Central, et cetera, where, when matters like these come before the House it is the Government's role, not the Opposition, the Opposition is not here to manage the affairs of the Government [*Desk thumping*] but it is the Government that would likely move a Motion so that both matters can be debated together. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Imbert: You are wrong.

Dr. R. Moonilal: Today, Madam Speaker, when my colleague from Caroni—and we can check the record—Central was debating an earlier matter and went to the Bill, he was advised that that earlier debate was on a report, it had nothing to do with the Bill. Madam Speaker, I want to debate the Bill and I have nothing to say of the report. [*Desk thumping*] The report never happened. I know absolutely nothing about this report. I am here to debate a Bill that is in my hand.

7.00 p.m.

Regrettably, the Minister of Finance said nothing about this Bill in my hand, so I am left to ask questions about this document that has been served to me, because it has nothing to do with a report, because when earlier there was an opportunity for the Government to act in an efficient and competent way, they

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chose not to. When my colleague raised the matter of the Bill, he was advised, I believe, quite rightly, that you could not reflect on the Bill when you are debating the report, but here we are with the Bill. So, unknown to me, I am now here to raise serious questions about a Bill. I will read from the Bill that we are debating, and it is their incompetence that has the Parliament here at this hour in this Motion. [*Desk thumping*] So the Bill says—and I am reading provision 3:

“The sums appropriated to the Heads of Expenditure specified in the First Column of Part I of the Schedule to this Act by the Appropriation Act, 2016...”—am I reading the wrong Bill?

Hon. Members: No.

Dr. R. Moonilal: Okay. Thank you.

“is increased by the amounts specified in the Second Column of that Part.” So, I look to my Schedule, I see Ministry of Public Administration and Communications. I see a sum there, \$120,781,446, and according to the provision I read above, this is incidentally a movement of some kind, it is increased. I have not a clue as to what the Minister of Finance is doing—I do not have a clue—and he chose not to explain in his introduction what he is doing here. So I will—this is a Bill, we are not concerned with the report. This is a Bill. We are not concerned with the report.

So I can only take the opportunity to ask the Minister of Finance and, by extension, the Minister of Public Administration and Communications: what is this about? What is the Bill about? Is it about Ministries being fused together? So that you had a Ministry—I think when they started their administration they had a Ministry of Communications and then they had a Ministry of Public Administration, if I am not wrong. Somewhere along the line, the Minister of

Housing was fired and the gentleman from La Horquetta/Talparo, our very good friend, absorbed the Ministry, the Ministry of Communications, I believe. [Crosstalk] Or was it public administration? [Crosstalk] Or, he absorbed public administration. My friend, the Member for San Fernando East, I think in that mix became the Minister of Housing and Urban Development and we cannot forget that because I see him every week now gallerying in front a UNC-built HDC house [Laughter] and he is literally in the gallery. He is gallerying in the gallery.

So the Member for La Horquetta/Talparo becomes the Minister of Public Administration and Communications. I could only assume that this thing has something to do with that movement of the Ministry and the expansion of communications. But what is Government communications? What has Government communications reduced to now? What is it reduced to? I seldom see my friend from La Horquetta/Talparo at the post-cab, assuming there is a post-cab. I understand they have cancelled several, but the Minister from La Horquetta/Talparo is seldom there. I see often, the Minister from Port of Spain North/St. Ann's West as the resident communicator. I do not blame the Prime Minister for that at all, but what is communications doing?

The Minister in his opening statement could not tell us. He just came here and dropped the Bill on us and gone. What is the Ministry of Communications communicating what, where and how? And is it that this movement here has to do with Government propaganda, to which you are entitled. Propaganda is today a bad word, but there was a time earlier in political history—the Member for Naparima would recall—when propaganda was a correct word over the 60s and 70s in parties and governments spoke of that. But is this to reintroduce propaganda?

There was an ad in the newspaper I saw in a build-up to an election, a newspaper had \$45,000 to put three, and the Ministry of Rural Development and Local Government announced that they paved three roads, and one was a bicycle path to Chaguaramas somewhere [*Laughter and desk thumping*] and that was Government communication. That was an ad. Is this \$120 million for ads like that? Is it for the debt of CNMG? Because I have not heard the Minister of Finance in introducing the Bill, I have not heard him speak of CNMG. I would have assumed that the Minister of Finance in introducing the Bill would have told us something about the future of state broadcasting—state broadcasting or public broadcasting is an established Ministry and so on—but you did not tell us anything about that.

Now, to the Minister of Communications, I understand from your public pronouncements you are very concerned about value for money; you are very concerned about spending properly and accountability. I can ask my friend, the Member for La Horquetta/Talparo, the private organization called the People's National Movement have they paid the \$850,000 they owe CNMG? [*Desk thumping*] At a time when the Minister of Finance need every cent, the PNM is still owing \$750,000 to CNMG. [*Crosstalk*] Well \$850,000. It might be \$950,000, I may have it wrong, with interest. By now the PNM would owe interest.

But the Ministry of Communications should indicate to us—and I am sure you will speak next in the debate, you should because you have not contributed anything on this matter—so you should tell us about the future of CNMG and the employees there, because that is a serious matter. Employees in the state media are very concerned about their future. They want to know if their future is a future of retrenchment, of job loss as we have faced. Who is going to buy CNMG—or 0/0/0? I think it is a unionized environment as well, several areas in the state

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sector.

Mr. Imbert: Madam Speaker—*[Interruption]*

Dr. R. Moonilal: What is the point of order?

Mr. Imbert: 48(1)—*[Interruption]*

Dr. R. Moonilal: I am not giving way to him. I am not giving way.

Mr. Imbert:—we are one, dealing with 2016 accounts, not the future, 2016 accounts.

Madam Speaker: It was not an objection or an attempt to interrupt under Standing Order 47.

Mr. Imbert: 48(1)

Madam Speaker: 48(1), about being relevant. We are into the Bill, and you are considering the Schedule, so please keep within that, and it is last year, we are not talking about this fiscal year.

Dr. R. Moonilal: Thank you. I would like to remind the Minister of Communications, not the Minister of Finance, that it was in 2016 that the employees registered their protest as to the management of CNMG and their future. *[Desk thumping]* It was in 2016 that they expressed their grievance. So you owe us a duty to tell us more about that. Where are you going to get money to sustain those entities when you are squandering money every day?

Today CEPEP lost a case against me and have to pay cost to me in court. *[Desk thumping]* Where will you get money for that? *[Desk thumping]* I understand.

Madam Speaker: You understand? So that you would not be going down that road.

Dr. R. Moonilal: No.

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Madam Speaker: Could you retract and come back on track.

Dr. R. Moonilal: Madam Speaker, as they say, wheel and come. So, Madam Speaker, in our Bill, we have our moneys for the Ministry of Public Administration and Communications, \$120 million. I am saying that because of the incompetence in managing the affairs of the House on this day, we must now ask the Minister to explain himself, because we cannot now look only at the Bill for explanations and the Minister in his presentation treated this House with disrespect, by not explaining fully the provisions of a Bill, because just as in a report of the Motion we could not go to the Bill, we cannot go to any report at this time.

Madam Speaker, the Ministry of Social Development and Family Services, I turn my attention, 2016, I am there. I am seeing here an increase of \$370,496,277. Madam Speaker, the Minister gave no explanation in his opening address on this matter, absolutely none, he gave none. He chose not to. So, again, I can only speculate as to what this is about in 2016. But in 2016 I can let you know that several constituents of mine and constituents I imagine of all, complained that they were not receiving social benefits, from food card, disability grant, the cerebral palsy and funeral grant—fire victims and so on writing the Ministry, communicating with the Ministry, were not able to get assistance. In my own constituency, we have two fire victims in an area called Retrench—and look at the area, it name Retrench.—and they have applied to the relevant Ministry, applied to the Ministry of Social Development and Family Services. Self-help, I do not know what has happened to self-help. I do not know if they are helping themselves, but nothing is happening in these Government Ministries because of this crisis we have where several of the benefits have not been coming. Self-help is not helping anyone. We are not getting the sort of cooperation and support. I would have felt

that the Minister could explain for 2016 what happened there? Why did they cut the social services to the extent that persons were suffering? Why did they cut that? That is the question I ask today, and the food card is a classic example.

In 2016, they reported that there was a problem with food cards and it was being abused and so on. Then they cut, in a savage way, and many, many citizens who are in need, who are suffering, who need help—13,000 citizens in one fell swoop lost their food card. And then we hear somewhere before about a caring PNM Government, and the crisis we face now is that we do not have a clue as to whether this Government will meet and treat with persons who are in need.

In 2016, constituents also complained that they were supposed to get an increase in their pension because of a promise made, a commitment made, a policy commitment. Madam Speaker, we, in our constituencies, we cannot find one pensioner who will tell us that they got this increase in 2016. [*Desk thumping*] So no increases were forthcoming in 2016. [*Crosstalk*] I do not want to go done there, that is a sure case of 48(1), (4), (5) and (6). [*Laughter*] It is under the next heading. [*Crosstalk*] Oh, yes, I am coming to that. So the Ministry of Social Development and Family Services can explain to us when will you meet and treat with those 13,000 persons that lost their food card under this administration. When will you meet and treat with those persons who in 2016 could not get the funeral grant? When will you meet and treat with persons who in 2016 were able to access other social services? And persons in the Ministry, in 2016—this money here—this money has anything to do with employment—with contracts, with contract employment?

There were persons in 2016—and the Minister may want to respond to that when he wakes up—in 2016 scores of persons in the Ministry of Social

Development and Family Services lost their jobs in the most ad hoc and flippant manner, and all of that was because they were saving. They claimed saving, value for money in 2016 and so on, and when you were doing that the fire victim, disability persons and so on could not get their grants.

Madam Speaker, I want to move on in our Bill to Part II of the Bill. Now Part II of this Bill deals with Head of Expenditure Ministry of Energy and Energy Industries, amount reduced. The amount reduced from the Ministry of Energy and Energy Industries mirrored the amount increased to the Ministry of Social Development and Family Services. The Minister in his introduction to the Bill did not tell us where the money—did this money come from Malcolm Jones? Did it come from removing the matter at court that they throw out the Malcolm Jones matter and they got this as a benefit? Did the money come from some other source, because that was 2016? In 2016, the CEPEP sued me too. Was this money from CEPEP, in passing? [*Laughter*]

Madam Speaker, the Ministry of Energy and Energy Industries, which just today there are serious problems—and I am on energy now—with Petrotrin, very serious problem involving restructuring. In the energy sector, Petrotrin is the flagship of the energy sector, the state energy sector, at least. In 2016, Petrotrin declined as they have never declined before. I am on the Ministry of Energy—

Mr. Imbert: Madam Speaker, 48(1), we are dealing with savings in the fuel subsidy.

Dr. R. Moonilal: He did not say that in his introduction. [*Crosstalk*]

Madam Speaker: Members, if we just observe the decorum, when one Member stands to raise a point under a Standing Order, the practice is that the other Member sits and I wish we will observe that. In terms of the objection just raised,

Member for Oropouche East, I am allowing you some latitude. From my own limited experience this is an unusual procedure, but I am allowing you some latitude, but I want you to stick within the confines of this Bill as it relates to the fiscal year 2016.

Dr. R. Moonilal: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker, much obliged. Madam Speaker, just for the record, I may have missed his brief introduction to the Bill, but I did not hear the Minister give any reason for the savings in his introduction. I may have missed it. But in his introduction to the Bill, I did not hear the Minister give an explanation of this, and since today because of their incompetence we have to debate the Bill separate from a Motion, [*Desk thumping*] I am entitled to ask, where was this reduced? How was it reduced? And I am entitled to ask further questions about the reduction at the Ministry of Energy and Energy Industries. I am entitled to ask, I believe, whether this money that they saved somehow, because the Minister did not tell us in his introduction how they saved it—I am entitled to ask whether it could not have been used in another area in the Ministry of Energy and Energy Industries that is in dire need of financial support.

So, I am at the Ministry of Energy and Energy Industries, the Minister in his flippant disregard and disrespect for the House, dismissive, did not give the House the courtesy of an explanation in a Bill, a Bill that he could have linked to an earlier Motion and we would have been out of here already. [*Desk thumping*] He did not do that, so I am asking whether this money could not have been used to assist Petrotrin with their own upgrade, with the support that they need themselves—more drilling, more investment. And a critical issue raised by I think a former Minister of Energy and Energy Industries, of course, is that you cannot expect better performance from the State energy company if you do not invest.

If you do not get the investment into the company for further land-based exploitation, exploring productivity, human resource upgrade, if you do not invest in the State-run company, you cannot expect better performance, and that is why I am asking whether this money that you saved somehow, only known to you, because you did not want to tell us that in the opening paragraph of the Bill [*Desk thumping*] only known to you—wherever you saved this from, I do not know—but could it not have been used in the energy sector as well? If today you are telling us that it has to go to the social development that is in the Bill here, why? Is it that you failed to budget properly in the last budget for the Ministry of Social Development and Family Services that they require \$317 million? [*Desk thumping*] Where did it come from? And the Ministry of Energy and Energy Industries and Petrotrin, in particular, have serious problems.

Today we have had a case in 2016 where we have had oil spills on the Gulf of Paria, in the La Brea area, in the Otaheite area, several oil spills affecting our constituents—loss of income, loss of employment, fisherfolk. The Member for La Brea, I think and the Member for Fyzabad and La Brea, of course—the Member for Fyzabad is piloting a struggle down there where Petrotrin has failed in 2016 and Pointe-a-Pierre—they have failed—Petrotrin under the Ministry of Energy and Energy Industries—to give support to those persons who lost their livelihood, their employment, their income, because of oil spills. And with part of this money that he saved from somewhere, would it not have been possible to use a little piece of that to support the vendors [*Desk thumping*], fisherfolk in Pointe-A-Pierre, Fyzabad, La Brea and Oropouche East. [*Crosstalk*] Of course, and keep people employed because that is the big trick we have now.

It is really to maintain employment. It is to maintain a certain level of

employment in the economy, particularly, as someone said earlier, in the service industry—you create more employers, more self-employed people—but the Government is not concerned with this. This is the only Government that I think established now a racquet centre. That is what they are concerned with, a racquet centre, and they are renting it out now to their friends and family, but I am not your friend neither your family, so do not try that. [*Laughter*]

So, Madam Speaker, my question with the energy industries and the Ministry's savings there by whatever way they chose to save is whether or not that moneys could not have be used to support the—[*Interruption*]

Mr. Imbert: Madam Speaker, 48(1).

Madam Speaker: Member, please proceed.

Dr. R. Moonilal: I will proceed. Ma'am in passing, I say no more, but I think the Standing Orders Committee should now amend so we only get two reviews. Like cricket, you cannot object all the time on the same thing, but you should get two reviews and another member otherwise they will get up until they fall down doing that. Get a review, two reviews per man.

So, Madam Speaker, yet on the Ministry of Energy and Energy Industries, when you look at this sector, the sector has taken a lash. We all know that. Some of the matters will do with the international commodity prices and so on, we are aware of that, but that did not start in 2016. It started before when we were in office. In fact, the Member for Siparia, as Prime Minister, addressed the nation on this matter in January 2015 and in 2016 it got worse. So in 2016 the energy sector faced external pressures because of commodity prices, but the energy sector also faced challenges. When you look, Madam Speaker, at the *Review of the Economy*, 2016 I believe, when you look at the data from the Ministry of Finance, you will

see that that sector declined significantly.

The Minister of Finance ought to tell us about investment in that sector and whether or not the money that you were saving there—this is really the point we make—the money that you are saving somehow in the energy sector, could it not have been used for further investment in that sector or promote even social objectives in the energy sector? Or is it because you wrongly calculated your figures—you made a mess out of your calculations—and discovered that the Ministry of Social Development and Family Services was terribly underfunded that you have to come now for 2016 and correct that? It is the height of incompetence, and to boast about social development receiving this is really to admit that you budgeted badly, that you got it wrong. [*Desk thumping*] You got the math wrong, you got the sums wrong and you got the chemistry wrong and everything wrong in your budgeting and whatever savings you earned elsewhere and so on whether or not it could have been used also in the specific area.

So, Madam Speaker, I do not want to detain the House further, but I will if you ask me to. [*Laughter*] Madam Speaker, for the Ministry of Communications as well, we are really hoping that we could get a statement from the Minister of Public Administration and Communications as to what is the strategic direction for state communications and state broadcasting. In 2016, what has been the effect on employment in 2016 that this matter is required? And, of course, to make some type of commitment on the quality of that sector, the investment in the sector and whether or not in Trinidad and Tobago, we will have anything like a state broadcast sector in the future? Madam Speaker, I thank you.

The Minister of Finance (Hon. Colm Imbert): Thank you, Madam Speaker. Let me correct the record. The Member for Oropouche East as he is wont , has put

inaccuracies into the record, and I need to correct the record because there are children listening and they might believe him. So, Madam Speaker, I have gone into the records and I have found the *Hansard* of the 9th of January 2015. On the 9th of January, 2015 the then Minister of Finance and the Economy, being a Member of the People's Partnership Government, using the established convention, which has been the practice in this House since 1962, moved the Motion to adopt the First Report of the Standing Finance Committee of the House of Representatives for the Fifth Session (2014/2015) Tenth Parliament on the consideration of proposals for the Supplementation and Variation of Appropriation for the fiscal year, and as I did today [*Crosstalk*]—Madam Speaker, the Member for Oropouche East is just muttering, I would ask for your protection please.

Madam Speaker: Members, I would again ask you all to respect the decorum. Any Member who wishes to speak knows how to interrupt in accordance with the Standing Orders. Minister of Finance, continue.

Hon. C. Imbert: Thank you, Madam Speaker. You see, they cannot handle the truth. So in 2015 the then UNC Minister of Finance, dealing with an identical committee report, dealing with an identical Motion to adopt the Standing Finance Committee Report for the closing of the accounts for the previous fiscal year did not request the House to consider the report and the Bill together. Did not! I will read the *Hansard*. This is Mr. Howai speaking:

“Mr. Speaker, I beg to move the following Motion standing in my name:

Be it resolved that this House adopt the First Report of the Standing Finance Committee.”

And he goes on to speak about the meeting of the Finance Committee, and he goes on to talk about the report, and nowhere in his contribution is there a request as the

Member inaccurately and irresponsibly and purposely put into the record was there a request that the report and the Bill be taken together and read as one, because that is not the practice in this House. The Member should know better, and should not come into this House and mislead the public and mislead the school children that are listening, because they might believe him. [*Desk thumping*] And then, Madam Speaker, when that debate was completed by the UNC Minister of Finance—when that debate was completed in 2015—the House then moved to the Bill, and let me read the entire contribution of the then UNC Minister of Finance.

“Mr. Speaker, I beg to move:

That a Bill to supplement and vary the appropriation of the sum the issue of which was authorized by the Appropriation (Financial Year 2014) Act, 2015, be now read a second time.

Mr. Speaker, I beg to move.”

And he sat down.

Madam Speaker, it is reckless, it is irresponsible, it is politically dishonest of honourable Members to come into the House and put such inaccuracies and such untruths onto the record. [*Desk thumping*] The fact of the matter is it has been a convention in this House for 40 years [*Desk thumping*] for this to be done. For 50 years this is the convention, and for 50 years you deal with the report—the report has everything in it—and then when you come to the Bill, the Minister of Finance, whether he is an NAR Minister of Finance, a PNM, a UNC or whatever, he gets up and says with respect to the Bill, “I beg to move”, so I beg to move, Madam Speaker. [*Desk thumping*]

Question put and agreed to.

Bill accordingly read a second time.

Finance (Variation of Appropriation)
(Financial Year 2016) Bill, 2017
Hon. C. Imbert (Cont'd)

2017.01.18

The Minister of Finance (Hon. Colm Imbert): In accordance with Standing Order 87(2), I now beg to move that the Bill be now read a third time and passed.

Question put and agreed to: That the Bill be read a third time.

Bill accordingly read the third time and passed.

ADJOURNMENT

The Minister of Planning and Development (Hon. Camille Robinson-Regis): Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, I beg to move that this House do now adjourn to Friday the 27th day of January, 2017 at 1.30 p.m. and that would be Private Members' Day. I would just crave your indulgence just to ask the Opposition what Motion they will be doing, please. [*Crosstalk*] I said 27th. Which Motion will you be doing?

Mr. Lee: Thank you, Madam Speaker, to the Leader of Government Business, we will be debating Motion No. 2.

Question put and agreed to.

House adjourned accordingly.

Adjourned at 7.34 p.m.