HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Monday, October 08, 2018

The House met at 10.00 a.m.

PRAYERS

[MADAM SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

VISITORS

Turks and Caicos Legislative Assembly

Madam Speaker: Hon. Members, I wish to draw to your attention the presence of the Hon. Speaker of the Legislative Assembly of the Turks and Caicos Islands in the Chamber, along with a delegation from his Legislature. On your behalf, I wish to welcome them during the discourse of our annual budget. [*Desk thumping*]

APPROPRIATION (FINANCIAL YEAR 2019) BILL, 2018

[Third Day]

Order read for resuming adjourned debate on question [October 05, 2018]:

That the Bill be now read a second time.

Question again proposed.

Madam Speaker: Member for St. Joseph. [*Desk thumping*]

The Minister of Health (Hon. Terrence Deyalsingh): Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. On behalf of the Government, welcome to Speaker Hon. Dwayne Taylor of Turks and Caicos and his team.

Madam Speaker, I want to compliment our Prime Minister, our Minister of Finance and our Minister of Planning and Development. [*Desk thumping*] First of all, the Prime Minister needs to be recognized for his steady hand on the wheel of the ship of state [*Desk thumping*] in guiding this country, not only the Government but the country through the winds that buffeted us from all directions from 2015 to present. We are starting to see calmer waters and for that he ought to be heartily

congratulated. [*Desk thumping*] The hon. Minister of Finance also needs our heartiest congratulations because his is one of the most difficult tasks in a country that faced what we faced in 2015. I think the country owes both our Prime Minister and our Minister of Finance a debt of gratitude, and on behalf of our grateful country I say to those two gentlemen, thank you. No less a person than the Minister of Planning and Development also needs to be recognized, because successive budgets could not be properly formulated without her advocacy for projects and getting projects onto the PSIP. So therefore, those three persons, the hon. Prime Minister, the Minister of Finance and the hon. Minister of Planning and Development, that triumvirate needs to be recognized, and I do so wholeheartedly right now. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker, in starting my debate on matters of health, it is incumbent upon me to refer and reflect, most sadly, on the contribution made by the Member of Parliament for Siparia where the hon. Member spoke on matters health. She spoke at length about the choices that we make on this side as to which health care facilities we choose to go to, either internationally or locally. Madam Speaker, it is now incumbent upon me to remind the hon. Member for Siparia and to remind the person who wrote that part of her speech, because obviously that person who wrote that part of her speech was not aware of the history of the Member for Siparia in choosing where she goes, where the hon. Member goes to seek health care, but she had chapter and verse to talk about this side. Madam Speaker, I refer to the *Guardian* of Friday, September 20, 2011, and this is a direct rebuttal to the Member for Siparia,

> The hon. Kamla—"Persad-Bissessar…revealed her medical condition minutes after being discharged from"—where? Not the San Fernando General Hospital, not the Eric Williams facility, not the Sangre Grande Hospital, no

public facility but from where—"St Clair Medical Centre where she had been warded for almost 48 hours."

That was when we were told by the Member for Caroni East that a can of peas and carrots fell on her instep. Two cans of peas and carrots fell on each foot on her instep and she had to be warded for 48 hours in a private facility, St. Clair, but lecturing us, lecturing the Prime Minister on where he seeks attention.

Madam Speaker, Thursday, May 21, 2015, after they had five years to manage the health care sector, the hon. Prime Minister, Kamla Persad-Bissessar, has been ordered to rest after spending yesterday afternoon at where?—not the San Fernando General Hospital, not the Eric Williams Medical Sciences Complex, not the Port of Spain General Hospital, not the Sangre Grande Hospital, but at the Cross Crossing Medical Centre. You call that, Madam Speaker, hypocrisy of the highest order. [*Desk thumping*] So whoever wrote that part of her speech, ought to research the history of the Member of Siparia where she seeks medical attention.

Madam Speaker, it is a sad day because I have to respond to this, when the Member for Caroni East, in conjunction with the Member for Fyzabad, called a press conference and accused me of all manner of ill, misbehaviour in public office because a particular physician's contract in Port of Spain was not renewed, that I interfered in the process. But do you know one of the first things the Member of Parliament for Caroni East asked me to do in September 2015? Do you know he accused me of misbehaviour in public office because a particular officer, her contract was not renewed? It went to court and she lost. But one of the first things the Member for Caroni East asked me to do in September 2015, was to renew the contract of a Dr. Gopeesingh, and you know—

Hon. Member: Oh.

Hon. T. Deyalsingh: No, wait, wait. Do you know who that Dr. Gopeesingh is,

the husband of the Member for Oropouche West. That was not misbehaviour in public office.

Hon. Member: Who asked you to do that?

Hon. T. Deyalsingh: The Member for Caroni East asked me to renew the contract for the husband of the Member for Oropouche West but then accuses me of misbehaviour in public office. What hypocrisy, again.

In that press conference, the Member for Caroni East and the Member for Fyzabad again said that the health care sector is now a killing field, the second time he has said that in the public domain. Madam Speaker, the Opposition could malign me and my wife as much as they want. They could call me, Terrible Terrence, as the Member for Siparia has done, they could call me a monster, they could bring my wife into ridicule, do that, but for heaven's sake, be patriotic. When you refer to the health sector as a killing field, do you know what happens? Three doctors—[*Interruption*]

Ms. Mc Donald: Madam Speaker—[*Madam Speaker rises*] Thank you.

Madam Speaker: Hon. Members, it is very early in the day and maybe it is because it is early in the day we have not familiarized ourselves with the place we are at, okay, so that I expect that we all respect Standing Order 53 and we will all display decorum that is demanded in this place. Member for St. Joseph. [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. T. Deyalsingh: Yes, Madam Speaker, when the Member for Caroni East made that statement, three doctors came to see me. I said, come and see me in the Ministry, they said, no Minister, we do not want to come in the Ministry because you know how things go. They came home by me on an evening and they were absolutely appalled and disgusted by the statement made by the Member for Caroni East. They said they cannot believe that a member of the medical

fraternity—and one of them is your very close friend, but I would not call their name. They said, without any anecdotal or statistical evidence, how could a member of the medical fraternity make such a statement and demoralize an entire health care sector without evidence? They just do not care. They make it up as they go along. So, therefore, it is incumbent upon me—[*Interruption*] Yeah, they want to destabilize everything. Health care, they want to destabilize that. They want to destabilize the entire country. So it is incumbent upon me to provide evidence, both anecdotal and statistical, to show that the health care sector under this administration is improving. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker, *Newsday*, 2nd September, and this is after the earthquake, Letter to the Editor, Dedicated Staff at POS General Hospital, written by Linus Didier of Mount Hope, anecdotal evidence; *Newsday*, 27th August, Good Experience at San Fernando General Hospital, Ricky Ali of Golconda; *Express*, 18th August, at last, at last somebody wrote, Compassion in Health Care System, Robert Kanhai; *Newsday*, 10th August, Successful Care at Excellent Government Clinics, Mr. McMillan O'Brian. These are citizens writing into the papers. Sunday 19th August, thanks to Dr. Rao at the Manzanilla Health Centre from Gabriel Henderson of Sangre Grande, and, finally, *Newsday*, 26th July, Wonderful People at San Fernando General Hospital, Anthony Maraj of San Fernando. That is evidence.

So that is anecdotal evidence, I will now give statistical evidence to show, Madam Speaker, where our health care sector has been improving since September 2015. This is non-refutable and this is data that is internationally recognized by no less a body than the World Bank. Madam Speaker, by 2015 this country was supposed to have reached its Millennium Development Goals, its MDGs, by 2015 in two critical areas, maternal mortality rates and infant mortality rates by 2015.

Who was in office then? We missed our Millennium Development Goals, and we missed them with flying colours.

Madam Speaker, this administration has now reached our SDG goals, our Sustainable Development Goals for 2030, 12 years early in 2018 on issues of infant mortality and maternal mortality. [*Desk thumping*] If that is not progress, if that is not saving lives, I do not know what is. On becoming Minister of Health, I challenged the health care system, let us create a centre of excellence for maternal and infant issues, and we have done that, and now Trinidad and Tobago is being asked by the World Bank, come and tell us what you have done, how you did it in two short years. That is progress. [*Desk thumping*] Madam Speaker, further evidence is to be found in a publication called "Just societies, health equity, and dignified lives", but I need to just put this in context.

I recently represented Trinidad and Tobago at two conferences, one in Washington for Trinidad and Tobago's incoming chair of CARPHA, and there we also had the Directing Council, the 56th Directing Council of PAHO. Then I went to New York to represent the hon. Prime Minister at a non-communicable diseases conference and a conference to end tuberculosis. Madam Speaker, on page 59 of this document, which is PAHO document, World Health Organization, Institute of Health Equity, on page 59 of this document you will find a bar chart. This is World Bank data for 2017, and it talks about the risk of impoverishment due to surgical costs in the Americas. So they looked at countries from Canada, the United States, Haiti, Bolivia, right down to Jamaica, Uruguay, Mexico, and so on, about 20 or 30 countries. Then they give you evidence, Trinidad and Tobago ranks third only to who?—Canada and the United States in the percentage of population who are at risk of impoverishment from incurring surgical costs. This is the actual opposite to what the UNC has been peddling about the local health care sector, the

absolute opposite, and this is not Balisier House data.

When I was at the PAHO's Directing Council, this was put up on a massive screen for the world and the Americas to see, and we were taken out and we were lauded for our data up to 2017. [*Desk thumping*] This was due to the increase in provision of primary, secondary and tertiary care. So my colleagues opposite have no moral authority to talk about health care in Trinidad and Tobago. I will explain to you why, Madam Speaker, they have no moral authority to talk about health care. I know the Members for Fyzabad and Barataria/San Juan are sincere. I know that. Those two gentlemen are sincere in their recommendations for health, and I always listen to their public utterances. You are sincere. However, when the Member for Fyzabad spoke on Friday about what he would like to see, you know why I called—not you—why I called your contribution hypocritical, because when this Prime Minister, Dr. Keith Rowley, offered a hand to the Opposition in the best interest of non-partisanship to take the Welch Report to a Joint Select Committee to have a discussion with the Opposition, tell us what your views are on the Welch Report, let us have a joint select and then come to the Parliament and have a fulsome debate, a non-partisan debate on health, your political leader spurned that opportunity and turned her back on every single patient that goes to the public health care system, because you did not want to go to a Joint Select Committee to discuss matters of health. Nobody was appointed, but on the Opposition Benches we have a former Minister of Health who could have made valuable contribution. We have the Member for Fyzabad who is sincere, a former chairman of South-West Regional Health Authority and we have the Member for Caroni East a former chairman of North Central/North West Regional Health Authority, and do not forget under the tenure of the Member for Caroni East $1.6 million was stolen from the bank accounts of North West Regional Health Authority.

Dr. Gopeesingh: Madam Speaker, 48(6), I ask him to retract that statement, it was counted. That was not true so he cannot make these statements.

Madam Speaker: Hon. Member, I will rule 48(6) does not apply to that. Member, continue.

Hon. T. Deyalsingh: So $1.6 million vanished. [*Interruption*]

Dr. Gopeesingh: "An' why yuh eh lock meh up, lock meh up nah?"

Madam Speaker: Hon. Member for Caroni East, I am hearing you, and maybe I may be mistaken but I did not hear any imputation as relates to you.

Dr. Gopeesingh: Madam Speaker, I have to protect my integrity and character, so if the Member makes a statement on me, I have to rise on 48(4) and 48(6). It is under my watch he is casting aspersion, so I have to rise to defend myself and my integrity, which I have protected for 45 years of my medical practice. [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. T. Deyalsingh: Madam Speaker, I do not know why he is taking ownership of the issue, you know. So I move on. [*Interruption*]

Dr. Gopeesingh: But you are casting aspersions.

Hon. T. Deyalsingh: So the Opposition appointed no one to the Joint Select Committee to talk about the Welch committee, but we have, unlike previous Ministers, we looked at the Gafoor Report, and now we have the Welch Report, and I reported to the Cabinet recently on the progress we are making with the Welch Report.

Madam Speaker, under the Welch Report we always hear about major medical equipment, MME, in our public sectors not working. Using the Welch Report as a catalyst we engaged our biomedical services across the board, and right now our MME, our major medical equipment now has an up time of between 95 to 98 per cent. [*Desk thumping*] First time in the history of Trinidad and Tobago our

major medical equipment is up 95 to 98 per cent of the time. Thanks to the recommendations made in the Welch Report. Other recommendations made by the Welch Report which we have acted on has to do with the first point of contact that patients have with the health sector, which is our accident and emergency departments. The stories about our A&E departments are legendary, I am not going to go into those stories. I am going to tell the country what we have done based on the Welch Report. Based on the Welch Report we have done two things, improved infrastructure in our A&E departments and processes. At our San Fernando A&E we have opened up 27 observation beds so that patients who have to be there for 12 to 24 hours to be stabilized and to be observed, do not have to go up to a ward, they can be observed there and their families can stay with them. They have showers. They have TVs. Because in an A&E we triage people: one, two, three, four, five; one and two, you need urgent attention, you are life threatened; three, four and five, less urgent. So we have opened up these bays for four and five, the patients who need to be observed. And in that setting at San Fernando they have access to CTs, ultrasound, X-rays and blood investigations. That is what we have done with the Welch Report. A similar approach is now being used at Port of Spain A&E and Eric Williams. I was at Eric Williams yesterday to see the works that have started at the A&E there. So I want to tell the country that our A&E departments, based on the recommendations on the Welch Report, which are now Government policy, have now been attended to.

Madam Speaker, another massive improvement in the private health sector is moving activities or business back to the public sector and away from the private sector. Two major interventions which we did this year, cataract—remember I spoke about this last year. Madam Speaker, I used the year 2015 when we first came into office as the base year for cataract surgeries in Trinidad and Tobago. In

that year we did 2,848. You know how much we have done for up to September this year? In nine months, 4,000, a 40 per cent increase. [*Desk thumping*] A 40 per cent increase of cataract surgeries in the public sector. Those were people who previously—who could not wait, would have gone to the private sector and have to pay $15,000. You know how many poor people see me in the streets and thank me. I go to a wedding, thank you; I go to a funeral, thank you; you walk down the street, Minister, "meh" family, "meh" father got the cataract surgery, and they got it free. A 40 per cent increase for nine months in 2018, over 12 months in 2015, which is the base year I am using. Those are facts, 4,000 people, 4,000. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker, a next thorny issue is that of dialysis. [*Interruption*] We have now saved $60 million, [*Desk thumping*] 4,000 by $15,000, that is what the taxpayer would have saved from going to the private sector. Madam Speaker, the next issue is of dialysis. We know we have an NCD problem, and I would come to that shortly, but we have ramped up our dialysis services in the public sector, especially at San Fernando. We have a newly reconfigured and expanded haemodialysis unit and other initiatives are going on in other RHAs, but we are not only satisfied with that, we are now pushing the RHAs to withdraw. The Ministry of Health is going to take back ownership of dialysis by doing multiple shifts now. We want to move to a 24-hour rotation so more patients could be dialyzed in the public sector versus the private sector.

Hon. Member: Give me the numbers?

Hon. T. Deyalsingh: I cannot give you the numbers as yet, but we will be saving millions and millions of dollars from taxpayers. That is what we are doing. That is why the Welch Report should have been discussed with our colleagues opposite, but our colleagues, under the guidance of the Member for Siparia, turned their

backs on the Welch Report, turned their backs on public sector health provision. Do not ask me why, only they can tell you why.

Madam Speaker, the world is facing a non-communicable diseases crisis, let us admit that, and Trinidad and Tobago and the Caribbean is a hot spot for NCDs, diabetes, hypertension, and the like, and again, the Welch Report mentioned this, and we took ownership of the problem. Trinidad and Tobago, building on the Port of Spain Declaration of 2007, retook ownership of this NCD issue on coming into office, and I would now like to thank my other Caribbean neighbours, because in New York, where I just came back from, Prime Minister Mia Mottley spoke, Prime Minister Holness spoke, Prime Minister Gonsalves spoke. When Prime Minister Rowley was at Caricom Heads of Government, all Prime Ministers signed up to an NCD plan. So what are we doing in Trinidad and Tobago, we launched for the first time in this country the great pap smear initiative; 833 women for the first time in Trinidad and Tobago got free pap smears in the public health care sector. [*Desk thumping*] For the first time, and that saves lives, we were able to identify from the first batch of 475, 10 women in their pre-cancerous stage. That is lives being saved.

Mr. Al-Rawi: That is Terrible Terrence at work.

Hon. T. Deyalsingh: That is Terrible Terrence at work. That is the monster at work, as called by the Member for Siparia. That is Terrible Terrence at work. That is the monster at work. Saving lives makes me a monster, and saving money. But, Madam Speaker, I want to congratulate again Jamaica, Barbados, and so on. When Prime Minister Mia Mottley spoke, and we are going to steal this idea from Barbados, I am singing that.

Mr. Al-Rawi: Borrow.

Hon. T. Deyalsingh: Borrow, borrow. Prime Minister Mia Mottley said they now

are instituting in Barbados "Water Wednesdays". We are going to borrow that idea.

"Fruit Fridays"—healthy eating. We are going to borrow that, but now we in Trinidad are going to add something to it, "Skipping Saturdays". "Skipping Saturdays"—skipping rope, physical activity. All Prime Ministers signed on to that, and the Minister of Health from Jamaica phoned me two days ago, he wants to come down to Trinidad to launch something called "Caribbean Moves", where all the Caribbean islands—I am hoping Turks and Caicos will come aboard too, as we have the hon. Speaker here—to get this region moving—moving.

10.30 a.m.

Madam Speaker, coming out of the Welch Report and recognizing that diabetes is a major problem in Trinidad and Tobago, we have started a very integrated, innovative programme to deal with diabetes in Trinidad and Tobago; the statistics are well known. Statistics on childhood obesity are well known, everything.

Madam Speaker, yesterday at North Central Regional Health Authority I had the honour to launch, for the first time in Trinidad and Tobago, something we have been talking about for decades. Dr. Geoffrey Frankson made this term popular when he used to be on the radio many years ago, "wellness"—"wellness". We launched yesterday our first Diabetes Wellness Centre in the country, [*Desk thumping*] in the public sector.

Let me tell you what used to happen to diabetics in the public health care centres, and Mrs. Jocelin Jackson spoke about this yesterday. She was one of the people who gave testimony, 74 years old. She came up to the microphone and she boasted, "My fasting blood sugar this morning was 85"; first time. So I called her up. "Ah say, Ms. Jackson, 'Ah beat yuh, mine this morning was 77'." The point

is, a diabetic in the public sector to get treatment had to make an appointment; they had to get their bloods taken; they had to wait for results. Based on the results, they may see a consultant. The consultant may then send them to a dietitian, may send them to a podiatrist, may send them to an eye specialist—because diabetes affects all those things—may send them to a nephrologist, and all of that eats up time. It would take you between a month and a half to two months for a patient to navigate the maze. I am hearing calls next door, "more", yeah, to navigate the maze of going to all these different silos. We say, none of that. We are now putting the patient, for the first time, at the centre of the universe for diabetes care.

What the Wellness Centre is, is that the patient comes in there on a morning and all the services are in the same location and the patient gets their bloods, gets their results, "see de dietitian, see de podiatrist". If they need to see a nephrologist, if they need to see an eye doctor, if they need to see a psychologist, it is all there. In half day now a diabetic patient can get world class attention at our first Diabetic Wellness Centre. So that, combined with our great Pap smear initiative, talks about how we are dealing with the issues of NCDs. And this is not recognized even by our colleagues opposite, because they were not part of the Joint Select Committee to discuss the Welch Report.

The issue of diabetes is not only an affliction of the elderly, as I spoke about the Wellness Centre. For the first time in Trinidad it has been done in pockets, gestational diabetes. Diabetes affecting our pregnant population is a big issue. Based on our policy directives we will be rolling out very soon a national gestational diabetes screening project in the public health sector for all our estimated 18,000 pregnant women who utilize our public health care system, and we want to roll it out to the private sector also.

Our children are not to be forgotten. We have banned the sale of soft drinks

in schools, [*Desk thumping*] and that I am told it is already having some impact on our children. We are also getting them moving. So, Madam Speaker, that is the local and Caribbean perspective on how we are treating with NCDs.

I now want to turn to another issue mentioned in the Welch Report, and which has been giving our senior citizens especially, a lot of trouble for years, and that is CDAP. A PNM project under the late Mr. Manning, launched by the then Minister of Health, Mr. Colm Imbert. There have been complaints for years about the unavailability of CDAP, and it is true. Before I can tell you what we did, let me tell you what we found with CDAP.

Every year in this country we dispense roughly $35 million worth of CDAP drugs—35 million. But what I found was that the administrative cost, the cost to manage the programme, the cost to administer the programme was $46 million—$46 million to administer the programme. It gets worse. Of the 46 million, 35 million was pure dispensing fees to pharmacies. So we were spending 35 million for drugs, 35 million to pharmacies to dispense the drugs and 11 million in other administrative fees.

Our colleagues opposite took up the dispensing fee in an election year, from $8 per item. So, if a CDAP prescription has four items, four drugs, the pharmacy will make eight by four, $32 to dispense. That is what it was, and I am sure the Member for Barataria/San Juan will tell me why he took it up. It was then taken up to $13 per item. So from $8 to $13 per item, which was borne by the taxpayer, but the taxpayers were still not getting the drugs, just dispensing fees—just dispensing fees.

The other issue was that drugs were only being sent to pharmacies once every two months. So if the pharmacies got drugs in week one of a two-month cycle and it finished, or it finished by week two or week three, they had to wait

until the end of eight weeks for their drugs to be replenished. We said no. The same way with the Wellness Centre, you put the patient at the centre of your activities, we are saying let us put the patient at the centre of CDAP.

We went to Cabinet, Cabinet discussed it long and hard. We reduced the dispensing fee from $13, back down to $8, and all that money that is being saved is going toward two things: one, purchasing more drugs and, two, we have now increased the delivery cycle from previously once every two months to once a month. That is what this Government did with CDAP, [*Desk thumping*] and that is working itself through the system now. We started it in August, and I am told by some pharmacies it is already reaping benefits. They are getting drugs more frequently and the issues of stock-outs are becoming less and less. And poor people who depend on C-DAP, the same way the Minister of Finance did magic with Food Cards, did magic with pension, did magic with disability grants, in the same vein that he put money into the hands of the disadvantaged, we are putting money into CDAP drugs and making sure the channel of distribution is filled at all times. That is value for money, PNM style. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker, in addition to that—and I want to make a plea to my pharmacist colleagues. When I sat with the monitors—there are three monitors, as the former Minister would know, who go to pharmacies and they will come back with stories of practices that deprive citizens of drugs when they go to a pharmacy. So he has artificial shortage of drugs. Do you know what is one of the major reasons? There is no pharmacist on site to dispense the drugs.

I have issued a directive to the monitors, and that directive has resulted in 13 warning letters sent to pharmacies between February of this year to September of this year. Get your act together. It must not be an excuse that you cannot dispense CDAP drugs because a pharmacist is not there. You are supposed to have a

pharmacist from the time you open to the time you close. We are not going to allow citizens who depends on CDAP to be deprived of their CDAP drugs because a pharmacist is not present.

I now turn to another item of Caribbean importance, just as I spoke about our NCD issue of Caribbean importance. It has to do with insect vector and mosquito-borne diseases. But I am not going to talk about CHIKV and dengue too much, but our rate of dengue is right down.

Madam Speaker, in going to the conferences recently in both Washington and New York, the Caribbean, all the islands, are very concerned about our WHO classification as far as Zika is concerned. Zika had a rampage through the world in 2016, and based on that, WHO has classified various countries Category 1, 2, 3 and 4, based on whether Zika is still present, the risk of a future outbreak and so on. The following countries are in Category 1. I remember the hon. Prime Minister, Dr. Rowley, speaking about an issue of Barbados recently, and he said what is good for Barbados has to be good for Trinidad and Tobago. He said that. It also applies to Zika, and I will tell you why.

Countries like Anguilla, Antigua, Barbuda, Barbados, Belize, Bonaire, St. Eustatius, Saba, Cuba, St. Kitts, Grenada, Dominica, St. Vincent, St. Martin, Trinidad and Tobago are all in Category 1. What that means is that we are classified as an area with new introduction or reintroduction with ongoing transmission, which is statistically inaccurate. However, when tourists are searching the websites of different countries to know where to go and spend their vacation, they depend on this categorization, and when we were having discussions, every single Minister of Health and Prime Minister spoke about the decimation of their tourism product, especially honeymoon tourism, because honeymooners do not want to go to a Category 1 country, and we fall into that

Category 1 situation. If we want to develop tourism via Sandals, we have to get out together with Barbados and all those other countries, from Category 1 to Category 3.

At the COHSOD, the Council for Human and Social Development, a decision was taken by all Ministers present, and some Prime Ministers, to write a very strongly worded letter to WHO, that based on data supplied by CARPHA, that Trinidad and Tobago and all these other countries—because it was sad to hear Ministers of Health talk about the decimation of their tourism product, how many hundreds of millions of dollars in revenue they are losing because of this unfortunate Zika categorization. So we want to use our collective power as a Caribbean nation to talk to WHO to move us from Category 1 to Category 3.

Madam Speaker, I now turn to infrastructure—Point Fortin Hospital, Arima Hospital, Couva Hospital. The Member for Siparia spoke boldly and proudly about the Point Fortin Hospital and the Arima Hospital, but the part of the narrative that our Opposition colleagues always forget is that they had no long-term financing for those projects. You know how they were funding those projects? Just like how they were funding the Point Fortin Highway, out of the country's current account. That is what they were doing. You had no long-term financing for Point Fortin and Arima; we had to do that.

In my first week as Minister of Health, China Railway sought an appointment with me, "Minister, you owe me $75 million". For what? Because when you signed these agreements the country is supposed to put 15 per cent counterpart funding into these, and do a framework agreement. Our colleagues opposite, in an election year, were supposed to make that $75 million payment to China Railway in June of 2015. They never did it. We had to do this. I had to go frantically to the Minister of Finance and he had to finance that through our current

account. The Attorney General almost had a heart attack when he saw the issue. No long-term financing. Point Fortin Hospital—it is only this year, under this administration, that the long-term financing for Point Fortin was put in place. [*Desk thumping*] We had to turn night into day via diplomatic notes via the Austrian Embassy in Caracas, get the Ministry of Foreign Affairs involved, the Office of the Attorney General, the Minister of Finance, Ministry of Planning and Development to put onto the framework agreement that the Point Fortin Hospital is a project.

They did not do that; just award a contract, leave it there and we will figure it out. They had no plan. They were funding Point Fortin and Arima just like they funded the Point Fortin Highway, out of the current account. You do not do that. That is not good fiscal management. It is no management. And I am hearing, "why"? Oh my gosh, if I had to explain that to you—

Madam Speaker, we are now doing a new Sangre Grande Hospital, and let me tell you briefly how we are doing it, to save money. We are using the same design for the Point Fortin Hospital, the same Austrian people, and the cost of that hospital, we are just taking the Point Fortin model, putting it in Sangre Grande. We will be saving this country about $500 million on the same hospital—$500 million. Let me explain to you why, two things. You will have some increased fees for the Point Fortin Hospital, because of the clay-type soil there, you have to put in piles, and you have some work to do on oil wells. Even if you allocate $20 million to that, the cost of Point Fortin was originally $1.6 billion. We are doing that Sangre Grande Hospital for $850 million, because we are using the same design, the same contractor and the same model. But what has come down is the UDeCOTT fees.

The old UDeCOTT fees were about $500 million. Madam Speaker, when

we came into office we cut the UDeCOTT fees on Point Fortin and Arima by a half of $1 billion. Where were those UDeCOTT fees going, one may ask? Under this administration, under this Prime Minister who has a zero tolerance policy for corruption, we are not paying that half of $1 billion to UDeCOTT.

The Couva Hospital, untruths again. The hon. Member for Siparia is on record as talking about the Couva Hospital being a gift from the Chinese.

Madam Speaker: Hon. Member for St. Joseph, your original speaking time is now spent. You are entitled to 10 more minutes to complete your contribution. You may proceed.

Hon. T. Deyalsingh: Thank you, Madam Speaker. The Couva Hospital was never a gift, "yuh paying for it". What we have decided to do, we have set up a company called the "Couva Medical and Multi-Training Facility", under the chairmanship of Mr. Nigel Romano. They have their first board meeting tomorrow, and they, together with the University of the West Indies, would chart the way forward.

In the few minutes I have left, I want to talk about a very important issue raised by the Welch committee. I have three doctors opposite me, and I do not know if you will defy your political leader, but I need your input into this project. I need your input. A former Minister of Health is valuable; the Member for Fyzabad, sincere, valuable; Member for Caroni East, whatever.

A new major policy intervention mentioned in the Welch Report that affects almost every citizen in Trinidad and Tobago and their families, is the issue of: How do we deal with blood in Trinidad and Tobago? It has been a problem from time immemorial. I was listening to Radio 97 recently, and one of my favourite announcers, Celia Scott, was making an appeal for blood. It should not have to be. She was also making an appeal for extended opening hours at the blood bank. I

want to thank Celia Scott for her advocacy, and to let her know we have been listening to you and we have been planning for this.

The current system of blood collection/blood distribution is inequitable and quite frankly dangerous. Both, inequitable and dangerous. The current chit and credit system does not work for the poor and disadvantaged. So we want to do several things. One: we want to increase access to blood banking, and I want to let Ms. Celia Scott know that your advocacy has not gone in vain. Our new opening hours for blood banking at North Central Regional Health Authority on a Saturday for the first time, is 7.00 to 3.00 p.m. on a Saturday. Putting the customer at the centre. At Southwest on a Saturday, 7.00 to 3.00. At eastern on a Saturday, 8.00 to 12.00, but people associate blood banking only with the blood bank in Port of Spain, which is never open on a Saturday. From later on this month the blood bank at Port of Spain will be open from 7.00 to 3.00—on a Saturday. [*Desk thumping*] So people do not have to take time off from work. It is more customer focused. But it is much more than opening hours.

We estimate that we used about 21,483 units of blood that we collected in 2017. The chit system, the credit system and the transitional credit system are inequitable and dangerous. The chit system can be given by the donor to a recipient. Where is the equity in that? What about the person who does not have a donor, the person who does not have family? You know what they have to do very often? Go and pay somebody to give blood, and we know that. It has been going on for years. Blood is a product that is not to be bought and sold, not to be bartered.

We are going to be moving this country to a pure, 100 per cent voluntary, altruistic system of blood donation. What that does is eliminate the need for poor people having to go and pay somebody to give blood, and it takes the risk out from

them going to risky donors, people with HIV, people with hepatitis and so on. That is what we are doing. We will be moving this country to 100 per cent voluntary blood donation system. [*Desk thumping*]

My friend from Fyzabad, he knows. We need emergency blood supplies in this country for about 10 women per day who are in labour, which is one of the causes of maternal deaths, postpartum haemorrhage. We need that, but we need a safe blood supply. For our neonatals, to drive down infant mortality again, you need blood. So that is a major intervention for 2019, which we have already started, and we have invited PAHO to come down and provide technical assistance for us.

A lot is going on, and I look forward to—not oral submissions. I will like Fyzabad, because I always say, Fyzabad and Barataria/San Juan you all are sincere. Give me your sincere recommendations as we move this country forward to 100 per cent voluntary, altruistic blood donation. I am hoping that your political leader will allow you to engage with the Government on this matter of national importance. This is not about politics. I urge you, but I am hearing Naparima is turning around and telling you all, no.

Madam Speaker: Member for St. Joseph, your contribution is directed to the Chair. It is getting a bit too direct.

Hon. T. Deyalsingh: Thank you, Madam Speaker. So I urge those two gentlemen who are always sincere in their criticisms of me and your recommendations for the health care sector.

Madam Speaker, in the couple of minutes I have remaining I want to talk about matters pertaining to the constituency of St. Joseph, and it is an honour to represent them in this august Chamber.

I want to commend my colleague, St. Ann's East—Maitagual Community

Centre. Work started on the Maitagual Community Centre under the NAR in 1986. They put up some pillars, and those pillars have been an ornament in the area of Maitagual from 1986 to now. I am happy to report for the citizens of Maitagual, your community centre is being built thanks to St. Ann's East. [*Desk thumping*] I want to thank St. Ann's East because the Curepe Community Centre has been totally refurbished. It was an absolute dump; so Curepe, Maitagual. I want to thank the Member for St. Ann's East. I want to thank her again for opening the Mount Hope/Mt. Lambert Community Centre, and I want to thank her for giving the residents of Caiman a new community centre next year. It is in the PSIP.

Dr. Rowley: What about Diego Martin East?

Hon. T. Deyalsingh: Diego Martin has to talk for themselves. [*Laughter*] Madam Speaker, these are some serious community activities. Other community activities in St. Joseph that we are doing are repaving roads. [*Interruption*] I want to thank the Minister of Works and Transport.

Madam Speaker: Order. Order.

Hon. T. Deyalsingh: We recently got some roads paved in Mt. D'or, right outside the Roman Catholic church. They used to refer to that stretch of road as the "first Bocas". Bridges are being repaired. We have some serious work to do in Maitagual again. The river that runs along Maitagual is in need of embankments on both sides. I have spoken to the Minister of Planning and Development, and I want to tell the residents of Maitagual that your bridges and your river flowing through your community are my top priorities for fiscal 2019. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker, other projects that we are doing up in the Maitagual area are, bringing water relief to Spring Valley; bringing water relief to Caiman again. So Caiman can look forward to both water relief and a community centre. We

have paved the roads in Farm Road in Bangladesh. Those roads were some of the first to be paved in St. Joseph. The roads in Farm Road were really bad. Other projects we are doing: we are fixing pavements in Mt. Lambert; pavements are now nice. We are replacing signs in Valsayn North; it looks nice. So throughout the length and breadth of the constituency a lot of work is ongoing.

So, Madam Speaker, as I come to a close, I have given you a report on what I have done on health. I want to ask the Opposition, not to defy their political leader but to join with us in meaningful dialogue on matters of health.

Madam Speaker, with those few words, I thank you.

Madam Speaker: Member for Caroni East. [*Desk thumping*]

Dr. Moonilal: Let us hear a real doctor.

Dr. Tim Gopeesingh (*Caroni East*): Madam Speaker, it astounds me that the Prime Minister does not want to hear my contribution on health. He will be educated if he stays here.

Madam Speaker: Member, continue with your contribution please.

Dr. T. Gopeesingh: Yes, sure. It amazes me that every time the Member for St. Joseph gets up to speak there is a degree of arrogance that is displayed that is very unfortunate. Name calling and casting aspersions on people's integrity. [*Desk thumping*] But if we were to respond the same way when you have a failed pharmacist on two occasions, [*Laughter*] wanting to be a medical doctor and who could have never been a medical doctor, it is "tabanca". It is "tabanca".

11.00 a.m.

So therefore—

Ms. Mc Donald: Madam Speaker, I rise on 48(6).

Madam Speaker: Member. Member for Port of Spain South, I am on my legs. I will ask all Members to display some tolerance. I would overrule the objection.

Please continue, Member for Caroni East. [*Desk thumping*]

Dr. T. Gopeesingh: And I take this opportunity today to ask the Member for St. Joseph, tell the county and tell the people, how many degrees does he have?

Mr. Deyalsingh: Three.

Dr. T. Gopeesingh: Is it a thermometer? I am just asking a question.

Mr. Al-Rawi: 48(1).

Dr. T. Gopeesingh: I am asking a question. Sit down.

Madam Speaker: Member for Caroni East, you are experienced enough that when a Member stands to make an objection that you know to sit. All right? Member for Caroni East, I will ask you move on. This is not anything about any personal CV and so on. Let us move on.

Dr. T. Gopeesingh: I am guided, Madam Speaker. I am guided. When people become personal and you begin to respond to them, they take offence to it.

Mr. Al-Rawi: I rise on Standing Order 48(1).

Dr. T. Gopeesingh: Stop disturbing me, "nah". Sit down.

Madam Speaker: Member for Caroni East, as I say, you know that you are senior in this game, and you understand the rules of engagement. We all have to show some tolerance and decorum. Every Member is entitled to rise on a Standing Order and hopefully you have enough confidence in me to rule accordingly. Okay?

Dr. T. Gopeesingh: I am guided.

Madam Speaker: As you said, you have been guided. I have asked you to move on from all the personal references now and go on to the substance of your contribution.

Dr. T. Gopeesingh: Yeah. I am moving on, Madam Speaker. I want to take this opportunity to congratulate our political leader and Opposition Leader [*Desk*

thumping] on a very erudite and distinguished [*Desk thumping*] professional political dissertation. It was professorial in nature, political, professional, pointing the way forward for economic and national recovery for Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*] In her contribution she ensured that she told the country where we were, where we are and where we are going to when we retain government in 2020 or before. [*Desk thumping*] That is the brilliance of our political leader who has stood side by side with international and world leaders around the world and that cannot be disputed whatsoever.

I want to respond to one of the statements made by the Member for St. Joseph. When our political leader experienced any medical problem, as we all do as human beings, she ensured that she stayed right here in Trinidad and Tobago [*Desk thumping*] and did not leave Trinidad and Tobago. Whether it is public or whether it is private, she stayed right here as opposite to many of our colleagues on the other side who leave and flee and go internationally to seek their medical attention.

I also want to ask Members on the other side: How many of you, speaking from your heart, sought medical attention at private nursing homes in this country? And you all know who you are. So when you cast aspersions about the political leader seeking medical attention at St. Clair Medical Centre, or X, many of our colleagues on the other side all sought medical attention at St. Clair Medical Centre or elsewhere. Sso my point has been made.

Madam Speaker, our health sector is in crisis. There is no question about that, and no matter what the Member for St. Joseph says, the people are seeing it across the country. And how many of us in this House and outside really have the confidence that when a member of their family or they themselves are admitted into a public institution in this country, do they have the confidence that they will

be well-treated and they will be managed in a way that their health problem will be better? That confidence is not there, Madam Speaker, and if that confidence is not there from our Members right here in the House without seeking to get assistance from some top doctor in the institution—"Here boy, look after somebody for me nah. Meh family is in the hospital, try and get some help for me." That is the type of health situation we are in this country. And when they come to tell us that the World Bank wants to get assistance from Trinidad and Tobago to tell us how maternal mortality and so on has been reduced, I wonder where they got that information from on the statistics? Where was the wind blowing?

Madam Speaker, the most important health issue in Trinidad and Tobago is the issue of non-communicable disease: diabetes, hypertension and cancer. And until we do not get that correct, we will be making no headway. In 2010 to 2015 the hon. Prime Minister at that time sought some assistance from the IADB and got $120 million—

Hon. Member: Grant?

Dr. T. Gopeesingh:—not grant, support from the IADB to deal with the non-communicable diseases of diabetes, hypertension and cancer. And this is what this present Government is utilizing now in their thrust.

The complications of diabetes, hypertension and cancer occupy more than 90 per cent of the wards in the secondary institutions. So what do we have to do? We have to prevent those diseases. We have to have early detection and then management. So the prevention of these diseases, first of all, is by a massive national campaign, and a national campaign to educate people on the prevention of obesity with diet and exercise and screening programmes for the cancer patients to prevent cancer. But we have not seen that from this Government, a dedicated effort to do that at a national level. [*Desk thumping*] And this is what it is missing.

So they can talk from now to eternity on NCDs and so on, but are you making any significant dent in the prevention and early detection of these diseases to avoid the complications of heart attacks, strokes, dying from hypertension, diabetic ketoacidosis and, of course, the cancers? What screening programmes do they have for prevention and early detection of cancers? The statistics show that cervical cancer—about 100 patients die per year from cervical cancer. About 200 people die from prostate cancer; 200-plus. Another 200-plus die from breast cancer.

So, Madam Speaker, we can make a significant interjection into prevention of these complications; complications of renal failure, blindness, and amputations. And this is increasing in Trinidad and Tobago. It is increasing, and our Prime Minister, between 2010 and 2015, brought a team together to state, "I want to make a significant impact on this NCDs", and immediately she set a team together with the Minister of Health to rejuvenate the 105 health centres across the country. [*Desk thumping*]

We were able to improve the infrastructure; build new health centres; repair more than 65 of those health centres with URP and CEPEP personnel. Up to today they have not paid the CEPEP personnel and the CEPEP team for helping with that construction.

Then we went on to open these health centres up to 9.00 during the days of the week, and on weekends up to 4.00 p.m. so that people could have, on their way from work, could have gone, get their blood pressure tested, get diabetic testing and help to manage their diseases. So these health centres, 65 of them, which we opened up to 9.00 p.m. during the week and 4.00 p.m. on weekends, we were able to make a significant impact in the health sector.

And then when this Government comes, and the Minister of Finance makes

a presentation and says they are opening three health centres 24 hours in different places, that is a far cry from opening 65 across the country, and you beat yourself on the chest and say, "Wow, I am doing a great job."

There are about 12,000 deaths occurring in this country every year, Madam Speaker, 6,000 women, 6,000 men approximately. Cancer is about 2,000 of these deaths, heart disease and stroke about 2,000, diabetes about 1,500, from hypertension another 1,000. So, and the statistics show that the deaths from these situations—from these diseases—are worsening. So whatever the Member—the Minister speaks about—is really not making any significant impact upon the population.

We also have nine district health facilities in Trinidad in addition to the nine hospitals. We must make use of our night district health facilities to ensure that the patients—could be the second-line treatment for patients who are having complications rather than filling the wards of the hospitals.

The Minister speaks about pap smears and he beat himself on the chest that 833 pap smears. The private cancer centre does thousands of pap smears by itself, and the Government has failed to give them their $1 million that they have asked for; they also do screening for breast cancers.

We have 105 health centres, nine district health facilities, nine hospitals across the country. We should be doing these pap smears on a daily basis five days a week for patients coming in. [*Desk thumping*] So when you come and tell the people you have done 833, Madam Speaker, we have close to 650,000 women, 650,000 men in the country. And from age 18 to 65, we have close to about 350 to 400,000 women who are supposed to have pap smears from about three years after beginning sexual intercourse, up to age 65. Once you have had three or four negative pap smears in succession, you could have a pap smear every two or three

years.

You know what rate we are in this country? About 6 per cent of the women get pap smears on an annual basis, and it is the same 6 per cent come back to have their testing on a regular basis. And we made significant inroads into that by ensuring that we started to do these pap smears within the health centres, the district health facilities and the hospitals. [*Desk thumping*]

Breast cancers. It is—after age 40 any woman should have a mammogram every two years, and after age 50, a mammogram on a yearly basis, and we are supposed to have these institutions—public institutions—doing these mammograms. You should have mammography machines in every public institution in this country and people to read the mammograms. We are making no dent in the increase in breast cancers. And when these patients go for treatment, whether it is for surgery—they have a breast lump, they cannot have the breast lump removed to be tested. That is happening now with the closure of the Port of Spain General Hospital. Hundreds of patients are waiting for surgery to be done to determine whether the breast lump that they feel is breast cancer or not, and they are in anguish, they are frightened, they cannot get their surgery done.

And everyone knows to get surgery in a public institution now—the minimum cost for any major surgery is not less than $50,000. How can people get surgery in private institutions? The public institution is supposed to be allowing them to get the breast tested, the breast lump removed and tested there. [*Desk thumping*] We do not have enough pathologists in the country to even read the reports for when these breast lumps are removed. So, we are talking about health care and health care, and that is the reality.

When you do pap smears in this country, 6 per cent of all pap smears prove to be a problem. We need to do colposcopy, have a look at the mouth of the

womb—the cervix—under a microscope, biopsy it and send it to pathologists. We cannot do that because we do not have colposcopes in the public institutions in Trinidad and Tobago. So what are we doing? We are dancing top in mud. [*Desk thumping*] That is why I say that the health care system needs resuscitation, and three years have passed and this Government has done absolutely nothing [*Desk thumping*] for the health care sector, Madam Speaker; only talk and old talk, no management.

How many times has the Minister of Health walked through the nine hospitals or walked through the nine district health facilities or walked through the 65 health centres across Trinidad and Tobago? How many times has he told the board to go into the hospital to see what is happening? When Minister Khan was Minister of Health he ensured that the boards that he put together were part of the management [*Desk thumping*] to investigate what was happening. And he himself walked the walk and talked the talk. [*Desk thumping*] That is what you want, management of the health sector, not old talk. [*Desk thumping*]

So the effect of a screening is abysmal, it is poor, it is pathetic, and patients could be having a problem, they could be having a cancer now and not knowing they have a cancer. And what is wrong in having a blood test, a PSA for the men? The hon. Prime Minister spoke about going to California to have his prostate tested with PSA. You can do the test right here in Trinidad. [*Desk thumping*] A PSA is just a simple blood test and that can tell you whether you are developing a prostatic cancer or not. Why can we not have these done at the health centres and in the nine district health facilities and in the hospitals? You know how many lives we will save from prostatic cancer when it is diagnosed at an early stage, Madam Speaker?

Let me come to the Couva hospital. Mrs. Persad-Bissessar as Prime

Minister of this country made sure there was a strong move and dedication to improving our health care, and that was uppermost in her mind. At one time she came to Cabinet, and I could out these secrets, and said, "Members, crime has been the number one in Trinidad and Tobago, but health care now seems to be taking over. We need a dedicated effort and a front to deal with this issue." [*Desk thumping*]

And when the issue of maternal mortality and the infant mortality and prenatal mortality and morbidity arose and we found that we needed to reduce that significantly, the hon. Prime Minister appointed a team headed by the Member for Fyzabad who was chairman of the South-West Regional Health Authority then to look at the maternity services in Trinidad and Tobago.

And that team met in 2013 and did—Madam Speaker, I have a copy of the book here before me, May 10, 2013; the Ministry of Health Services Review Committee of Trinidad and Tobago. And in that committee we had some distinguished colleagues of ours who sat on that. Mrs. Rawlins, about six or seven degrees; Maria Dillon-Remy from Tobago; Dr. Spencer Perkins; Professor Ramsewak; Dr. Sonia Roache, Dr. Adesh Sirjusingh who is now the head of the women's health; Dr. Vanessa Stewart, Dr. Victor Wheeler; Prof. Seetharaman and Dr. Maria Rollock, chaired by the Member for Fyzabad; and made significant findings and significant recommendations, all of which with the implementation of these recommendations have resulted in a drop in maternal mortality and morbidity. [*Desk thumping*]

So what this PNM Government is claiming to be their victory, we want zero maternal mortality, it is as a result of the work done by the People's Partnership [*Desk thumping*] administration and the foresight and the brilliance of the hon. Prime Minister at that time to set up this committee to do the work; and they want

to take credit for it. So when the World Bank call them they taking credit for it. It is the work of the PP Government.

All the public hospitals, whether it is the Port of Spain General Hospital, Mount Hope hospital, San Fernando General Hospital, were overcrowded. You have the Arima and the Sangre Grande. There was a lacuna somewhere in the central part of Trinidad that people were not getting the health care that they really needed, particularly the children, and it was the decision to build the Couva hospital.

And when we started the Couva hospital, they say earthquake, it is an earthquake zone. They did all kinda thing. Earthquake pass and gone, you see anything happen to the Couva hospital? [*Desk thumping*] We built the Couva hospital. They completed it. $400 million in sophisticated equipment: MRI, CT scanning, radiology department, fluoroscopy, everything. Yeah? It is lying idle three years now rusting, losing its warranty. But it is "bad mind" and spite and vindictiveness [*Desk thumping*] that they have decided not to open it. Just like the south campus, just like two of the schools we were building in south Trinidad, not to continue. Everything started by PP Government, no, we not touching that, we do not want it. Vindictiveness. Political vindictiveness. [*Desk thumping*]

And they do not know what to do. They first said, "You do not have enough doctors and nurses to open it". We have 600 doctors waiting for jobs now and 300 nurses waiting for jobs. [*Desk thumping*] So that is the furthest from the truth; disingenuous. Then they say they want a private sector/public sector partnership. Where is that? They talk about "Interdent". Where is "Interdent"?—probably seeking dental health now. [*Desk thumping*] Then they said they are waiting for the Welch Report. Welch Report come and gone.

Then they say, we are giving it to UWI because they owe the University of

the West Indies $200 million. So they are taking a $200 billion institution, giving it to UWI. They say what?—they opened a medical school there, an off-shore medical school when the faculty of Medical Sciences of UWI never even ran a parlour before. [*Desk thumping*] And so, where is the money coming from to run it?

And then when they said, you will be opening Couva, you have to pay. My God! The people paying taxes all the time, health surcharge, they are paying taxes which they cannot pay anymore, you want them to pay more for if you open. They are not going to open Couva hospital. Five years will come and go and they will not open. [*Desk thumping*] And they are coming and say, "Well, where you getting the money to build the Point Fortin Hospital?" That is the ingenious ability of the People's Partnership to seek funding from within [*Desk thumping*] to do their own work without having to borrow that amount of money.

So, we started the Point Fortin Hospital. We started the Arima Hospital. We were on our way to doing work at the Sangre Grande Hospital. We renovated 65 health centres. We opened them up to 4.00 p.m. We started massive programmes to reduce the non-communicable diseases and so on, Madam Speaker.

What is happening now? They closed down the Port of Spain General Hospital, the central block. They say it is "earthquake". Well of course all of us were very concerned about this earthquake, and we were concerned about our brothers and sisters in the whole of Trinidad and Tobago; so we were worried. [*Crosstalk*]

Madam Speaker: Hon. Members, I want to hear the contribution of the Member for Caroni East. There has been a constant buzz which has been increasing and therefore he has had to strain his voice just to keep my attention. I would like you all to cooperate, listen in silence so that the Member for Caroni East can make his

contribution. Member for Caroni East. [*Desk thumping*]

Dr. T. Gopeesingh: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, they removed all the patients from the Port of Spain General Hospital main block. They crowded them in two of the ENT and ophthalmology wards on another wing. They put some down at St. James in the Infirmary. They want to send some at Caura Hospital. Caura Hospital is where patients with the HIV and tuberculosis are. They want to send them there. They said, germs, infirmaries, where people who have been there for 30 or 40 years, poor thing. They do not know where to go again. You sent them down there.

The 400,000 people in the north-west of Trinidad are in pain and in agony because they do not know what to do [*Desk thumping*] if they get medical problems where to go and what to do. And thousands are awaiting for this elective surgery to be done, whether it is hernia, whether it is breast lump, whether an angiography, whatever, and they are claiming that they—what are they going to do about the Port of Spain General Hospital? One man said, "They have a contract do it. It is starting in a month". The next one say, well they are going with a BOLT arrangement. Well, that BOLT bolted already. So where is it? Fooling the people on a daily basis. It is a "rell" run-around, according to our Prime Minister. [*Desk thumping*] We still consider her our Prime Minister. That is the brilliance and the team that she led to do the things that she did in the five years.

What about St. Ann's Hospital now? It is dilapidated. The electricity going off, there is no water sometimes, the wards are breaking down, the people are suffering. Where you should be helping these mental health patients, you are making them worse because of the environment.

In San Fernando General Hospital the ceilings are falling. It is falling all over the place in the operating theatre, in the wards, wherever. What are you

doing, hon. Minister? What are you doing, the Rowley-led Government, to this health sector? So when I said that the hospitals are killing fields, they are killing fields. [*Desk thumping*]

Then you refuse to hire the 600 doctors. You said that the junior doctors do not want to work, they do not want to go in remote areas. We asked the question, up to today he has not answered—the Member for St. Joseph has not answered the question: How many doctors applied? How many doctors were hired? [*Desk thumping*] And how many doctors refused to go where they are supposed to go?

And you have 1,640 foreign doctors practising in Trinidad and Tobago and you "cyar" hire your 300 local doctors. [*Desk thumping*] You have nurses who are seeking jobs internationally and you are losing them, hundreds are being lost to Canada and the United States and even Great Britain, and you refuse to take them up. We have 1,500 nurses shortage in our hospitals in Trinidad and Tobago, and 300 begging for jobs, Madam Speaker, and you are not taking them. You have overcrowded wards, people waiting on trollies in the emergency department for two days to get a bed. In all the hospitals, the emergency department flooding with patients on wheelchairs, who are sleeping on wheelchairs for 24 hours and cannot get a bed.

The CDAP drugs are not available in the 250 pharmacies. Our former Minister of Health knows that now and he has been asking what is happening. You had $600 million to buy pharmaceuticals. You have not brought the pharmaceuticals under the Public Sector Investment Programme. You have that money, and there is a drug shortage in Trinidad and Tobago. Some of the hospitals do not even have the pharmaceuticals to help the people when they go to fill out their prescriptions. Long waiting time for surgery, and you are talking about cataract surgery. Man, there are hundreds of other surgical operations that need to

be done.

You have brain aneurysm. You have brain tumours. You need people with angiography to determine whether they need heart surgery. You need stomach surgery. You need gallbladder surgery. You need hernia. People who need surgical intervention for fractures, legs, hip. They have to lie down on a bed for six weeks with an old pulley system with their foot up in the air and a pulley pulling down their legs to stretch it out so that the fracture will try and heal. They do not have plates and screws, they do not prosthesis. They refuse people who had been supplying them, refuse to give them, because they are not paying them, Madam Speaker. [*Desk thumping*] That is the state of our health sector.

Mr. Indarsingh: What a sad state of affairs.

Dr. T. Gopeesingh: If you go to the orthopaedic wards, you will see how many of them are on pulleys for six weeks. They cannot even do toileting for themselves, and all they need is to going into the operating theatre, get a pin and plate and they are out in one day.

11.30 a.m.

Madam Speaker, that is our health care. I am ashamed to be a citizen of Trinidad and Tobago [*Desk thumping*] to be part of this destruction of the PNM health sector. Because of you all, because of the destruction by the PNM. That is what made me join to become a politician, because I could not stand to be governed by the People's National Movement [*Desk thumping*] and I made a determination that I will come forward, I would even sacrifice my old profession to some extent to try and come help the people. [*Desk thumping*] That is what I did. You think—I "doh" want to talk about myself here. [*Laughter*] They know enough already. [*Crosstalk*]

You know what are the health headlines, Madam Speaker? Saturday,

September 19th, *Trinidad Guardian* written by Sasha Wilson. "Parents beg Deyalsingh to help sick child". An 18-month child. Friday September 21st, *Newsday* by Marlene Augustine, "Miracle, hoping for a miracle, no dollars for surgery so child can run again"; 10 April, 2017, "Toddler denied assistance from Children's Life Fund"; August 07, 2018, letter to the editor. *Trinidad Express* by Daren Chatoor, "Waiting for a bed". He said:

> This experience made me aware of the abhorrent conditions in which people of this country live. We had to wait until 4.00 a.m., because there were no beds available. Many sick people had to sleep on the ground.

Friday, September 06, 2016, *Trinidad Guardian* by Radica De Silva. "Shortage of drugs and tools at San Fernando Hospital". That has spoken about that. "Pensioner going blind waiting for eye surgery". And he talked about cataracts, no tools, no lenses. They are not buying the lens, and when they buy the lens it is inferior lens. So, people who have cataract operations, when they have the cataract replaced they "cyar" see better than they had the cataract. [*Interruption*] "So children cyar geh help." The Attorney General said that he was going to bring legislation and alter the legislation for the Children Life Fund so that more children could become eligible. Where is that? Three years now and that is nowhere. [*Interruption*] Nowhere. Where are the surgeries for life threatening diseases? No surgery. When patients have cancer they have to have surgery first, they cannot get the surgery. Then if they have surgery they cannot get the chemotherapeutic drugs because the chemotherapeutic drugs are Z class drugs. If you do not treat a cancer patient properly with the first line treatment and the best pharmaceutical agent, the patient will die within six months to a year.

Mrs. Gayadeen-Gopeesingh: And he stand up and boasting.

Dr. T. Gopeesingh: And you stand up and boasting about your health care. No

reagents to do basic lab tests in the hospital. Somebody gets a chest pain and they go to the hospital, they are worried whether it is a heart attack. The doctor does not know whether it is a heart attack. The ECG might be a little abnormal. They are waiting on the enzymes study to be done, the troponins. They have to take the blood and go to a private lab outside, by the time they go to the private lab and get back the results, the patient dead.

They reduced the spending. Lack of beds and overcrowding at the hospital. Postponement of surgical procedures. They do not have aneurism clips. When I was chairman of the North-West Regional Health Authority in 1970 to 2000, one day I got a call from one of the neurosurgeons at the hospital, "Dr. Gopeesingh, we need an aneurism clip". How much for it? Well, he put one of his junior doctors because he in the brain. They say it is about $120,000 for the entire set, but you have to buy the set. So I say, "Well, it is a life we have to save." So, we bought the set, the patient's life was saved. Today, you have nothing like that in the hospital. No aneurism clips, no plates, no screws. No neurosurgical and orthopaedic pins. Refusal to hire the trained doctors. Refusal to provide any information on how many doctors you have hired. Yet still you have so many of these, and you are boasting about World Bank asking for your advice on maternal mortality. This is the advice. We can give you the advice from here. It is in the report, and you know it is in the report. When you talk about infrastructure—Minister, you do not have any, really, I mean, courage to say that the People's Partnership has been foremost and to the forefront in improving the infrastructure in all our area. [*Continuous desk thumping*]

You know, I am amazed, Madam Speaker. I read through this book, *Public Sector Investment Programme 2019 "Turnaround"*, which is the run around and I looked at page—the health page, it starts at page 73, "Construction of new health

facilities". They "cyar" name one new health facility they started by themselves. What you call ab initio. None. All that they are talking about in the budget, the Minister of Finance, is what the People's Partnership started. Upgrade of existing hospitals and health facilities, the sum of $10 million was utilized. What can that do? You have over $150 million outstanding and available for you under the Public Sector Investment Programme and the IDF, but you spend $10 million under the Hospital Refurbishment Programme, when all these institutions are crumbling before your eyes. And they are talking about page 76, Medical Equipment Upgrade Programme, utilized the sum of $25 million. Vital sign monitor, they buy vital sign monitor and that is a big thing for them. In my practices, I have about six vital sign monitors [*Laughter*] [*Desk thumping*] and you buy seven vital sign monitors and you write it in your book, Madam Speaker. [*Laughter*]

Hon. Member: It is not a joke.

Dr. T. Gopeesingh: It is not a joke, Fuad. And you buy an anaesthetic machine, each hospital operating theatre has about four or five, Mount Hope is supposed to have about 17 anaesthetic machines, the operating theatres. Port of Spain is supposed to have five in the main block, and three in the maternity, and two in the ophthalmology and ENT wards. But you buy one and you make a big thing about it. Is there no shame in writing this, Public Sector Investment Programme and "Turnaround". What you turnaround? It is a merry go round. You know, the millennials would not know about the gramophone. You know where the turn table and the gramophone and you put the needle on and the needle stick, you hear the same thing time and time and time again. That is what is happening now, the same thing happening time and time again. [*Desk thumping*]

Mental health: Madam Speaker, the pain and suffering that the people of

this country are experiencing, creating fear, and apprehension, and depression their psyche is at the lowest level. Many people cannot deal with their own depression, and yet still there has been no significant determination by the PNM Government to do anything about mental health. Nothing. [*Desk thumping*] And you see reports on the newspapers—I am sorry I did not cut them out—by Ms. Mora and others who have been working with citizens who have been challenged mentally with depression, also with schizophrenia or manic depressive syndrome, or bipolar syndromes. Some persons could be very manic now and then they become very depressed and become suicidal. But there is nothing in the country to show any improvement in the mental health situation, and we are going to ensure that we do quite a lot of work on that when we come in. Quite a lot. [*Desk thumping*] So, if you go through the PNM manifesto promises, expand the training opportunities for our citizens in all areas of health care. We trained them. Minister Karim when he was Minister of Tertiary Education opened the Tunapuna—

Mr. Karim: El Dorado.

Dr. T. Gopeesingh: El Dorado Training Institute, and he started training hundreds of nurses, these same nurses have come out now but "cyar" get jobs. We were training paramedical allied professionals there as well, they "cyar" get jobs. So, they talk about expand training opportunities. We did the training, but they cannot hire them. Refurbish and modernize our existing ageing hospitals and construct new health facilities: Well, that is rubbish, because they have not done anything like that. Higher standards of health care, I just showed you the abyss that we are in over the health sector situation. Primary care would be strengthened: What strengthening of primary care? Efficiency and value for money in the public health care delivery system. Pure—[*Crosstalk*]

Mrs. Gayadeen-Gopeesingh: Madam Speaker, 53. I am standing on Standing

Order 53, please. I am not hearing him.

Dr. T. Gopeesingh: And you are next to me.

Madam Speaker: Member for Caroni East.

Mrs. Gayadeen-Gopeesingh: Too much noise.

Madam Speaker: Member for Caroni East?

Dr. T. Gopeesingh: Yeah.

Madam Speaker: You could continue.

Dr. T. Gopeesingh: Thank you. Financing the modernization of the health system: This is in the manifesto you know, Madam Speaker. Essential that we move swiftly to introduce the long awaited Universal Health Insurance Programme, especially for vulnerable groups. Madam Speaker, in 2015 they were talking about the health insurance, to start the health insurance, national health insurance. In 2016 budget promise they come back again. The Universal Health Insurance Programme has been an elusive goal. We will place universal health insurance high on our agenda and ensure that by December 31, 2018, a national health insurance system will be in place and operational thus bringing much needed relief to our citizens. Where is that? Three years, promises upon promises, and this is what the Minister of Finance has done with his budget. If I were the Minister of Finance I would have come here and say, listen, I giving you this budget in five minutes. "I eh taking three hours. I want to tell you ah raising super by $1, ah giving $150 more for the public assistance, and everything else ah saying ah say it already." [*Laughter*] [*Desk thumping*]

I say the same thing in "one day, two day, in one year, two year, three—he coulda" close the book and finish in five minutes. Promises upon promises, same thing. Revenue Authority, Toco Port, San Fernando Waterfront, procurement legislation proclamation. Everything the same thing, nothing done. "Is de worse

Minister of Finance this country has ever seen". [*Desk thumping*] And that was the same Minister of Finance who when we had distinguished members with economics and so on, and finance, he used to take a turn on Minister Dookeran at that time, and then Minister Larry Howai. What has happened today? You better stick to engineering and stay with your partners in engineering. [*Desk thumping*] When the stadium fall down in Grenada, and the walls fall down in Diego Martin. You did any financial accounting? Management accounting? International Monetary Finance? Anything like that? Financial management? Accounting management? You "doh" have a clue about finance, but that is the weakness and the paucity of the bench on the other side. I am not casting any aspersion on any Member. All of you have your own strengths and ability. But as Ministers of Government you have failed miserably. [*Desk thumping*] Not one of you can say what project that you have started and have completed. Not one of you.

And this PNM Government has two or three people who are running the entire country, and they are falling over themselves. They do not know what they are doing. They do not know what they are doing. So that is the cabal. So promises again in 2018. They are saying construction of the Arima hospital is ongoing. We started that. That hospital should have been finished, according to the Member for Oropouche East, by March 2018 already. Point Fortin Hospital is not going—[*Interruption*] you know, Madam Speaker, PNM has been talking about building Point Fortin Hospital from since 2002—

Mr. Indarsingh: In 1956 difference.

Dr. T. Gopeesingh: In 1956 Dr. Williams promised it, and in 2002 they rehashed it. It took a UNC Government, a People's Partnership Government to start the Point Fortin Hospital. [*Desk thumping*] You know what it is that people living in Cedros, and La Brea, and Point Fortin, they get a heart attack or something, they

have to come by to San Fernando and by time they reach they dead. Point Fortin needs the hospital, and that is why we were building it, and that is why—we almost are certain that they will not complete.

Madam Speaker: Hon. Member, your original speaking time is now spent. You are entitled to—[*Interruption*] Member for Naparima, I am certain you would have an opportunity to speak when the time comes. Member for Caroni East, you are entitled to 10 more minutes, if you wish.

Dr. T. Gopeesingh: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, you know what is ironic? They say they are doing such a great job, but they are begging the Opposition for help to run the health system. [*Desk thumping*] And that is to tell you the competence we have on our side. We will help you all. We will run this country. Pack up your bags and go and we will run this country. [*Desk thumping*] Call an election now. Call an election now.

Madam Speaker, in the last 10 minutes I want to talk about the achievements of the People's Partnership Government in the health sector over the five years that we were there under the distinguished leadership of the Minister of Health at that time. We established a Children Life Fund which has saved the lives of many sick children. We reduced infant mortality from 20 per 1,000 live birth in 2010 to 12 per 1,000 in 2014. [*Desk thumping*] we constructed a 216 in-patient San Fernando Teaching Hospital. It was completed. We established a single electronic window to assist with the food cards—with the health cards that the Minister was getting for 250 pharmacies. Over 8,500 individuals benefited from the implementation of the pre-paid dialysis programme, which allowed patients to receive free dialysis treatment. Over 4,300 persons benefited from cardiac care at both public and private health institutions. You saved the lives of 4,300 people who would have died from heart attacks and would have died from heart problems if you did not do

the surgery. [*Desk thumping*] More than double the number of physicians working in our institutions. We built or refurbished 105 health centres. We completed the children's hospital and started the Arima and Point Fortin Hospitals. The Air Pollution Rules became law in 2015. We introduced the Nurses and Midwife Act, the Nursing Personnel Act, done by the Minister of Health. National health card for 275 pharmacies to help with the CDAP drugs, construction of the Carenage, Palo Seco, Point Fortin, Sangre Grande enhanced health centres. Where is the Member of Diego Martin West? We built a new health centre. One of the most beautiful health centres you could get in the country. [*Desk thumping*] Mount Hope Women's Hospital, for years—under PNM they said they are going to transfer the women's thing across to the big block at Eric Williams Medical Sciences Complex. They are going to mash up the maternity hospital and take it across.

We built a new wing at the women's children hospital for outpatient. When you pass on the bus route you would see. It is painted red. [*Laughter*] We delivered the nice Scarborough Hospital and developed the 240-bed San Fernando Teaching Hospital. We also built and refurbished, well, the 105 health centres. We established the El Dorado Nursing Academy to support the country's need for nurses and medical personnel. Allied Health: We had the Chinese Neurosurgical and Interventional Cardiology team, and neurosurgery team, helping to do neurosurgical procedures where the local personnel needed a little more training to do, and they trained a number of our local personnel to do these neurosurgical operations. We established a teaching wing at San Fernando hospital. We opened the oncology suite at both San Fernando and Sangre Grande hospitals, so patients could get the chemotherapy treatment at both areas. [*Desk thumping*] So, you reduce the amount of patients dying from cancer. The Blood Bank was opened on

Saturdays in 2012 by our People Partnership's team.

Dr. Moonilal: Repeat that, I think he is—

Dr. T. Gopeesingh: The Blood Bank was opened on Saturdays in 2012. So, when the Minister speaks now about opening the Blood Bank, it is something we had forgotten.

Mrs. Gayadeen-Gopeesingh: They closed right now for lunch.

Dr. T. Gopeesingh: And they are now closed.

Mrs. Gayadeen-Gopeesingh: For lunch until 1.00.

Dr. T. Gopeesingh: So, we got the $120 million loan from the IDB for non-communicable diseases. We set up a special purpose company to deal with the difficulties we were having in implementation in the health sector, for maternal and child health, we had a comprehensive policy, and we created the Director of Women's Health which you have now put into place. [*Desk thumping*] We restarted the Oncology Centre and we will complete it when we get back into Government. [*Desk thumping*] We had a master plan for the general hospital, Port of Spain, the San Fernando and Mount Hope. We linked up the Royal Society of Medicine.

So, on the way forward, Madam Speaker, for our health care—you know, I want to make some comments. The Welch Report, Dr. Winston Welch is my colleague from 1960s, late '60s, very distinguished guy, good surgeon. But his team produced a report which was not anything more than what the Gladys Gafoor Commission of Enquiry had put forward. There were no new recommendations on that report from what the Gladys Gafoor report had in 2008 to 2010. So, we said this is an exercise in futility in trying to go to a special select committee to discuss it because there was nothing new in it. Nothing new. [*Desk thumping*] And we have all the recommendations of the Commission of Enquiry into the Operations

and Delivery of Public Health Care Services in Trinidad and Tobago, done by Mrs. Gafoor and her team. Acute shortage of human resources, inadequate infrastructure, shortage of equipment, drugs and so on, more education and training, all these things, maternal and child health. All of these things which we took into consideration: Pharmaceutical services, national blood supply, ambulance service, public health inspectors, dental services. All these things we took into consideration and we began to implement when we were in Government between 2010 and 2015. So, the Welch Report cannot give us anything new.

But you have the ability. You have it there before you. You take it and implement what the Welch Report said that you should implement, and this is why you still—you are trying to implement it but you have reached nowhere. So we have our documentation on the way forward. Madam Speaker, I have it with me. Just to touch on some of these, complete construction equipment and operationalizing of hospitals and community health centres being built or refurbished including Couva, the National Oncology Centre; Point Fortin, Arima Hospital. Development of individual master plans for the development of Port of Spain General Hospital, San Fernando, and Eric Williams. We will expand an institutionalized the Children Life Fund, we will intensify the existing awareness programme, combating childhood obesity and expand its reach. Maternal and childhood policy and standard operating procedures for obstetrics and midwifery. We will update and implement it. We will initiate the national awareness campaign on mental health, about 50 recommendations on the way for us. Public/private partnerships will be made to widen the Ministry of Health, health reach with respect to mental health promotion. We would formalize the draft national comprehensive mental health implementation plan for execution, mental health services would be integrated into all routine health service delivery system.

We will increase the number of trained staff at the research unit of the Ministry of Health, so that more research in health can be accomplished in timely data provided. The Ministry of Health will collaborate with the Ministry of Education, Ministry of Tertiary Education and Skills Training and research institutions, focus on the health sector, develop the comprehensive plan for health wellness and preventive medicine. We will introduce the nurse practitioner and the Aid to Nursing Programme into the health services, creating more employment opportunities. We will focus on hospital administration. That is where we are weak in Trinidad. We will give more scholarships for people who need to train in hospital management and hospital administration.

So, Madam Speaker, I want to say how proud we are with the work we did in 2010 to 2015, [*Desk thumping*] how unhappy we are about the present situation in the health sector. The health sector crisis is looming big and we are worried about our patients in Trinidad and Tobago. We wish that they would do something more to uplift it and better the health care programme, and we would give all the support that is needed in the interest of all the patients of Trinidad and Tobago.

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

The Minister of Trade and Industry (Sen. The Hon. Paula Gopee-Scoon): Thank you, Madam Speaker, and it is always a pleasure to be in this honourable House. Madam Speaker, since coming into office in late 2015, this Government has demonstrated both prudence and decisiveness, under the astute leadership of the hon. Prime Minister, Dr. Keith Rowley. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker, we adopted a fiscal stance that has stemmed the tide and has turn around this economy and for this we must thank the hon. Minister of Finance. [*Desk thumping*] Now is the time for us to move forward and to expand

and transform this economy into a more sustainable one. Now is the time for us to redouble our efforts towards economic growth and a comfortable living for all, and a society which is fair and just. I also wish to thank the business community. I take the opportunity to thank them for their support to the Government through the chambers, the Trinidad and Tobago Manufacturers Association, and also the Trinidad and Tobago Chamber for the support shown to the Government, when faced with a very difficult decision regarding Petrotrin, and which we took, and all of the support of the business community. We thank them.

Before going into the substance of my debate, I wish to respond to a few matters raised by Caroni East, and I am surprised that he did not really comment on the Ministry of Education. That is what I would have expected from him. [*Crosstalk*]

Madam Speaker: Order! Order!

Sen. The Hon. P. Gopee-Scoon: Firstly, he spoke about the Point Fortin Hospital and they started, and they started and so on. But, you know, the Point Fortin Hospital is very dear to me, and it is very disappointing that when you all were in office and you all had top dollars and oil prices were at $140 a barrel, you did not build the Point Fortin Hospital, you did not build the Arima Hospital, you did not build the Sangre Grande Hospital, you did not attend to the central block [*Desk thumping*] at the Port of Spain General Hospital. You are talking about the central block, you did not attend to that, and you knew the stage of the building. [*Continuous desk thumping*]. And let me correct you, that the contract—[*Interruption*] no, with regard to that very—[*Interruption*] I am speaking now. [*Crosstalk*]

Madam Speaker: Members, let us have some order! Minister of Trade and Industry.

Sen. The Hon. P. Gopee-Scoon: With regard to that central block, let me correct your wrongful assertions again, that the contract for the first phase of the building of that central block has been signed, and the preliminary works have actually commenced contrary to what you said. [*Desk thumping*]

You also spoke about the IDB loan for NCDs. You never singed the loan when you should have when you were in office, and you left it to us when we came in office, and we have signed that loan, and we are moving ahead with our NCD project. [*Desk thumping*] And the other thing is, that little child, I think Shanice is her name. The child who needed to have the liver transplant. Let me correct you: The Children Life Fund never refused Sheenece or the parents. It is a fact of a liver transplant. It is a donor issue, and they know that. And it has all to do with finding a suitable donor. It is not any matter of the Minister of Health or the Children Life Fund refusing the child, and you know that. And again, all of the claims that you made in the last 10 minutes that you did this and you did that, and you did this and you did that. If you did that and you did that, why did you all not win the last election? [*Desk thumping*] And that is because other things super—and I am not going to—I do not want the Speaker to put me down to sit on the account of privileges. I have just started my contribution. And that is because other things superseded whatever you implemented, small that may have been. And let us not go and talk about corruption and so on, I am not going there. But other things superseded your actions, and that is why you did not win the last election. [*Interruption*] All right. You are talking about when you come back and when you come back, that eh happening. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker, I really have to go into the substance of my contribution and not bother with the hysterics from Caroni East. So, Madam Speaker, we have had a lot of economic challenges, and the country well understands that over the

period. Since we came into office as a matter of fact, the first three years, yet we have rebounded, and I am sure that other speakers have said it but I am going to say it again, we have turnaround and we are now on the path towards economic growth and prosperity for Trinidad and Tobago. But, our economic fundamentals remain intact, and permit me just a minute or two to say these again: That our economy grew in real terms by 1.9 per cent. That headline inflation fell to historic lows of 1.9 per cent in 2017. That the productivity of workers in all industries rose by 1.8 per cent in fiscal 2017. And, of course, the current account recorded a substantial surplus of US $1.9 billion TT as at 2017. Moving from a deficit of $670 million in the previous year, and as at August 2018 our growth or official amounted to 7.6 billion or 8.3 months of import cover, which is more than reasonable by world standards. The net asset value of the Trinidad and Tobago Heritage and Stabilisation Fund stood at US $5.9 billion in September 2018. And I say all of that to say that this economy is in good shape, and we are well on our way to achieve the things that we have set out to do. The economy has indeed turned around.

12.00 noon

And I want to go straight to diversification because that is a pet peeve. It appears on the other side and it is now my pet subject. So I go straight into diversification and what shall I speak of before, firstly, more than anything else than the manufacturing sector? Now, Madam Speaker, "dey doh like to hear the truth, eh", and they do not want to acknowledge that there has been a 7.3 per cent [*Desk thumping*] in overall growth in the manufacturing sector. [*Crosstalk*] Members, [*Crosstalk*] no, no, Members—and you are talking oil and gas. Have you read the Review of the Economy? If you turn to page 80, [*Crosstalk*] you turn to page 80, Gross Domestic Product of Trinidad and Tobago at constant market

prices in—right? And—page 80, I said, the manufacturing sector is now, in 2018, projected to be—[*Interruption*]

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: Madam Speaker, Standing Order 53(e).

Madam Speaker: Hon. Members, if you could settle down. I understand that the visit by the Minister of Trade and Industry might be causing some excitement, but let us just remember, just remember where we are and behave in a manner fitting of this Chamber. Minister of Trade and Industry.

Sen. The Hon. P. Gopee-Scoon: Thank you. And the fact is that the manufacturing sector will contribute $32 billion to our country's overall GDP. And the source of this data—let me make it clear, you are going to come up with all kinds of other things—is the Central Statistical Office. And the presentation and the categorization which you have complained about is the very same thing as last year. Nothing has changed but the growth, right? These are the very facts. And manufacturing, we will acknowledge, is broken down into four categories. The food beverages and tobacco sector which grew by 5.62 per cent; [*Desk thumping*] that is a fact. Textiles and clothing grew by another 1.46 per cent. We will acknowledge that petroleum and chemical products grew by 9 per cent.

But, Madam Speaker, the overall growth is encouraging and in the petrochemical sector we are pleased. We are pleased for the increased output which is on account of the gas availability made to those industries at Point Lisas under our Government. [*Crosstalk*] And even in this category we have asked the CSO to provide us with a breakdown because we do believe that there is some overlap when it comes to electrical products. The manufacturer of electrical products will also be included in that and by the time I come to the Upper House I will have details on the breakdown of that. But I mean, this is very hopeful. When one considers the recessionary period and, in fact, the global recession, this

increase is very heartening and more so the fact that it has come from our exports because we all know that demand would have been down, would have been suppressed in Trinidad and Tobago and even in the Caribbean region, in the Caricom region, so most of it has come from exports and we are very pleased about that.

I want to show you. I want to come to a select group of products which have in fact improved because the proof is in the pudding. It is in the facts. The manufacture of malts and liquors and manufacture of soft drinks, mineral waters increased by 20.3 per cent; the manufacture of bakery products increased by 13.39 per cent; the manufacture of chemicals increased by 12 per cent. You do not want to hear these things. The improvement in the category of grain mill products and starches and prepared animal feeds improved by 8 per cent; manufacture of basic metals and fabricated metal products, 7.62 per cent; the processing and the preserving of fruits and vegetables improved by 5.82 per cent. You do not want to hear this but this points to the fact that the manufacturing sector is on a roll and their production and—I am telling you, is on a roll and is doing very well. And I could go on and on.

But, Madam Speaker, even looking at the country's trade surplus, even looking at the country's trade surplus, that must be recognized. And the point about it is our exports have increased from 2016 to 2017 by 21 per cent from $50 billion to $62 billion; and that is noteworthy. Our imports also have declined from $53 billion to $46 billion. So overall there is a trade surplus and that is noteworthy. And looking at the non-energy exports, whilst there is a trade deficit, it is a fact that our non-energy exports have increased from $12.9 billion to $16.26 billion, a 25.94 increase, Madam Speaker. So looking at the trade deficit, yes, we still have a trade deficit of $19 billion and that is because of our appetite for

imported food and cars and clothing and so on, and that we must curb. But at the end of the day even the trade deficit has improved from a negative $26 billion to now a $19 billion.

And even—I have looked at the fact, Madam Speaker, that 208 companies are now exporting in Trinidad and Tobago; 208, large, small and medium sized companies are now exporting to 69 different countries in this world. There are those, the larger ones who are exporting, seven of them are exporting more than $100 million, but there are those small ones and those are the ones that we must pay attention to, 156 of them just in the category of one to 10 million. But those small and medium size manufacturers, those are the ones that can grow and those are the ones that we are prepared to assist. And our trade with United States, Caricom, Costa Rica, Colombia, Canada, all of those countries, our trade with them has improved. In short order, I wish to say that in three years we are really achieving our goal in terms of increasing our exports to improve our revenue streams or improve our foreign exchange and also to create jobs in the manufacturing sector. [*Desk thumping*]

The Minister of Finance would have said we are doing it our way and in fact we are. The question is, what are we doing differently? And how did we achieve what I said we achieved? And again, it is because of this Government's excellent working relationship with the TTMA and the Trinidad and Tobago Chamber. We are a facilitative Ministry and therefore our work together with these bodies is vital for improving our exports. Again, when one looks at the incentives and allowances which are available for manufacturers, their fiscal incentives, their import duty concessions on raw materials, machinery, and equipment, on some packaging material as well, from all of the allowances, promotional expenses, capital expenses, depreciation allowances, all made available to manufacturers

from successive PNM governments. Again, the services of exporTT, whose mission is to develop a more sustainable and diversified export sector with a focus on increasing our non-energy exports. And the TTMA tells me that—the directors tell me that they wish to increase our export by 50 per cent by 2020. A little difficult to achieve, quite some goals but they are working hard at it and we are achieving that.

Again, the focus is on new exports and this is the focus by exporTT, our new exporters. Therefore, they are working very, very closely with them. I do not have the time to speak about all of the services of exporTT, but one in particular I will mention is the Co-Financing Services. That is a facility that is available to these new exporters and that is designed to offset the cost incurred with export related activities. Like, for instance, attending trade shows, booth rentals, shipping of samples, all of those, product testing, brand registration in overseas markets, international capacity, building workshops, attendance and translation fees. All of those activities we assist and provide 50 per cent of the cost of those and that is available largely to the small exporters. You talked about building the SME sector; that is the kind of work that is necessary. And the value for co-financing, we have raised from 15,000 to 20,000 and in 2018, 25 companies; 25 SMEs would have benefited from this co-financing facility.

In addition, another area of support at the trade missions and I can tell you that the Ministry of Trade and Industry again works well with the TTMA and the TT Chamber in supporting and attending, in hosting inward missions as well, and since coming into office the Ministry has supported 15 trade missions to 12 different markets. Some of them like Cuba and so on, we keep going to year after year and we have had more than 100 participating companies on these trade missions, and that is going to be our continued focus because we are beginning to

see the results. And so we have had trade missions in the last fiscal year to Costa Rica, to Panama, to Cuba. And in Cuba, for instance, where we are not actually seeing the increased numbers as yet, we are now beginning to hear that all of the efforts are bearing fruit. For instance, ANSA Coatings has gotten their first order for paint into Cuba and that is for about 15 containers of paint. So it is starting. But we have continued to do trade missions to Jamaica, to Panama, to Guyana, and there is the importance of course of working beyond Caricom because that market is pretty much saturated, so therefore we have gone into Colombia, Dominican Republic and so on. So the efforts, you are seeing the results because we have seen the figures, the proof is there. But as I said, the focus has to be on the extra-regional markets.

So, Madam Speaker, I do not want to spend too much more time on this. I would have announced sometime—I think it was last year—that we were looking at doing a Partial Scope Agreement with the Government of Chile. I want to say that during the course of the year we did form a workshop group between ourselves. This working group was to facilitate exploratory discussions towards the Partial Scope Agreement. Chile is an extremely important market for us in terms of our ammonia and other products exporting to Chile. I am pleased to say that we have concluded the exploratory discussions and we will now proceed to formal negotiations. Again, we have implemented the Panama's Partial Scope Agreement. We are also reviewing the Guatemala and the El Salvador as well.

There are other facilities that we have launched, that we committed to launching in the last budget and that we did in fact launch during 2018. One such, and again to assist small manufacturers more than ever and agro-processors, is the grant fund facility which allows each individual or company to access $250,000 per applicant for the purchase of machinery and equipment within the areas of

manufacturing and agro-processing. So as we said, this has gotten off the ground and it is a gift to the SMEs. And the priority sectors which we have targeted included cocoa, coffee, chocolate processing, aquaculture, local beverages. To date we have awarded two applicants the sum of $351,000 and six more are currently being processed.

Madam Speaker, another area of support is with regard to research and development, and theme four of the Vision 2030, National Development Strategy recognizes the importance of developing globally competitive businesses. But in order to do so, to be globally competitive, you have to engage in research and development so that you can develop new processes, new products that would distinguish you from other products that are available on the market. So that, as we promised in this last budget, we did launch the research and development facility [*Desk thumping*] where grants of up to $1 million can be afforded to any company or person desirous or satisfying the application requirements. And the aim, again, is to stimulate and support investment in new technology and innovation. You are talking about moving from the opportunities, for you to move from the idea stage to the development of prototypes to feasibility studies, to the commercialization of the product; that is the range of activity which moneys from this fund will satisfy. To date three applications have already been approved, totalling $787,000 and five more are now being processed.

So, Madam Speaker, we are at the point where because of all of these programmes, we have developed a number of new and innovative products, new products that will find themselves in niche markets and I am talking about our chai rum, our dark chocolates which are on the shelves in Harrods of London, the Twigs Natural Tea which has won many awards internationally, the Moruga Hill Rice which is unique to us and also sweet potato fry. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker, we also said in the last budget that we were going to launch the foreign exchange facility at Eximbank and we have in fact done that. This is a $100 million fund which was launched in May 2018 by the hon. Minister of Finance and of course this eases the previous challenges, some of the challenges that manufacturers would have had in terms of being able to pay for their inputs into manufacturing for their raw materials and so on. There are conditions which are required to be satisfied, but the moneys are available. This is functioning. This is operational and it is really of great assistance, in particular, to the small and medium size manufacturers who would have difficulties in accessing foreign exchange from their bankers.

Madam Speaker, we had also spoken last year about this export allowance. And it was not launched, but, however, several discussions were held with the manufacturers in this country and there was quite a bit of collaboration as to the format of this. I mean, the Government wants to recognize, yes, we would make incentives available, but it ought not really to hurt the country's revenue to any great extent. So this incremental foreign exchange tax credit announced in fiscal 2019 is the result of discussions between the manufacturers and the Government and it is to be applied—the tax credit is to be applied on incremental exports only, that is, incremental exports to the previous year. As I said, we have given the manufacturers what they have asked for and I give you the assurance that this incremental foreign exchange earnings tax credit will come into force during this fiscal year and the end result will be again, boosting exports and enhancing foreign exchange earnings and so on.

Madam Speaker, I want to talk about, the question is always, what products do we go into? What subsectors, what industries? And so I want to talk about the Aluminium Industry.

Mr. Lee: Sural.

Sen. The Hon. P. Gopee-Scoon: Madam Speaker—you know about Sural. You should have done something with Sural but you did not do so. [*Desk thumping*] Madam Speaker, last Wednesday the Government launched yet another major project which is the Alutech Research and Development Facility, which is a manufacturing plant to produce aluminium wheels, rims from imported ingots. This has nothing to do with the Alutech Smelter plant. This is the production—this is the manufacturing of alloy wheels, aluminium wheels and parts—we will come to parts as well—from imported ingots. And really this launch was a defining moment in terms of the development of the downstream aluminium industry in Trinidad and Tobago and it is really a continuation of a journey which began since 2005, but of course was purposely derailed by the UNC-PP Government when they were in power. [*Desk thumping*] And you will recall that the construction of that plant really began in 2009, and when they came into power, for no good reason, the project came to an absolute halt with no activity between 2010 and 2015. Madam Speaker, we could have revolutionized the downstream aluminium industry. We could have done that, but they never saw the merit of it. In fact, I do not even think that they went into any discussion of it. It was all politics, a PNM project, and they stopped it.

There is absolutely no reason for you having stopped it that is fact and I am sure that you never reviewed the plans, never looked at the benefits to be derived from the downstream industry. So, as a result of that, we were well on our way to building this customized plant and as a result of that the plant remained unfinished and, of course, all of the opportunities for foreign direct investment were lost; all of the opportunities for increase in our revenue streams were lost; all of the opportunities for creating jobs were lost, again, and all of the manufacturing

equipment which was already purchased was left idle for eight years and really and truly you have to—I mean, think of it? You did not lose, it is the taxpayer who lost because, for instance, the construction firm which had been employed, termination costs had to be paid to them. Twenty million dollars in termination costs as a result of your decision not to pursuit this beneficial project.

And I can tell you that the Standing Committee on Energy, under the hon. Prime Minister of Trinidad and Tobago, Dr. Keith Rowley, we have standing committee meetings on our side, you did not before. The project was reviewed—extensive review by all parties, and Cabinet took a decision to move ahead with the project. We would have employed a local structural engineering firm to review the project, to review the work that had been done before to ensure that the designs would have been compatible with Alutech's needs and to conduct an analysis of the value of the work done and whether or not we could have used the steel frames which had already been in there. Fortunately, for us, the Alutech facility was found to be in generally satisfactory condition with just some restoration works needed and we now can move forward with it.

So, Madam Speaker, this Alutech research and development facility involved in the manufacture of alloy wheel rims is the first industry occupant at Tamana InTech Park and I can tell you again when they came into office they also stopped the development of the Tamana InTech Park. The flagship building which was 90 per cent complete. You put a coat of paint on it and you put a slab, a marble slab, with Vasant Bharath's name on it. But really and truly you did no work on the flagship building, just a coat of paint and the rest of the Tamana project you just stopped it.

I can tell you that when you do things like that whose loss is it really? It is the country's loss because many other countries have gone ahead and have

developed their technology parks and left Trinidad and Tobago behind, making it absolutely difficult now to get into the technology field. But it is going to be our focus to do just that, technology, high-value manufacturing. But, again, coming back to the aluminium industry. You really have to look and see where this industry is going, and it is that by the year 2020 this industry is targeted to grow globally to US $200 billion and I say this to tell you so that you can examine the loss that this country has had to bear on account of your decision.

We could have been far ahead with this and the country would have been enjoying revenue streams from this project because they simply did not see the value of the aluminium project. But we are going to go ahead with this and this is not the only one, Madam Speaker. We will also move ahead with the cable and wire plant and also the aluminium flats project, and both of these projects will be hosted in La Brea.

So, Madam Speaker, again we are satisfied with the—[*Crosstalk*] Yes, in La Brea and the people of La Brea will benefit from this. [*Desk thumping*] And, Madam Speaker, so this particular plant will generate on completion 100 direct jobs and more than 500 indirect jobs and, of course, put us in a position to earn valuable foreign exchange. The Shanghai Construction Group had been awarded the contract to construct the Alutech facility at a cost of just over $87 million and this facility is expected to be completed in 443 days at max, but I can assure you that by the end of 2019, early 2020 this project will in fact be completed. And, of course, the contractor has agreed to utilize 60 per cent local labour including local sub-contractors and, of course, this will bring great benefits to the people of Wallerfield and environs.

And, Madam Speaker, I can tell you that this fits well with all of the work that we are doing along the East-West Corridor, and my colleague, the Minister of

Works and Transport, will speak about the Curepe interchange and the Valencia to Toco highway and the Churchill Roosevelt Highway extension to Sangre Grande and, of course, the Arima Hospital and the Sangre Grande Hospital, Madam Speaker, all of these projects targeted at improving the well-being of the people of the East-West Corridor. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker, and I can tell you that with regard to the cable plants project and also to the flat-rolls project, those two projects will create 1,000 direct jobs and 3,000 indirect jobs as well. Madam Speaker, another commitment is if we want manufacturing to grow, another commitment is the provision of economic spaces. You have to have the spaces, so that when they are ready to put their plants down there is an organized commercial space that is ready. And so this Government took a decision to establish the Phoenix Park Industrial Estate and this is very close to the Point Lisas park. It is five minutes away from it and, of course, this work is expected to commence in January 2019 and will become completed by December 2019, 12 months later. [*Desk thumping*] The project is a US $104 million project which will be secured through concession loan facility form the China Eximbank. The new facility will target businesses of high value and light manufacturing, warehousing and distribution, emerging industries, et cetera, and, Madam Speaker, it is going to be a state-of-the-art, very modern facility which has distinguishing features in terms of environmental protection, energy savings functional and aesthetic value as well. You would know, Madam Speaker, that in June of this year the Government would have signed a Memorandum of Understanding with the Beijing Construction Engineering Group to develop this park, and concomitant with this is a commitment by the Chinese to provide the first 10 manufacturing plants into this estate.

So there has been interest already shown in the glass powder manufacturing

business, the air condition manufacturing, paper converting operations, ceramic manufacturing as well, wood processing, communication equipment manufacturing, building materials manufacturing as well, food processing, and again there is a commitment by the Chinese to ensure that there is 60 per cent local labour and the purchase of at least 50 per cent of building materials within Trinidad and Tobago. Again, this is an initiative.

You know, the last Prime Minister would have circled the globe and brought nothing back, no benefits to this country, but it is our Prime Minister on his recent trip to China who would have brought back with him this particular project [*Desk thumping*] and not only that, but also the dry docking and ship repair facility for La Brea. So, Madam Speaker, the background to this of course is also, the belt and road initiative, and again it is that the Government—China's Belt and Road Initiative, and again the Government is committed to making Trinidad and Tobago the gateway for China to South and Central America. That is the benefit of this park and our location here in Trinidad and Tobago.

So as I said, for a project update the loan application is in, the feasibility studies have been prepared, the commercial loan agreement has been sent Beijing Construction and by the middle of this month we will begin the formal negotiations to ensure that the project commencement date will be in fact in January 2019.

I go to another project, Madam Speaker, which is the Moruga agro-processing and light industrial park. [*Crosstalk*] I need your protection, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker: I just want to advise Members that any time I could hear a voice and know precisely who is the speaker, that person is offending Standing Order 53(1)(e). Please proceed, Minister of Trade and Industry.

Sen. The Hon. P. Gopee-Scoon: So, Madam Speaker, I go now to another park

which this Government doing and it is very different in terms of it being an agro-processing park, but not only agro-processing and I wish the Member for Oropouche West would have been here. This is a park in Moruga to facilitate agro-processing and also light manufacturing. The project actually commenced in May 2018 and will be completed in May 2019. This park will occupy about 18 acres of land. And this is the part of an initiative as a component of a wider national policy to prioritize the agricultural sector and to improve this nation's food security. But there was a lot of negativity regarding this project by the Member for Oropouche West. She asked questions as to why build this park? She saw no value in light manufacturing and agro-processing being placed in Moruga. She was very confused because on the one hand she was speaking about the value added in agro-processing and in agriculture. And on the other hand she was saying that there was no need for this park. The worst of the comments is that the Member accused this Government of giving the construction contract to friends, implying that there was no transparent process. Madam Speaker, that is further from the truth of this and the Member should really take kindly to doing some research before speaking and making these very awful comments.

12.30 p.m.

Obviously, the Member sees no value in agriculture. She had a lot of negative things to say about it, and the Minister of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries will deal with her when he comes to this honourable House. She saw no value in manufacturing, no value in agro-processing and really does not want to see the people of Moruga progress.

Why does the Opposition not want to see the people of Moruga progress? And I will tell you. "Yuh laughing?" When we took a decision to develop the petro-chemical sector, we could have taken that and put it on the East-West

Corridor. We could have taken that and placed it in Marabella and in Point Fortin. We did not do that. We put it in central Trinidad and it is the reason why Couva and Chaguanas are what they are today, and that is because of a decision taken by us.

But we have been very careful with this project. I can tell you that it is a successful project. Our approach has been a meticulous one. We have done a master plan to support the project, and I can tell you that there was a very open transparent process for the selection of the contractor. There were 12 proposals received. So, all of the assertions made by the Member for Oropouche West were in fact false. They were terrible allegations. We did all of the compliance checks and the technical evaluation; and the contract, after all of that, was awarded to Rosscon Limited. Rosscon Limited has about 30 years' experience in steel design and fabrication and engineering. They have completed several construction projects. Madam Speaker, this was entirely, entirely, entirely a project that went through the rigours of a proper and transparent process. All of the allegations, the false allegations, made by the Member for Oropouche West were completely unfounded and it is very, very disappointing.

So, I want to tell you that this project is definitely one to benefit the people of Moruga, along with many other projects that we are doing in Moruga: the Moruga fishing port and so on, which would be spoken to. And again, development is not about development of Port of Spain and San Fernando. Development is about all of Trinidad and Tobago, [*Desk thumping*] and the people of Moruga deserve no less, Madam Speaker.

I want to talk a little bit about the development of the maritime sector, and I feel that my colleague, the Minister of Energy and Energy Industries, may have spoken a bit about the dry dock and shipbuilding repair facility, which is to be

placed in La Brea, and I will tell you why I will speak about that, because the project was one which was contemplated by and touted by the last Government, when they were in office. It was a project under the Ministry of Trade and Industry. So, there was a lot of discussion. An agreement had been signed. The Cabinet had approved it. They were all over the place bragging and blagging about this project, but at the end of the day they had spent so much that they could not borrow at all to do this project, and they knew very well they could not do that. But as usual, it was misinformation and just talk, and this project went nowhere under the last Government. In fact, they were not interested in doing anything for the people of La Brea.

So, this project, the people of La Brea and Point Fortin are quite anxious and, of course, the public is well aware of the agreement which was signed between NIDCO and China Harbour Engineering group, and we know that there are two businesses that are to be established in La Brea: the dry dock and shipbuilding and repair facility and also the trans-shipment port, which will come after.

We know very well that during the construction stage, 3,000 jobs will be provided—direct jobs—and 5,700 indirect jobs. And on completion, this project will generate 2,700 direct jobs and 13,000 indirect jobs, Madam Speaker. And really and truly, this will energize and modernize the communities in the south-west peninsula. And according to the Minister of Finance, it really is a game changer. We expect the generation of revenues to the tune of US $500 million annually by the fourth year of operations. So there are significant opportunities to be gained, not only for the community, but also for a lot of companies who will benefit, in terms of people involved in the paints and lubricant production, steel processing, electromechanical equipment as well, lodging, catering. All of those

persons involved in all of those little sub-industries/subsectors will benefit from this project.

But I will tell you what this project is. This project, Madam Speaker, is an example of how social and economic needs can be stymied as a result of poor decisions by an ineffective and indifferent set of politicians because that is what they were. So, we are happy about this project.

I can tell you we are behind many of the countries that were ahead of the game. The world knew about the extension of the Panama Canal. That project would have been about a $5.4 billion project, and that was the time—when they were in Government, when they were receiving excessive revenues on account of high oil prices—when we really should have invested in that project. Many of the countries along the eastern ports, even Jamaica, had invested in projects, port projects, to take advantage of the Panama Canal extension; a tremendous opportunity. Again, you should have done it when you had your high revenues, but you were spending on other things like the Beetham Wastewater Project, at the end of the day, and the five rings you constructed on the entry to Point Lisas as well. Waste! Wanton waste and bad spending and wrong decisions by you all. [*Desk thumping*]

I want to tell you that since the—let me tell you about the losses—well, let me not go there. Let me talk about the opportunities that we could have had and the opportunities that we lost on account of that. Because I can tell you, since the opening in mid-2016, more than 3,000 new Panama ships have crossed the canal expansion during the first 20 months. Cargo through the canal increased by 23 per cent in the first nine months. Traffic had—

Madam Speaker: Hon. Minister, your original speaking time is now spent, you are entitled to 10 more minutes, if you wish to complete your contribution.

Sen. The Hon. P. Gopee-Scoon: Thank you. [*Desk thumping*] More than 90 per cent of the world's LNG now transits the Panama Canal. I say all of that to tell you just think, just think what La Brea would have looked like, had this commenced a few years ago. Just think of the jobs and the commercial activity. Just think of it. We all would have been proud of it, but you did not care about south Trinidad. [*Desk thumping*]

So, Madam Speaker, the entire maritime sector is one that is, again, one that we are focusing on, in terms of new sectors for development. And I can tell there are many untapped opportunities in there. Even within the ship repair and dry docking, there are at least three private sector companies in Trinidad that are already doing these kinds of activities and all of them are gearing up to increase activity, and so on. And all of this points to increased foreign exchange and job opportunities as well. Again, it is a sector that can grow, that will grow, but whilst the larger dry- docking facility would provide opportunities with regard to larger-type vessels, there still remain the avenues with regard to those vessels which are under 230 metres. Cabinet also took a policy with regard to trans-shipment and coal stacking, and again, there remains tremendous opportunity within those subsectors.

Also, the yachting subsector, the proof is in the pudding. Again, yachting arrivals have already increased from 545 yachts during the first half of 2017, to 683 yachts during the corresponding period in 2018. We are expected to have a marina in Tobago and in Trinidad. All of the applicants from the expressions of interests, which were invited for marina development in Tobago and in Trinidad, all of those proposals are now being evaluated and we expect that those projects will get off the ground pretty soon.

Madam Speaker, with regard to the creative industries, and I will speak more

to this when I go down to the Lower House. The Live Music District—

Dr. Moonilal: "De Lower House? When yuh going tuh de Lower House?"

Sen. The Hon. P. Gopee-Scoon: Sorry, when I go up to the Upper House—the Live Music District has been a tremendous success, again, with more than 68 participants, in showcasing 360 performances. And what I can tell you is that this was a pilot project and we now understand. We have done the consultations with the owners of the venues and also with the artistes. And we are now preparing our finalized programme to be presented within Port of Spain and we are then going to go out to other areas as well.

In fashion, the fashion Value Chain Investment Programme has been an absolute success, and I can tell you that we have now opened that to a four-tier programme, where we have a global value chain project, which is for those designers that are ready to export. We also have the traditional non-global value chain, the incubators and also the future support. A hundred designers are going to benefit from this programme.

The Bespoke Tailoring Programme has gotten off to a great start, [*Desk thumping*] and 28 participants are expected to benefit from this. This is diversification now coming alive under this Government, Madam Speaker.

So that, within film I can tell you that we are going to, during this fiscal—as a matter of fact by early next month—seven producers will now receive film rebates to the extent of $6.2 million. I will again speak to the strategic plan for the film sector and all of the projects under those.

Madam Speaker, there are number of projects under this whole diversification focus, and my colleagues will speak to this. But we have looked at all of the opportunities within manufacturing and agriculture, the creative sector, the tourism sector as well, and we expect job creation to the extent of 10,000 jobs

by the end of 2020. Once these projects are completed, the conservative figure is 10,000 jobs. You raise the point about the garment production facility and I am not afraid to speak to it. [*Crosstalk*]

[*Madam Speaker rises*]

Madam Speaker: Minister of Trade and Industry.

Sen. The Hon. P. Gopee-Scoon: I am not afraid to speak to it, Madam Speaker. This project is under review. There have been some budgetary constraints with UTT. It is a joint project between UTT and also FashionTT and we are now reviewing the project, re-scoping the project. There are possibilities. There are great possibilities that we can get EU financing, under the 11th EDF and that is the way that we are going.

When I go up to the Upper House, Madam Speaker, I will speak to improving the business environment and I will also speak to the number of investments that we have facilitated by our local manufacturers, in particular, and I will also speak to some foreign investments which are under way.

Madam Speaker, in particular, we look forward to the implementation, in 2019, of the automated construction permit system. This will be live by May 2019. And also, another significant one will be the Integrated Risk Management System, which will affect border controls and how we do business at the ports.

Madam Speaker, all of the projects that the Ministry, 90 per cent of the projects which the Ministry of Trade and Industry had committed to doing under the last budget, have already been implemented and are in the course of implementation. We are going to take this time and this fiscal year to complete what we have already started. It is pointless talking about new things and "ramajaying" about things, as the last Government, about new things. We are going to complete. The focus is on implementation and on completing what we

have started, Madam Speaker. And with those few words, I wish to thank you.

Madam Speaker: Hon. Members, I have been advised that now is a convenient time to take the lunch break. This House is now suspended. We shall resume at two o'clock for the continuation of the proceedings.

12.45 p.m.: *Sitting suspended.*

2.00 p.m.: *Sitting resumed*.

Dr. Bhoendradatt Tewarie (*Caroni Central*): Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. It is an honour and a privilege to be able to say a few words on this Budget Statement 2019 of the Minister of Finance.

The country, Madam Speaker, the people of this country, are under a great deal of stress and they feel it in their bones that things are not right and that something else needs to be done, and they are looking for direction and for clarity. And I hope today to speak, through you, Madam Speaker, not just to this honourable House but to them, to address some of the issues that might be troubling them, as they experience the present and look into the future, waiting for a sense of hope.

I want to start by acknowledging the tremendous contribution of our political leader and Leader of the Opposition, [*Desk thumping*] Mrs. Kamla Persad-Bissessar. She spoke in response to the budget. She spoke to the important macroeconomic issues and the challenges that the country faces. And she put forward the beginnings of a plan for rescuing this country and taking it from recovery. [*Desk thumping*]

This was followed by very, very able contributions on behalf of the people of their constituencies from the MP for Pointe-a-Pierre, the MP for Fyzabad, the MP for Oropouche West and the MP for Manzanilla; all of them who acquitted themselves well, [*Desk thumping*] represented their constituencies well and put forward, not

just arguments and criticisms but contributions to the country that could make their way in the realm of policy. And this morning we heard the response to the Minister of Health and the Member for St. Joseph from the Member for Caroni East, and I must say it was as if the Member for Caroni East had taken out his baseball bat. [*Desk thumping*]

I want to spend a couple of minutes responding to some of the issues that the Minister of Trade and Industry presented here this morning. The first issue that she raised was the issue of prudence and decisiveness of the Government, and this is a claim also made by the Minister of Finance. I just want to remind the Minister that Moody's ranked us as Baa2 in September 2015. They then ranked us as Baa3 up to April 2018, which is investment grade, although we were downgraded. And, currently we were are at Baa1, which is what is known as a sub-investment grade. And if that is the result of prudence and decisiveness, well then I think we ought to be very cautious about how we go forward.

I want to say also that the Minister spoke to a number of issues having to do with the manufacturing sector and the diversification. And the Leader of the Opposition made the point, in fact, that most of the growth in the manufacturing sector came from methanol and ammonia, LNG, et cetera, basically gas-based derivatives that contributed to manufacture growth that are really located in the energy sector. [*Desk thumping*]

I would not quarrel about that. She touted the 7.3 per cent growth and she said that the other sectors were also growing, and she used the *Review of the Economy* in order to make her case. I want to say that the IMF and the Central Bank, in their documents, indicate significant declines in most sectors of the economy and the calculation of these figures is something that I find a little troubling, and I want to ask a simple question: If there is all of this growth, 1.9 in

the economy and 7.3 per cent in the manufacturing sector, where are the jobs, Madam Speaker? You know we created 55,000 jobs during the period when we were in Government? I think that there may have been a loss of almost that many under this Government in the last few years, perhaps about 40,000 to 50,000 jobs by this Government.

And some other issues that she raised, she raised the issue of Chai Rum. I want to say that Chai Rum was created by someone who put forward their proposal to the Idea 2 Innovation Programme of the Council for Competitiveness and Innovation, and that is why we have a new superior international project today and product called Chai Rum. That person was Kiran Akal, the nephew of VS Naipaul, who got the particular project going. And the dark chocolate in Harrods, that was sent to Harrods in early 2015, based on a project that had been stewarded by the then Minister of Food Production, Mr. Devant Maharaj. [*Desk thumping*]

And the Eximbank issue that she mentions, I want to say if you look at our 2015 manifesto, on page 74, you will see the following:

"To achieve these clearly-identified objectives…"

—that is for the manufacturing sector.—

"we will:

- Properly capitalise the EXIM Bank and provide submarket rates and strong factoring support to exporters in order to boost exports.
- Create a line of credit in US dollars at EXIM Bank for manufacturers, thereby reducing the strain of competing for US dollars with importers who make little contribution to foreign exchange earnings. This will resolve the issue in a noncontentious (and non-preferential) way"—forward.

So we have no problem with them taking the ideas or building on what we have

done. We have no problem. That is how governments operate. But what I have a problem with is their coming and claiming it, as if it were an expropriation. [*Desk thumping*]

The other issue—I think the same can also be said of the trans-shipment initiative. But I would not go into that. The Minister of Trade and Industry mentioned the issue of SMEs focus and extra-regional markets. All of these things are commendable. I want to let her know that with the Export Company of Trinidad and Tobago, what the then Economic Development Board did with that, at that time it was headed by Richard Young who is now head of the International Finance Centre, you see we put people in positions in order to do the work for the country. But when he was there, one of the things that we did was identify the top 20 exporting companies in the country and tried to grow those exports using the Export Development Company, driven by the Economic Development Board who had oversight of a number of issues related to these things.

I want to remind the Member for Point Fortin that she was Member for Point Fortin and a Minister in a PNM administration for almost 10 years, and she did not advance the case of the Point Fortin Hospital, [*Desk thumping*] which had been on the "drawing books" for, God knows how long, 30 years maybe, and we did it because we felt it was necessary and good. [*Desk thumping*]

About the Moruga agro-processing and light manufacturing, we like Moruga and we have served Moruga well [*Desk thumping*] and we will get a chance to serve Moruga again, [*Desk thumping*] and we wish all the projects that accrue to the benefit of Moruga, whether it is the fishing port or whether it is the agro-processing, we wish these projects well, so that the people can benefit and have jobs.

The La Brea dry-dock project, I want say that that is a project you will find

also in this manifesto. [*Desk thumping*] It is something that we initiated, and I want to remind the country, and the Minister knows this because she would have seen the documents, we did an entire study on the business of ports and the implications of the Panama Canal and its expansion on port opportunities in the Caribbean, including Trinidad and Tobago. And one of the recommendations of that port study was either that we could move the Port of Port of Spain to La Brea or we could use La Brea as a dry-docking facility and keep the Port of Port of Spain intact, so to speak, with changes. And they recommended changes that should be done. They wanted to move the port, things like that, move it further down to Sea Lots, and things like that.

The important thing about that particular project was that it had to be financed, and we signed an agreement with the Chinese Government, of course, to begin the discussion about dry docking. We did not contract anybody for it and it would have been a cost. And the issue there was, if we had to go into a loan, what would that mean? At that time the debt-to-GDP ratio was 45 per cent under our watch. And we were then worried about carrying up the debt. And, secondly, we were worried about what the debt might mean, if it involved a Chinese company, Chinese financing and Chinese diplomacy and what that might mean ultimately, in the end. [*Desk thumping*]. So we did not shelve the project. As you see, it is in our manifesto and we were willing to continue with it, but we wanted some thought to go into it. And we had to finally make the decision between the Port of Spain port and the dry- dock facility in La Brea. And that is why that project was not started in 2015.

The Minister also talked about the fact that the former Prime Minister, Mrs. Persad-Bissessar, circled the globe and this and that and the other. I want to say that the Prime Minister may have travelled from time to time, in her capacity as

Prime Minister, as this Prime Minister also does and every Prime Minister does. But I want to say that people circled the globe to come to talk to our Prime Minister. [*Desk thumping*] The Premier of China came and the Prime Minister of Japan came, and the Vice-President of the US. And out of the visit of the Prime Minister of Japan came the finalization of the arrangement on the Mitsubishi/Massy Project.

I want to deal with one matter which was raised by the Minister of Public Administration on Friday, and that is the CSO. I would be very brief on it, because the Minister of Public Administration talked about some CSO workers going home during my watch, I think it was in 2013.

2.15 p.m.

Well, the Health and Safety Division did declare the main CSO building unfit and the PSA refused to send their workers out to work, but we kept the work going. We met all our obligations including the GDP preparation for the budget of that year and later on, that is to say, 2013/2014. The CSO had caught up and was providing up to date employment data in 2014, that is to say, with a lag of two quarters only. It has since slipped. And you were right to say, that is to say—the Member for Port of Spain South, the Minister of Public Administration—Minister, that under the Patrick Manning administration you sourced data from the Central Bank rather than the CSO because that was the time at which the CSO began to be sidelined in preference for Central Bank at the time. I do not know what was the issue, and this is what led to the neglect and deterioration of the CSO. [*Desk thumping*]

But when I was in office, the little time I had there, I was able to bring the Central Bank and the CSO together, and the Central Bank, in fact, offered what can I say, technical support and they worked collaboratively, and other institutions

including the IMF and other international institutions also played a role in strengthening capacity. I am glad to see that work has continued with the CSO. We found a home for them on Frederick Street [*Desk thumping*] and they were supposed to be all in one place. I do not know if that has happened yet, but the idea was to give the CSO a home, make it stable, make sure it worked for the country because that is what it is working for, and to make sure that the work of the country was being done, and that we had the statistical basis to make policy and to make decision.

Now, the Minister of Finance did not remind us of the earlier themes of his budget presentations, but other Ministers did and I was a little surprised at that, that they would even mention them because it does raise the question of credibility. The Minister of Finance only mentioned the theme of this budget, and the reason why I say that is because—you see the theme in 2016 was "Restoring Confidence, Rebuilding Trust: Let us do this together". Now, I do not think anyone would challenge the fact that confidence was not in fact built, and that trust was not built, and that there was not in my view, any great collaboration.

In fact, the one collaboration that was established with the OWTU eventually collapsed [*Desk thumping*] and I do not think there is any credibility to the theme of the 2016 budget. The 2017 budget, "Shaping a Brighter Future – A Blueprint for Transformation and Growth", that also—what brighter future? A blueprint for transformation and growth, where is the growth? Where is the transformation that has taken place or that took place under the 2017 budget fiscal measures? And 2018, "Changing the Paradigm: Putting the Economy on a Sustainable Path", I want to say whether the figures are true or they are not true, the reality is today that Trinidad and Tobago is more depend on energy and energy resources than we have ever been for a long, long time. [*Desk thumping*]

So that is why the "Turnaround" theme is so hard to believe. Not just because people are complaining and because there is pressure everywhere, but because the 1.9 per cent projection belies the projection of the Central Bank and of the IMF, and neither the Central Bank, nor the IMF, or the Minister of Finance in his budget speech—neither of the three, not the Minister of Finance, not the IMF, not the Central Bank, none of them take into account Petrotrin refinery closure [*Desk thumping*] as a factor in the economic fortunes of the country. How are we then to believe "Turnaround" if there is no evidence to support restoration of confidence, building of trust; if the numbers and growth are disputable; if no transformation is happening; if the paradigm has not shifted and we are now more dependent than ever on energy? Nowhere does this budget bring us any closer to a sustainable development path.

The last three years, Madam Speaker, have been years of pain for our citizens, pain and punishment. The Minister of Finance gave an interview after he met with the Chamber in a post-budget session and announced no new taxes over the next two years. He said that he did not want to punish the population any further. He therefore was acknowledging that he had been severely punishing all sectors of the national population in 2016, in 2017, in 2018. And dare I say continuing in 2018 and '19, we will see with the rise in the gas prices at the pump, and the punishment continues with property tax and seems premeditated in its arbitrariness and its severity—that is to say, the property tax—and with the $1 per litre price hike we are going to see an impact with a ripple effect throughout the economy. [*Desk thumping*]

The question for the population—and I speak now through you, Madam Speaker, to the population—is can we expect better financial management; can we expect fiscal impact of a more positive nature; can we expect any significant

growth in the non-energy sector; can we expect any job creation; can we expect a better standard of living, a better quality of life? You know, in one shot in three years they have decimated the working class and reduced the middle class. [*Desk thumping*] Can we expect a more sensitive stewardship and better governance over the next two years? I do not think so. I do not think the people believe so. The recent disrespect dished out to Petrotrin workers on Friday last, tells us that insensitivity, callousness and arrogance will continue as they remain in office and, therefore, the solution becomes clear to the population.

So if the last three years have been bad and the next two, Madam Speaker, are not likely to be better, what to do? Because that is the message of the Minister of Finance, that the last three years have been bad but there is a turnaround and the next two will be better, but there is nothing to substantiate any likelihood of a better two years ahead. The people of this country knew it you know, because when they did a poll at the end of three years, at the third anniversary of this Government as Government, they basically said that 42 per cent of those interviewed said that crime was a major problem and was in fact a crisis—55 per cent. So 55 plus 42 said it was a major problem or a crisis. On the economy, 46 per cent of them said the population said that the economy was in crisis, 28 per cent that it was a major problem. On national infrastructure, 51 per cent of them said that it was a major problem, and 22 per cent of them said it was a national crisis. I want to say just in passing to the Minister of Health, who spoke so strongly on the progress in the health sector, that only 22 per cent of those interviewed expressed any confidence in the health institutions of this country.

I think that the people of Trinidad and Tobago, Madam Speaker, have to consider how to change the Government now [*Desk thumping*] and they have to consider how to ensure that in the interest of Trinidad and Tobago, they put into

place a better Government who will govern better. [*Desk thumping*] If, Madam Speaker, the people of this country were to make the decision to give the United National Congress, under the leadership of the former Prime Minister Kamla Persad-Bissessar, the opportunity to serve this country again, this is some of what you can expect. [*Desk thumping*] All of the projects which the People's Partnership initiated and which the Minister of Finance is now claiming as their own, will be continued and completed because "dey not continuing and completing nuttin". [*Desk thumping*]

After all, they are our projects and we are proud of them, and I do not think that even with these projects much will be achieved by this particular Government. Projects such as the San Fernando/Point Fortin Highway which we did most of; the Maracas beach facilities which they stopped and restarted, and they have botched up somewhat according to the people, but we will go along; the San Fernando Waterfront project which we had completed every piece of that exercise. The project was ready to go. We even established a committee.

We will govern to serve the people and the public good. We are not against anybody. All of us together make up the nation state of Trinidad and Tobago. We will work for all, we will deliver to the nation. So we do not have a problem with taking our projects which they have now claimed as their own and proceeding, but in addition to that we will make sure that the Couva children's hospital will be opened and available to every citizen of Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*]

We want to bring all our people together, Madam Speaker. We want every community to benefit. We want every single citizen to progress. The People's Partnership was always strong on social infrastructure, on road and other infrastructure to support business on community development, and on environment and sustainable issues. If you read this 2015 manifesto, you will see that progress

and achievement was built around these kinds of projects, but what will we do that is different?

The hon. leader of the Opposition gave the general population and this Parliament a taste. She talked about the fourth ICT and technology-based industrial revolution; she talked about the role of artificial intelligence; she talked about the circular economy to address recycling and environmental concerns; she talked about renewable industries, renewable energy and an enlightened approach to agriculture for the contemporary times; she talked about the blue, green and silver economy as part of the diversification and transformation process. I want to build on what the Leader of the Opposition presented and in the process demonstrate how a little imagination and an integrated planning approach can make a huge difference to the country and to jobs, because one of the things that this budget lacks is creativity and the imagination.

There is nothing new, afresh or innovative in this budget. The accounting for growth and the expropriation of ownership of the benefits of Juniper, Angelin, et al, as an act of deception, is as far as the creativity went in this budget. To get the economy going, to begin the recovery, Madam Speaker, there are things that we can do now. To put people to work there are things that we can do now and these need not be sophisticated measures, just pragmatic actions carefully thought through in an integrated fashion. One of the problems with the current Government was that they spent two years waiting for Juniper because they knew that the gas would be coming from the third quarter of 2017, but they did little else in the intervening period to stimulate jobs or economic activity. And so, three years have passed now with very little to show, and they want to do 20 projects now if you read this budget, all at once. After three years of slumber they want to get busy, busy.

Here are some solution-oriented things that we will do immediately as a Government. Yesterday it flooded in Port of Spain. Whenever it rains it floods in Diego Martin, it floods in the Croisee, it floods in Tunapuna, it floods down the highway as you go all over Central Trinidad. Caparo in my constituency is brutalized every time there is a flood. All over Penal, Debe, Woodland—[*Crosstalk*] Eh?

Hon. Member: You did not talk about Port of Spain.

Dr. B. Tewarie: I talked about Port of Spain. Port of Spain, the centre of Port of Spain, Diego Martin, everywhere. And then there is an agricultural problem. The agriculture problem is that in the dry season the farmers do not have proper irrigation. My colleague from Oropouche West talked about the fact that if you want to deal with food processing and agro-processing, you first have to deal with the production side, and how are you going to deal with the production side if the farmers cannot successfully and peacefully grow their crops for 12 months of the year? [*Desk thumping*] So if you take flood, and irrigation, and agricultural production, relocation of at-risk families who live like on the rivers, and so on, and communities, if you do not address water capture through retention ponds and other measures, and the creation of leisure and recreational space, then we will never get on top of these issues.

This can provide national solutions—we can provide national solutions to flooding, drainage, irrigation and water capture problems, and this can be done with central coordination and decentralized management, and everywhere that there is now flooding, from Diego Martin to Cedros, we can now begin to manage it. But what is the significance of this? The significance of this is that you will be solving a flooding problem, you will have a national project that is both centralized and decentralized, you will be solving a drainage problem which will be

throughout the country, you will be solving an irrigation problem for farmers which would then lead to higher production, and what we are going to do in the process, if you are doing this as a nationwide project, as a project management initiative, you are talking about literally thousands of jobs both skilled and unskilled.

The State can lead this project. Private sector can be involved, institutions like APETT can be involved, the technical competence can be brought into the picture and we can have voluntarism in the process. And if you take a project like this, one and a half years, two years, we would solve a myriad of problems at the same time. And while we were doing this—just as you see it now in the Florida area—retention ponds could be built, flowers can be grown, trees can be planted, the greening of communities, you create an atmosphere in which people can have leisure and pleasure and enjoy their communities. So that is one project that we can do, but at the end of the day what we are talking about is jobs, jobs, jobs, and what we are talking about are solutions, solutions, solutions. [*Desk thumping*]

The hon. Leader of the Opposition spoke about getting agriculture going, and the Member for Oropouche West also spoke in her contribution about agriculture, but if you take an integrated planning approach to agriculture—let us say we solved the flooding and the irrigation, the water capture, the retention ponds, the leisure, the pleasure, basically getting the production going, what is a way that we could integrate agriculture that would cause a boost to the industry? A synergistic integrated development of tourism, agriculture, culture, entertainment, events, craft, culinary arts, fashion and destinations development would contribute significantly to diversification and create large numbers of service jobs and opportunities for entrepreneurs while bringing in tourist dollars.

In three years, less than three years, with the appropriate level of airlift we

can begin to manage for sustainable long-term benefits with incremental increases year by year. This initiative can be boosted by infrastructure that we already have, like the hospital in Tobago, which the People's Partnership completed; like the Children's Hospital in Couva, which this Government has failed to open. Both of these can contribute to health tourism, or health and education tourism; and the cycling and swimming facility in Couva can contribute to sports tourism, sports education and training tourism. All of these infrastructure are elements that can be put to good use and give an economic boost to the surrounding communities. Can you imagine if you get that facility going, in that Couva area, what you will do to the surrounding communities in terms of investment, entrepreneurship, business creation and job creation? [*Desk thumping*]

An integrated project management approach will be taken to make high performance on high achievement possible. There are other things that we can do to create jobs, to stimulate communities and regions, to harness energy and to solve problems that are real and that matter to people, matter to the country, matter to the citizens, matter to the nation. For instance, we just experienced a serious earthquake with several aftershocks. We would embark on a comprehensive, retrofitting exercise to bring all buildings not approved by Town and Country Planning—and the majority are like that—into compliance with building codes and standards. Most buildings in this country have not been approved. This will help us to solve a problem—take a non-punitive approach, encourage development at a micro-level, but in a comprehensive way bring buildings up to safety standards. This will be good for individuals, communities, societies and nations, and can be formally certified. It will create a fair number of short-term jobs for both skilled and unskilled workers, and if people understood that retrofitting would lead to certification and approval, that in itself would be an incentive for them to act. We

would responsibly give every building for which steps were taken to meet acceptable standards, approval, and give the citizens peace of mind, and the country as a whole will be better prepared for earthquakes and for disaster security issues.

The United National Congress, Madam Speaker, is deeply committed to land and home security. The Minister identified the waiting list for housing of close to 140,000 or families as the case might be. We would make land available to the landless for home construction. That would put responsibility in the hands of citizens and take some of the burden off of the State. We would also accelerate public-private initiatives in housing at a time when the State and state entities are strapped for funds. A properly managed land for the landless and homes for new owners programme will create jobs and give more people a stake in the society, something that is very lacking now. I will not deal with it now, but the other aspect of it is employee share ownership both in the State and the private sector, so that people could earn more than income at the end of the week, or at the end of the two weeks, or at the end of the month.

A training and retraining programme for all workers in land preparation, home construction and flood mitigation and irrigation in the integrated project that I just mentioned would be offered training to transfer over time to the manufacturing and services sector. So while they are building the country, and freeing up the country, and creating the conditions for production and productivity in the country, they can also be trained and we could then be dealing with the manufacturing and services sector, trying to retrofit them for higher exports and to deal with the markets that are outside of Caricom. [*Desk thumping*] So that, you have an easy movement of these workers into skills and then into sustainable job opportunities.

We have an ongoing ICT-based export services programme which the current Minister of Planning and Development has continued, but if this is properly done business can prosper to export and more jobs will be created. A diversification agenda which takes into account the manufacturing and services base which is quite solid, and which Trinidad and Tobago already has, but also our human capital assets—and I want to take note of the fact, Madam Speaker, that a lot of young people after they leave university—I mean, the Member for Caroni East mentioned the doctors this morning, but a lot of young people graduating from university are either migrating or they are terribly frustrated. [*Desk thumping*] You have nearly 5,000 unemployed people with university degrees, bachelor's degrees and master's degrees waiting to get a job, and when they do get a job they are under-employed. So we need to take advantage of these human capital assets, and one of the ways to do that is to link it to the green economy having to do with environment, sustainable, renewable things and the importance of the ocean around us as an asset.

The Leader of the Opposition speaks about these two matters all the time, the green economy, the blue economy, and the need to build an applied research capability aligned to a higher value chain strategy to key sectors and new clusters of the economy, and linked to a world that will soon be dominated by artificial intelligence is what we need. And you heard our leader on Friday, this is what the UNC will do to take the country forward. [*Desk thumping*] Let us take a look at where we can take some action to take the country forward rather than backward as we are headed now. Do you know that the economy has shrunk in 2018, to the point where it was in 2008? Look at the GDP figures, Madam Speaker, and you will see what has happened in terms of growth of the economy. So what do we take action to do to move this country forward? One thing that we will do is to

digitize growth in the Trinidad and Tobago economy. The implications of this for social and financial inclusion are immense, as well as for the growth of digital services, and trade, and economic growth.

For people who do not have access to the banks, access to the digital economy presents opportunities for personal economic growth. In this way, more people will be able to enter the formal economy, increasing financial inclusion and bringing transparency throughout the life cycle of financial transactions. More opportunities are created for families, for small and medium businesses, new and different markets are opened to these businesses. Finally, there is a value to be gained through a competitive offering of digital services and content because this will push the country to become a producer rather than a consumer of services as we are now. This could be another phase of the global export services project, supported in this country by the IDB and which is now under the charge of the Minister of Planning and Development.

Our goal as a UNC Government will be to increase our competitiveness through digitalization, thereby strengthening our financial markets while fostering transparency. What we have to do is to encourage acceptance of digital means of payments. All Government payments can be done in this way, saving time and money. We can have both the development of digital commerce as well as the digitizing of the public sector, financial flows, increasing transparency inclusion and fostering this across all sectors.

We need to strengthen the leveraging of our natural resource base including renewables like wind, like solar, like water around us for both renewable energy and renewable industries. In our 2015 Manifesto, we highlighted elements of the green, blue and silver economy that we would have concentrated on had we won that 2015 elections.

2.45 p.m.

Madam Speaker: Hon. Member for Caroni Central, your original time is now spent. You are entitled to 10 more minutes, if you wish, to finish your contribution.

Dr. B. Tewarie: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. [*Desk thumping*] Our political leader and Leader of the Opposition has spoken to these from time to time and we are strengthening our plans in these areas. And we will speak more on those on other occasions. There is much that I can say here on policy, on plans, science and technology, artificial intelligence, but I will proceed to some other things in the 10 minutes.

The Minister of Finance said in his budget, Madam Speaker, that under section 119 of the Income Tax Act, Chap. 75:01, he will increase the penalty for offences in respect of fraud from $50,000 to $250,000 as the current sanction is. I hope the Minister means by that that if such an allegation is made or such a matter comes up before the BIR, that the matter will go to court. I hope that he does not mean that the Inland Revenue will now be given the power to simply accuse someone of fraud and impose a fine on them. So I would like a little clarification on that. [*Crosstalk*] So there is no clarification. [*Crosstalk*] All right.

And on the land and building, the stamp duty tax, the stamp duty exemption, all I would say on that is that, you know, land and building tax depends on land, not on a person and I do not know if we have a register to determine who are first-time homeowners that the BIR will have at its disposal. Because are they not the ones who have to give the tax exemption? And therefore, I want to know, first of all, if this is doable in the current context. Secondly, if it is going to create a problem. And anytime you have a situation where verifiable information is not available, you open the door to all manner of manipulation, and I want to ask the

Minister how this will actually work.

Now, I want to deal with a few issues that have been raised by the Minister of Energy and Energy Industries, Sen. Khan, and I just want to indicate that whatever happens in Petrotrin, the 850 and $750 million debt, $13 billion in terms of Trinidad and Tobago currency will still have to be paid. And he also talked about the shutting down of the plant, as he himself admitted, will kill the local production of bitumen.

Now, the Minister of Energy and Energy Industries said that Lake Asphalt, we will import this within a liberalized market. I want to know if this will, in fact, work in Trinidad and Tobago. It is also going to kill the production of fuel oil, diesel, kerosene, motor oil, aviation oil and LPG. Petrotrin will no longer pay the $170 million to subsidize LPG. Does that mean that the Government will now subsidize that if it is to happen with Phoenix Park and Atlantic LNG? [*Crosstalk*] Well, you said you will keep the price at the same time, at the level, so I imagine that you will have to subsidize it. [*Crosstalk*] You did not say that you will keep the price at the same level? [*Crosstalk*] Oh, so you will subsidize it but raise the price?

Mr. Imbert: I never said that. Read the budget statement.

Dr. B. Tewarie: Okay. So it will come from the two companies. I wonder if the Minister has calculated in his assessment, the loss of PAYE taxes from 5,000 retrenched workers at Petrotrin and more in other parts of the country. The Minister of Energy and Energy Industries also mentioned Petrotrin as being the middle man in the supply of fuel of various kinds and I want to know, given what is happening in the market for these products now in Caricom, whether in fact Petrotrin is going to be able to retain those markets.

The Minister mentioned that PNM built energy. Well, they had 30 years and

some, [*Desk thumping*] you know, from 1956 to 1986 and then some. But whatever the PNM did, they did nothing for a decade from 2002 to 2010 in energy. [*Desk thumping*] And the only reason Trinidad and Tobago has natural gas production now in increased supplies is because the People's Partnership made it possible in 2011 and 2014. [*Desk thumping*] So if you want to write an accurate history, Minister, you better write that in. [*Desk thumping*]

The Minister of Energy and Energy Industries, while he is writing that down, should also write down that the accelerated capital write-off which made the exploration possible, and which gave us the natural gas that we need today, came to an end in 2017. It was not a forever condition and if you did not get tax revenue in 2016 and 2017 but you got natural gas in the third quarter of 2017 and you are getting it until 2022, then that was the trade-off. [*Desk thumping*] Make sure that you do what is required now to get it after that because that is your responsibility now.

On the transfer pricing issue, he said there were sensitive discussions on negotiations. Remember to tell the country that we hired the consultants that produced the report and that we commissioned the study and that we left it for you to address three years ago. It took you nearly three years to get to it. I am happy you retained the same consultants who wrote the report to advise you. It means that we must have done something right. [*Desk thumping*]

The Minister said that 2017 replaced the gas reserves and that there is need to continue replenishing the reserves and that is real. Okay. Well, the replacement was provided by Savannah and Macadamia. I think the Member for Pointe-a-Pierre pointed that out and they produced 2 trillion cubic feet of gas while the gas consumption for the year was 1.3 billion cubic feet, which is why it was replaced because of work that we did. Do not forget, Minister of Energy and Energy

Industries, the Mitsubishi/Massy investment which will come on stream soon and will provide not only methanol and DME but downstream manufacturing companies if the plan that we admitted will be followed.

Do not try to make it out that the Kamla Persad-Bissessar Government ruined the shop because what really happened is that the Kamla Persad-Bissessar Government saved the day for Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*] The boost in natural gas income and cash flow that Trinidad and Tobago enjoys at this time is due to what the People's Partnership Government did and also because of the higher prices for oil and natural gas being enjoyed now which is not anybody's doing.

The Minister said that there was great transparency about the deal with Venezuela and Dragon gas. Here I have some questions. I would not ask you about the price but, who will build the pipeline? When will the project start? What are the cost-sharing arrangements for the project? What are the beneficial arrangements for Shell, NGC, Government of Venezuela, Government of TT or any other party that we may not know? What will be the ratio of downstream gas versus gas destined for Atlantic LNG? Are there any other players in the project? Madam Speaker, do I have two minutes?

Madam Speaker: You have just about a minute.

Dr. B. Tewarie: All right. I just want to mention a few things that the IMF report highlighted so that the country will know. On page 13 of the Article IV report, the IMF said that public debt and the HSF should be managed in an integrated framework and the reason that they are doing that is they are worried about what you are going to do to the debt and what its impact is going to be on the HSF. And I simply want to alert the country to the fact that the IMF has a concern about that. The IMF asked you to settle the overdraft balance at the Central Bank and

implement stricter limits on monetary financing, reduce reliance on Central Bank for financing. They warned about continued state of market—

Madam Speaker: Hon. Member, time is up.

Dr. B. Tewarie:—and the existence of a parallel—

Madam Speaker: Member for Tobago West. [*Desk thumping*]

The Minister of Tourism (Hon. Shamfa Cudjoe): Madam Speaker, I thank you and the hon. Members of this House for the opportunity to contribute to the 2018/2019 budget debate. As I do so, allow me to add my voice to the chorus of support emanating from all corners of this country raised in commendation of my colleague, the Minister of Finance, for eloquently and skilfully [*Desk thumping*] presenting what is clearly a budget, rooted in sound economic principles and policies; a budget that is geared at removing the stumbling blocks that have been detrimental to our economic development. Madam Speaker, this is a budget that provides opportunities for all sectors of the society while keeping us out of the hands of the IMF and expanding and extending our social safety net.

Madam Speaker, when we assumed duties as the Government in September of 2015, we had funds to run this country for only three days. Public institutions were denigrated. Right-thinking public servants were emasculated. We inherited a society that was ungovernable, beaten, bruised, abused, by a bunch of ill-willed, mischievous, misguided joyriders. [*Desk thumping*] Madam Speaker, that was our lot.

Madam Speaker, many looked on hoping that we would have failed. They looked on laughing, waiting for chaos and confusion and mayhem to step in, hoping that like many of our Caribbean neighbours, we would end up before the IMF cap in hand, subjected to structural adjustments; also, that they could ride back into Government on that wave. Madam Speaker, three years later, we are still

here [*Desk thumping*] and as we like to say in Tobago, managing our own business, man in our house, meticulously managing the state affairs, well on our way to economic recovery about the people's business. [*Desk thumping*]

I want to take this opportunity to thank the hon. Prime Minister for his intelligent and inspiring, sober and courageous leadership. [*Desk thumping*] We have managed to keep the ship of state afloat, even changing the direction, making the necessary adjustments, making the difficult decisions towards recovery and toward turnaround. Madam Speaker, this is all for a more prosperous future, not for ourselves but for our children and our children's children. So I will say in typical sport term, 1,000 days, not out, and by the grace of God and the right-thinking citizens of this country, we have many, many, many more days, weeks, months and decades to go.

I want to thank, Madam Speaker, the staff of the Ministry of Sport and Youth Affairs and all public servants who continue to work diligently towards achieving the Government's development agenda. We have made some major adjustments. We have had to adapt quickly to new circumstances but we have remained understanding, focused and committed. So I thank the public servants of Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*]

I want to thank specially the people of Tobago, Madam Speaker; it has been an eventful year for us. But for the most part, we have been reasonable. Tobagonians have been understanding. We have been resourceful, resilient and most of all, we have persevered. It would be remiss of me if I did not mention the people of Tobago West. Madam Speaker, I have the pleasure and privilege to represent a proud people; and I like to say "I come from ah good heritage". [*Desk thumping*] I am because we are. So I sincerely want to thank the people of Tobago West for carrying me. To the women who wait their turn, long lines on a

Tuesday, to simply come into the office to say "keep going", I thank them.

Madam Speaker, to the people who provide us with fruits and produce as we do our monthly walkabouts in the communities, I thank them. For those who show up for roving public day, I thank them and I will thank them each and every week because, Madam Speaker, because of them, we are standing here today. [*Desk thumping*] Even the members of the clergy who come by simply to offer prayers. That is the kind of constituents that I serve. Most times, they do not come asking for a house, a work or anything like that, they come to simply say "Thank you, keep on pushing". So I thank them for showing up every Tuesday for allowing me to enter the schools to talk and touch and change the lives of young people. Madam Speaker, I serve a great people and a great constituency. I want to say I continue to be motivated by their love and their support and I would continue to serve them for as long as they allow me to.

Now, Madam Speaker, from a Tobago perspective, we would like to say that this is a good budget. We have received 4.30 per cent of the national pie. The lower limit for the Dispute Resolution Committee in the Tobago House of Assembly Act is 4.03 per cent. And under their leadership, we used to receive exactly 4.03 per cent. We have received 4.30 per cent and that is supported by $1 billion in projects to be completed by other Ministries under the Sixth and Seventh Schedules.

And for the first time in the history of this nation, a caring Minister of Finance and a caring Government has afforded to the Tobago House of Assembly the ability to borrow. We have been granted a borrowing limit of $300 million and this is the first time that this has happened. I would have been here year after year and witnessed Chief Secretaries and Secretaries of Finance of the Tobago House of Assembly making requests to Government. This is the first time this has happened

and this provides predictability in the conduct of our business as the Tobago House of Assembly, and in the words of my hon. Chief Secretary in Tobago, the outlook is good for Tobago's development. [*Desk thumping*] Madam Speaker, this is a practical, pragmatic and forward-looking budget.

And we look forward to the other initiatives that have been proposed by this Government. Sandals, coming to Tobago, changing the game of our tourism in Tobago. The expansion of the airport. Madam Speaker, it is good to see the airport project finally getting off the ground. I remember being in high school in the 1990s and there were talks about attracting an international brand as Sandals and there were talks about expanding the airport. I remember being in the Opposition, Madam Speaker, when the previous Government, their Ministry of Works would have promised over and over to expand the ANR Robinson airport and they cordoned that area with galvanize for years, giving the impression that there is work taking place behind that galvanize, Madam Speaker, and there was no work that was done. So I am happy to see this Government [*Desk thumping*] finally hitting the ground running and getting that work done. We are benefiting from the expansion of our power capacity at the Cove Eco-Industrial Park, the desilting of the dams in Tobago, the desalination plant and all these good projects that are coming along. We are finally getting a bus terminus built by the Ministry of Works and the list goes on and on and on.

Today, Madam Speaker, for the first time, the *Galleons Passage* made its— [*Interruption*]

Madam Speaker: Member for Pointe-a-Pierre, I will remind you of Standing Order 47. If you wish to invoke it, please invoke it in the proper way. Member for Tobago West.

Hon. S. Cudjoe: Thank you, Madam Speaker. For the first time, the *Galleons*

Passage made its maiden voyage to Tobago today with no casualties, no problems. I looked on, on social media this morning and I saw the people of Tobago were very elated. It has been a rough year but we are happy that this is finally on board and now we have not one, but two boats [*Desk thumping*] travelling back and forth to Tobago and we look forward to the addition of more boats coming along under the leadership of this Government and we are not leasing them, we are buying them, we are owning them, Madam Speaker, [*Desk thumping*] and that is something that I think ought to be commended.

Out of the Ministry of Sport and Youth Affairs, the Dwight Yorke Stadium is the only physical project that is managed by central government in Tobago because sport development is under the remit of the Tobago House of Assembly. When I assumed duties in the Ministry of Sport and Youth Affairs, there was a $5 million project in refurbishment taking place there. We have expanded that project to an additional $15 million to do a total refurbishment of the Dwight Yorke Stadium and I am pleased with the work that UDeCOTT is doing in helping the Ministry of Sport and Youth Affairs with that.

We are also in conversation with the Division of Sport and Youth Affairs in Tobago and the Chief Secretary to have an indoor sporting facility built in Tobago. This has been the cry for Tobagonians for years, for decades, ever since I was in high school in the 1990s. Whenever rain falls, you have to leave Shaw Park, no games could have happened because we did not have one indoor facility. So the technical work would be taking place between now and midterm; and at midterm, we intend to start the construction of the first sporting indoor facility in Tobago under this Government. [*Desk thumping*]

So, Madam Speaker, fiscal 2017/2018 has been an interesting and exciting year for me. I learnt a lot, Madam Speaker. I started off the year in tourism and I

was then assigned to the Ministry of Sport and Youth Affairs and I must say I am very, very happy to be there. I have had the opportunity to work with the most diligent and dedicated athletes in Trinidad and Tobago and I have worked with some of the most zealous and optimistic youth advocates in Trinidad and Tobago. I want to say it has been no walk in the park because there are many challenges in each area. Each sporting discipline has its own set of issues, a politics of its own, but I am pleased to wear the hat of a facilitator and enabler in this Ministry.

I remember coming on board in April and I was interviewed by TV6. They kept saying you are not an athlete—[*Crosstalk*] Really? You are not an athlete, how is it that you could lead the Ministry of Sport? I said sport is not my forte but I came out of the Youth Development Movement of Trinidad and Tobago. I was once President of the Tobago Youth Council, Caricom Youth Ambassador and so on, so this really is my background. However, sporting is not just about high activity or high impact sport. I do long-distance running. [*Crosstalk*] Some of them who across the floor speak about me not being involved in sport, I run, I compete in long-distance running. [*Desk thumping*] Madam Speaker, I have done half marathons, 5K, you name it. Because it is not just about that, it is also about getting women to get up and start moving again. Sporting in schools. So I hear the voices coming from all corners, from Princes Town to Couva South. Some of them play just as much "moral" as I did but sport is about physical activity for all of us. [*Desk thumping and crosstalk*]

So, Madam Speaker, I want to turn my attention specifically to sport because, as you know, it is two disciplines: sport and youth affairs. Now, it was Nelson Mandela who said:

> "Sport has the power to change the world…It has the power to inspire. It has the power to unite people in a way that little else does."

So sport is a powerful force contributing to social change, to promoting physical health, happiness and well-being, Madam Speaker, to promoting equality and youth. The United Nations right now is even utilizing sport as a platform for peace. So it is an important part of development, not just for young people but for everybody, Madam Speaker.

So when we came on board in 2015, we made it our business to hit the ground running in revising the sport policy; and last month, we were able to launch the new sport policy 2017—2027. And, Madam Speaker, this new policy has two main pillars: the development of sport and sport for development and it was done through a collaborative approach with the stakeholders and looking at different mechanisms as it relates to the institutional and legislative framework. So the development of sport speaks to the high-performance sport, total participation in sport, capacity building and so on, and using sport for development speaks to sport tourism and industry and commerce and so on.

The Ministry of Sport and Youth Affairs oversees or recognizes over 50 sporting disciplines, from cricket and football, rugby, volleyball all the way to scrabble, ballroom dancing, chess and all fours. They are all recognized sporting disciplines at the Ministry of Sport and Youth Affairs. So, Madam Speaker, over this fiscal year, the athletes of Trinidad and Tobago would have made Trinidad and Tobago very proud. We go all the way from the performance of Michelle-Lee Ahye and Jereem Richards and Dylan Carter, earlier this year in April, at the Commonwealth Games. They brought home gold medals and silver medals to us.

And more recently, the CAC games that took place in Colombia. We had 233 athletes participating in 22 different disciplines and we brought home 30 medals in the year 2018 and that would have been triple the number of medals we got four years ago. In 2014, we brought home only 11 medals. And I want to say

that the achievements of the athletes have been truly inspirational to all of us and have a very positive influence on our nation as it relates to uniting us and making us happy, making us proud. I want to say that the Government is keen on continuing to provide support towards sporting entities as we move towards Tokyo 2020 where we intend to perform very, very well.

Now, Madam Speaker, a critical part of the policy 2017—2027 is the reward and incentive framework and we have decided—this Government has decided to provide incentives for athletes who would have medalled at games from World Championships, the Olympics, all the way down to CAC Games. And many people ask: Why did we offer incentives to CAC?—because it is so many people and it is so young; it is a lower level of games. But, Madam Speaker, this is to attract more young people to sport and to reward them because it is not just about the older folks or after you have become an accomplished athlete, but we want to capture the young people at the development and early stages.

So, this policy also provides incentives for national teams that would have qualified for the first time to international championships; and this year, we see the seniors men hockey team getting that incentive along with the women's volleyball team who have done so well in Japan over the last couple of weeks. So this year, we distributed over $5.2 million in incentives to athletes for their accomplishment and for putting Trinidad and Tobago on the map as it relates to sport. [*Desk thumping*]

Now, Madam Speaker, the Minister of Finance would have mentioned in his budget presentation that—he spoke about the outstanding performance of our national teams in qualifying for the highest level of tournaments in their respective disciplines and he made the commitment to fully fund our national teams to this end. In this light, I would like to expand a little bit more to say national teams

would receive full financial support from the Government in their regional qualifiers towards these championships and also to attend these championships, and that is the element of "fully funded" that the Minister of Finance is speaking about. [*Desk thumping*]

Now, it is very important for me to place on the record and to remind NGBs that it is critical that they comply with the rules and the guidelines of the Ministry of Sport and Youth Affairs as it relates to submitting their financials, their schedules, their calendar and so on, so that these applications could be processed and we could really facilitate this initiative of providing them the necessary support to attend these regional qualifiers and these international games.

3.15 p.m.

It is unfortunate that over the years a number of NGBs have adopted a culture or a practice of waiting until it is too late—weeks or even days before they are due to travel to present an application to the Ministry of Sport and Youth Affairs for funding, expecting the Ministry to just come up with the money and place it in their hands. You see all kinds of tactics, from Facebook videos, to parents writing letters, to media releases, and so on. Madam Speaker, I want to say that that practice is unacceptable. It must be stopped. It is unfair; it is unethical; it is selfish, and I want to also say, Madam Speaker, it is rude.

[MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Because when sporting entity X comes in the middle of the fiscal year, then the Ministry has to make a decision to put aside, or place on the backburner, an entity that would have submitted its documents and its paperwork, and its calendar to the Ministry since the beginning of the fiscal year, for which we would have budgeted. So when you wait two weeks before the time to travel to now submit a document and then cry in the media, it puts us in a very unfortunate position. So I

want to remind NGBs to submit their documents on time.

In the month of August, the Ministry of Sport and Youth Affairs, with also the SporTT, would have written to our different 40 or 50-something NGBs asking them to submit their documents as it relates to their calendars, their budget and so on. And, unfortunately, Mr. Deputy Speaker, under 10 NGBs would have responded. Under 10 of the 50 NGBs would have responded. The new fiscal year has already started and I just want to encourage them once again to please submit your requests, your financials, your calendars and all the necessary documentation on time so that we can properly budget to provide the necessary support.

Now, NGBs would tell you when I meet with them how serious I am about encouraging them to uphold the principles of good governance as it relates to transparency and accountability. This is very paramount to their survival. They need to be accountable, not just to the Government, but also accountable to their governing bodies and accountable to the stakeholders that make up their entity because you would know, Mr. Deputy Speaker, it is only this far that the Government could reach. These entities are autonomous bodies. They have their own elections. They report to other international governing bodies, and so on. It is only this much that the Government could do.

Recently I had to step in as it relates to an issue that was taking place with one of the NGBs, and there were people all over social media and the media calling on me to–"You should dismantle this specific NGB." And that is not my job as Minister. These entities have their own means of operating their autonomous organizations. It is only this far the Government could go as it relates to maintaining order, good governance, good practices in these NGBs. So I want to encourage stakeholders, members of these NGBs and these sporting disciplines to really become more professional, more organized, more democratic, more

transparent, because at the end of the day it is not just about working with the Government, you have to work with your stakeholders, the members of your organization and your international bodies also.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, we are at a point in time where the Government cannot do it alone and we need to attract—we need to get corporate TT to support. Once again, I must commend First Citizens Bank for the incredible work that it is doing [*Desk thumping*] in supporting athletes. When the volleyball team would have cried out for funding, First Citizens Bank contacted us and contacted the volleyball team, extending help to the volleyball team. You have a number of other corporate stakeholders that are providing support. You have NGC; you have Scotia Bank; you have a number of them providing support. So we want to remain attractive to corporate TT so that they could provide the necessary assistance to athletes, just like it is done in the United States of America and in the United Kingdom, and so on.

Many of our local businesses are enhancing their corporate social responsibility and I think the teams should reach out also to corporate TT to get that necessary support. It also is a very good marketing tool for both the NGB and the business. So the Ministry of Sport and Youths Affairs will continue to champion in collaborating with the private sector for such support and we would be working on a returns-on-investment policy to encourage more investment for supporting our sporting disciplines.

Now, let us turn to the development side of sport, or that side that we call Sport for Development. And this looks at development of communities—no, no, no, before I go there, Mr. Deputy Speaker, let us look at the development side of sport because the development of sport is much more than simply providing our athletes with flights and accommodation when they have already qualified for

international meets. We have to talk about total participation in sport, from the very, very early ages. If it is not happening at that stage, then the turnaround is not happening at all. If it is not happening at your primary school Intercol meets; if it is not happening at your secondary school Intercol meets, then that transformation that needs to take place in sport is not happening at all.

So we are now working in collaboration with the Ministry of Education. The Ministry of Education has full responsibility for sport in schools, but the Ministry of Sport offers assistance in providing coaches for specific disciplines when the Ministry of Education is unable to seek that support on its own.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Member. There is an on-going commentary on the Government side. Kindly desist, please, or do it in softer terms. Proceed.

Hon. S. Cudjoe: Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. So I was on the topic of sport for all. So it is about providing the necessary support for the young athletes and not just waiting until they would have accomplished something to reward them. I think the assistance is most needed at the earlier stage, so we have to bind together, as Ministry of Sport and Youth Affairs, Ministry of Education and all the other stakeholders to make that possible.

The total participation of sport initiatives speaks to participation of senior citizens, young adults, children, people of different genders, ethnicity, encouraging them all to adopt an active lifestyle. It also speaks to encouraging women to get up and move once more, to take up leadership roles also in sport, and to this end we would be working with the NGBs to provide coaching and support to different community groups. We would be doing that with the TTOC this year. Later on this month the TTOC and UWI would be launching the "Future is Female" campaign and the Ministry is on board, encouraging women to get up and move once again. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Deputy Speaker, sport development speaks also to—or should I say—yes, sport development is also about providing the necessary facilities so that our athletes could train, and this is critical to the accomplishment of this total participation in sport initiative. We boast about over 300 different sporting facilities across Trinidad and Tobago, from community swimming pools, community play areas, all the way to national stadia and these high quality, fancy indoor arenas for sport. Mr. Deputy Speaker, I think we all have to admit that administration after administration, maintenance of these facilities has been very, very poor. And this year we intend to focus, not so much on building new facilities, but the refurbishment of the already existing facilities so that our athletes could have a proper place to train and we could improve the use of these facilities, even making them income generators.

So we start off this year with the Hasely Crawford Stadium and the Jean Pierre Complex. They are going to receive priority this year. And then we move on to Ato Boldon Stadium; Mannie Ramjohn, Larry Gomes Stadium and the Dwight Yorke Stadium in Tobago. Packages one, two and three have been completed at the Dwight Yorke Stadium in Tobago and work is moving full speed ahead. We have made a commitment to the people of Tobago to complete this project in time for school sports or Intercol in Tobago because this is a major feature of our sporting agenda, or our sporting calendar in Tobago.

I move on to the indoor facilities. We have had some maintenance issues at a number of our indoor facilities but I have been in contact with SporTT and I know that pre-contract works are beginning for CRISA, that is the Central Regional Indoor Sport Arena, as early as the 18th of October, and we intend for the works to be well in gear by December. We have some work to do at the Sangre Grande Multipurpose Sport Facility. The construction of this facility started in

2012. It was completed and handed over in 2016, but there were some issues with the floor, where it was built with material that was not suitable for its purpose, and the contractor would have asked over and over for an extension of that guarantee period, and that ended on August 19th of this year. So we are moving ahead in this new fiscal year to do the necessary work so the people of that area can have full use of this facility. [*Desk thumping*] So we are going to be upgrading our indoor arenas also. And as I said before, the people of Tobago have been crying out for an indoor arena and within this fiscal year we intend to start the construction of an indoor sporting arena for the people of Tobago.

I want to talk a little bit, Mr. Deputy Speaker, about the regional complex, or the regional facilities. We turned sod and construction is ongoing for the Mahaica facility. The same thing is happening for the Moruga facility where we turn sod earlier this year, and construction is moving ahead. The Diego Martin Regional Complex, the first phase of that project should be completed by the end of November. And I hear over and over all these concerns about you sole selected. But as the Member for Diego Martin Central would have stated yesterday, the construction of this site started in 2006 and in 2012, under the previous government, they would have gone in and done an investigation as to how this project came along, and so on, and the Member for Diego Martin Central would have been a part of the walk-through for that. And SporTT under the previous government would have established an investigation and the report of the investigation came up with the result of having the same contractor do the work; the same sole select, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

So at the end of the day, Mr. Deputy Speaker [*Interruption*]—you would have your turn to speak. This is my time and I am claiming my time. [*Desk thumping*] So works are moving ahead in Diego Martin and we are pleased to see

that. Swimming pools, the Ministry has remit over six swimming pools and we intend to add to that. [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Silence.

Hon. S. Cudjoe: I recently visited the Laventille swimming pool project that is taking place [*Desk thumping*] in Soogrim Trace and we look forward to the completion of that swimming pool to serve the people of the Laventille community. [*Desk thumping*] They should have recreational space like everywhere else in Trinidad and Tobago. And, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I am pleased to say that Morvant would be done in this new fiscal year, along with a swimming pool in Maloney. [*Desk thumping*]—in this new fiscal year—taking place under the Ministry of Sport and Youth Affairs. That is good representation, Mr. Deputy Speaker. That is speaking to total participation in sport throughout all of Trinidad and Tobago, and I am happy and proud that it is this Government that is doing this work.

Mr. Hinds: It is Olympic standard pool too.

Hon. S. Cudjoe: And, yes, it is an Olympic standard pool, Mr. Deputy Speaker. So it is not just about quantity; it is also about quality [*Desk thumping*] for the people of Trinidad and Tobago.

You know, Mr. Deputy Speaker, despite our many challenges as they relate to maintaining these facilities, we must admit that we do have world-class facilities here in Trinidad and Tobago from the National Aquatic Centre, the National Cycling Velodrome, the National Racquet Centre and, of course, the Brian Lara Cricket Academy. Mr. Deputy Speaker, we continue to do upgrades to these facilities and I am happy that we have got it to a point where Cricket West Indies is considering ICC accreditation for the Brian Lara Academy. In addition, later on this week we would be meeting with the University of Trinidad and Tobago to

discuss our plans for finally transforming this academy into an institute for sport development for our athletes. [*Desk thumping*] So we are moving full speed ahead about the people's business.

Finally, this year also—as a matter of fact, last month, we collaborated with the Ministry of Trade and Industry to provide a home for TTASA. And TTASA is the group that is responsible for auto sport in Tobago. So we are giving them a controlled area where they can race and do their auto sport in peace. They had been on month-to-month lease in the past and we are finally working with TTASA to provide a home for them to Wallerfield.

So, Mr. Deputy Speaker, our sporting infrastructure has an important role to play, not just as a place for our athletes to train, but also as tourism attractions, and we have to ensure that they are able to generate income and revenue for Trinidad and Tobago. And that is a major pillar in our new sporting policy. So we are currently fine-tuning our business plan towards exploring options for optimal use and for income-generation for these facilities, because our business is to ensure that Trinidad and Tobago becomes a regional development centre for sport in the English-speaking Caribbean. We already have warm weather, very hospitable people and a vibrant energy. Mr. Deputy Speaker, you would have seen that we recently hosted CPL, the biggest party in sport, and it has been successful this year once again [*Desk thumping*] and we have a three-year contract with CPL to do this cricket party all the way to 2020.

So this is your Government utilizing sport towards the development of the nation. People from Tobago and visitors would have been able to tell you it was difficult to find a room, even in Port of Spain, during the CPL cricket period. So that goes a long way in our sport tourism in creating jobs and so on. Over the past fiscal year we would have hosted at least 20 tournaments and regional and

international games, from tennis qualifiers with ITF. I had the opportunity to meet with the executive of ITF who came to Trinidad to meet with me towards planning to host other international tennis federation activities. In the past we would have hosted swimming meets, volleyball meets, a number of different activities at our world-class facilities, and this Government intends to provide the necessary assistance and support. Right now we are working with the TTOC towards hosting the Youth Commonwealth Games in 2021, and that is a matter that we are working on right now.

Now, all these initiatives cannot be properly managed by the Ministry of Sport and Youth Affairs in its current construct. So you will be well aware, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that in 2004 the Cabinet would have made a decision towards the development of a Sports Commission and this Government would have instituted a committee to review and to examine the recommendations for such, and I must say that a Government committee is fine-tuning the recommendations so that we can proceed with the establishment of the Sport Commission and be of international standard just like Australia and our other competitors throughout the world.

So, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I want to turn quickly to the youth portfolio. So I have dealt with sport. I am now on to youth development—youth affairs, or as I prefer to say, youth development. Mr. Deputy Speaker, I am a product of this country's youth development movement. I came through the—I have done the groundwork. Since I was 12 years old I was a part of the Royal Bank Young Leaders, and then I was a part of the Tobago Youth Council, the National Youth Council Steering Committee, Caricom Youth Ambassador; a number of different youth-related initiatives. So I have had the opportunity to see both sides of the youth development movement in Trinidad and Tobago. And I think that the problems or the concerns that existed in the 1990s when I was a teenager, still exist

today. Some of them have become more complex, but I am happy to say that the support systems and the network have become more sophisticated. You now have private sector becoming a part of the whole youth development eco system; you have Royal Bank doing tremendous work. You have entities like "We Say Yes" going into troubled communities and helping young people to develop their business skills and entrepreneurship skills, and so on. So work is happening. From the perspective of the Government, we are reviewing the National Youth Policy and phase one of the consultations have already been completed. We have circulated a draft document to the youth bodies throughout Trinidad and Tobago and we get ready to start a second phase of consultations towards developing year 2017 or 2018 National Youth Policy.

In addition to that, we embark upon a youth registration drive where we are encouraging all the youth groups throughout Trinidad and Tobago to register with the Ministry so we can have all the information in one Ministry. You have a number of youth programmes and youth initiatives taking place in the private sector, also in the public sector. You have OJT taking place one place; MiLAT one place; CCC one place. What we are creating is one database, one portal, so anybody interested in getting involved in youth work or running youth programmes in Trinidad and Tobago, there would be a one-stop shop. And I got the support of youth activists and youth leaders from all over Trinidad and Tobago, to move forward with this initiative.

The Cabinet has recently passed and confirmed the establishment of a Youth Advisory Committee. So what we are having is young people coming together in a committee to provide advice to the Minister and the Ministry of Sport and Youth Affairs. This is a very big deal as it relates to youth development, regionally and internationally, because young people want to be a part of the decision-making

process; they want to sit at the table; they want to be able to influence the initiatives and the programmes that affect their development, and this Government is working with our young people to create that, through the establishment of the Youth Advisory Committee.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I move on now to our partnerships with local and international bodies, to strengthen, to re-enforce, to expand and enhance the youth development agenda. We have partnered with the Global Campaign for Youth Entrepreneurship, which is based out of the United Kingdom, in helping young people to develop their private sector skills or to hone their entrepreneurial skills, and that would be starting in this quarter with the school enterprise competition. In the first week of November we have the members of the Global Campaign for Youth Employment coming to Trinidad and Tobago to kick off this project with us. We are also working with some local entities to do the same.

We have partnered also with the Prince's Trust. The Prince's Trust has been around for quite some time in the United Kingdom and they are helping us work on our mentorship programme and in developing programmes for employability, entrepreneurship and youth activism. We have had two meeting with them so far and they make their return to Trinidad and Tobago in the first week of December, so we can move forward with our work.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, the National Youth Awards would have been executed once again this year. There was a period where it was not happening and I was able, with the assistance of the Ministry of Sport and Youth Affairs and the technical officers that are working in that Ministry who are so passionate about youth development, to bring back to the calendar on International Youth Day, the National Youth Awards. [*Desk thumping*] This year we were able to award in 17 different disciplines, recognizing young people for their commitment, for youth

service, for youth excellence, and I would like to say youth grit, because for the most part, the majority of them worked with little or no resources to make this happen and I am happy that the Ministry of Sport and Youth Affairs is now on board.

During this July/August period, Mr. Deputy Speaker, we, in the Ministry of Sport and Youth Affairs, decided to do a pilot project where at all our youth facilities we conducted a two-week programme called Youth Life Skills. And we registered—over 216 young people would have participated in this initiative. On the day of registration—actually, on the first and second day, we had to turn back some young people because most of the facilitators would work with only classes as large as 35. So it was a very, very successful initiative where we trained young people in how to manage their time; how to manage stress; how to have a proper diet; how to dress for interviews; interviewing skills; résumé writing. And you would be surprised to know, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that many of our young people go through secondary school and go through college and graduate without the ability to write a proper résumé or to do a proper proposal asking for assistance for their youth groups, and so on.

So I want to commend and thank all the NGOs and all the stakeholders that would have participated in providing our young people with the necessary training. You have entities like AFFET, like TTHTI that came on to teach them dining etiquette and dressing professionally; dressing for success. It was a wonderful initiative that took place in the month of July and August over a two-week period. The young people even asked to remain as a class throughout the year so that they could continue this training. And based on the response of these young people, we have decided to extend these training programmes throughout the entire year and we are going to start doing that again in the month of November.

This is important, Mr. Deputy Speaker, because we have spent much time, money and resources establishing youth facilities throughout Trinidad and Tobago. Right now we have seven youth facilities. But under the previous regime there were no youth programmes taking place at these youth facilities. As a matter of fact, a number of the youth facilities were rented for all kinds of other purposes: to throw parties; to throw weddings. You even have a church somewhere, utilizing the youth facility to hold services. I want to make priority—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Hon. Member, your initial time has expired. You have an additional 10 minutes. If you care to avail yourself, kindly proceed. [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. S. Cudjoe: Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. So we would be working with YTEPP and a number of the other youth stakeholders and executing initiatives led by the Ministry to provide training to young people, to youth workers and doing virtual classes with international entities like the Prince's Trust, Global Campaign for Youth Employment and making links with other youth councils and youth bodies throughout the world to provide our young people with the necessary training, the capacity-building and the skills that they need to not just survive but to thrive as they face life. So, Mr. Deputy Speaker, these are some of the initiatives.

I want to turn for a minute, to our YDAPs. Our YDAPs or our Youth Development and Apprenticeship Centre. These entities have been in existence since the 1960's and they had never been updated to bring into the 21st Century. As a matter of fact, they house some of our troubled youth who are being trained to learn different skills to enter the workforce. We provide a stipend to them and we have a number of issues down at the YDAPs. To this end, Mr. Deputy Speaker, we just had a break-in at one of the YDAPs recently where about $30,000 in

equipment was stolen. And we have security there, but we have to do so all that is necessary to step up. And, Mr. Deputy Speaker, this is the first break-in we have had at that facility in six years. But we cannot take that for granted. We have to ensure that these facilities are properly secured and that we provide the necessary environment for young people to learn.

So these YDAPS were initially established to carry out agricultural programmes, to have our young people learn computer skills, and so on, and over the years, facilitators have left and the curriculum has changed. Today, currently, the Cabinet is considering a committee to look at the restructuring and the streamlining of these YDAPs to bring about proper management, their optimal use and to ensure that our young people are well taken care of, well trained and preparing them for the world of work and life.

So we are moving full speed ahead in the Ministry of Sport and Youth Affairs and our stakeholders would tell you there is now a tremendous focus on youth, and that is not a mistake. It is not by chance. It is deliberate as it relates to this Government's development agenda, focusing on people and more so investing in our youth, because our youth are our future.

So, as I wrap up, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I want to say that we move on hopeful. I stand before you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, hopeful and with boundless faith in our destiny, that we can and we will. [*Desk thumping*] Because over the last six months I have had the pleasure of working with some of the most disciplined and distinguished sportsmen and women and some of the most selfless and dedicated youth leaders. And in working with these individuals, you would realize that there are people who are still passionate about Trinidad and Tobago, passionate about seeing us united, passionate about—[*Crosstalk*]

When you hear the comments coming from the naysayers, it is easy to think that all is lost. It is very easy to think that all is lost. They "chook" and poke and all mayhem, hoping to stir up confusion and chaos so that people will be disheartened about Trinidad and Tobago. [*Crosstalk*]

3.45 p.m.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Members.

Hon. S. Cudjoe: But I am happy that there are right-thinking citizens out there who are still very passionate about seeing Trinidad and Tobago get to a place where we need to be. I am happy about—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: One second. Members for Oropouche East and Couva South, please, I am hearing you. Okay? I am hearing you all, you will have the opportunity to join the debate very soon. Proceed.

Hon. S. Cudjoe: You see, Mr. Deputy Speaker, we in this Government on this side, we are working diligently. We are taking the hard decisions. Some of the decisions that other people—and people on the other side knew these decisions were to be made a long time ago to do what is necessary for the advancement of our economy, and to create a better future for our children. But they did not have the courage to do so. We are taking the hard decisions, [*Desk thumping*] Mr. Deputy Speaker, because at the end of the day it is not about us. It is about our children and our children's children.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I am 36 years old, and I have had the benefit of GATE. Mr. Deputy Speaker, I have had the benefit of the School Feeding Programme. I have had the benefit of riding the bus to school free of charge, free school uniform and so on under a caring People's National Movement Government—[*Desk thumping*]—and we are where we are because of prudent leadership. Mr. Deputy Speaker, everybody—we have to do our part to provide all children and our

children's children with what is needed for the future. We cannot take it all now. I remember growing up as a child, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I used to watch TTT. As a matter of fact, TTT was the only station we had at that time, and we had to watch this movie about "The Yum Yums", and this Opposition reminds me about the Yum Yums, Mr. Deputy Speaker, because Yum Yums lived on a planet that was made of milk and honey—

Mr. Mitchell: "Pakaskas".

Hon. S. Cudjoe:—yes. "Pakaskas". And they ate, and ate, and ate, and ate. They ate the land, Mr. Deputy Speaker. They ate the houses they lived in, they ate until they did not have a place to live because they were only concerned about themselves and concerned about today, Mr. Deputy Speaker. But this Government, we make plans and establish the necessary strategies for tomorrow for our children and our children's children to prosper in Trinidad and Tobago. We have to provide that hope, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and I am happy to be a part of this Government that is working to ensure a more prosperous future for the people and the children of Trinidad and Tobago.

So, I say once again, Mr. Deputy Speaker, over a thousand days, not out, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and we many, many more days to go, knocking sixes and going beyond the boundaries for the people of Trinidad and Tobago for this land we love and, most of all, for our children.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, with these few words, I thank you. [*Desk thumping*].

Mr. Barry Padarath (*Princes Town*)*:* Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, for the opportunity to be able to contribute to the financial appropriation Bill 2018/2019, currently underway before the House right now. Mr. Deputy Speaker, right off the bat, I would also like to take the opportunity to congratulate and thank the Member for Siparia for standing up and standing on the side of the people of Trinidad and

Tobago, for giving them a voice in the highest forum in our land, the Parliament of Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Deputy Speaker, you will recall on Budget day there was a large crowd assembled outside of the Parliament protesting. Mr. Deputy Speaker, it is a day I will never forget, as the Leader of the Opposition, Member for Siparia, arrived and if you would allow me to use some local dialect, the crowd shouted out to the Member for Siparia: "When you go inside there talk for we. Talk for we." And indeed, Mr. Deputy Speaker, the Member for Siparia spoke for "all ah we". [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I like to always take the opportunity—[*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Members, please.

Mr. B. Padarath:—of taking a look at a snapshot of what our young people have to say, because I am the youngest Member of Parliament in the 11th Parliament of Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*] And, Mr. Deputy Speaker, while the Member for Siparia was delivering her budget presentation, I took a look at the live feed of the Parliament and, Mr. Deputy Speaker, this is what some of the young people had to say: One young mechanical engineer, 25-year-old Rehanna from Oropune, this is what she had to say about the Member for Siparia's contribution:

> Kamla spoke facts, something you do not hear often in Parliament for the past three years. She spoke for the people. She spoke for me. I have two degrees and I cannot get a job. What turnaround are they talking about? Kamla is right. [*Desk thumping*]

Trevor Jackman, and this is on the Parliament's live feed, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Trevor Jackman, 31 year-old businessman.

> In the past two years I saw my business go down before my eyes. I still cannot get my VAT refunds. No foreign exchange to buy raw materials. I

> lost my house because I cannot pay my mortgage and now I am hustling sales out of the back of my Toyota wagon. What turnaround the Minister feel I am feeling? Kamla was spot on in her reply.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, these are the voices of young people of Trinidad and Tobago. And, Mr. Deputy Speaker, these are the people who are on the battleground fighting everyday looking for the turnaround in the battleground of high food prices, in the battleground of high crime, in the battleground of mass unemployment, in the battleground that is life in Trinidad and Tobago. There is no turnaround. It is only a runaround. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Deputy Speaker, breaking news. While thousands of workers have been put on the breadline by this Government from Petrotrin, the Industrial Court has just granted those workers leave, having successfully filed an injunction to stop, to cease and desist the illegal actions of this Government, [*Desk thumping*] Mr. Deputy Speaker, and we congratulate the workers for taking that stand for standing up to this wicked, incompetent Government and saying enough is enough.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, you will recall on the last time I spoke on a financial appropriation Bill in this House, it was for the mid-year review. Mr. Deputy Speaker, all hell broke loose after I spoke. It was pandemonium in Trinidad and Tobago for two weeks. The Minister of Finance berated, lambasted, qualified, highly respected economists and others, who indicated just like they are indicating now that there was no turnaround in the figures, that there was fudging of numbers and that no one was feeling any relief. [*Desk thumping*]

Well, Mr. Deputy Speaker, almost six months later I asked myself in preparation for this debate, had their views changed on the fiscal package and the way forward articulated by the Minister? You see, Mr. Deputy Speaker, the answer is a resounding no. But those five economists who the Minister went after

for telling the truth they were not alone. After the Minister presented his budget on Monday heads of business organizations, namely in San Juan and San Fernando, Chambers of Commerce, the Employers Consultative Association, the TTMA, Taxi Drivers Association, they have all said the same thing, that there is no turnaround. [*Desk thumping*]

You see, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I am intrigued to see whether the Minister will brand those organizations just as he branded those economists as foolish and as UNC sympathizers. You can run Minister but you cannot hide from all of the people of Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I was particularly intrigued by some of the comments made by my colleague, the Member for Tobago West. Minister of Sport and Youth Affairs, now holding the seat of Tobago West, is one of two Ministers we have seen in this administration, in the Ministry of Sport and Youth Affairs.

The Member for Diego Martin Central was a very hands on Minister, hands on the assets of the Ministry [*Laughter and desk thumping*] and that is what he would always be remembered for in this country. But the current Minister, Member for Tobago West, she seems as though she cannot keep her hands on the Ministry, because she says I know not, I do not, and I actually am not ever fully aware of what is going on in the Ministry of Sport and Youth Affairs every time she is asked a question.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, another point that the Member for Tobago West made, and I thought it was so laughable coming from the Member for Tobago West. The Member for Tobago West referred to members on this side as joyriders. You know, this is a Minister who boasts about almond milk and yogurt but sits on a plane to go to Caracas to sign the Dragon deal, and I am asking myself the Minister who described herself in this House as the Les Coteaux jumbie finds herself in

Caracas, Venezuela without any reason to be there. There was no sporting programme, there was no memorandum of understanding, but the Minister has a penchant for caviar and champagne. So who is engaging in the joyrides now, Minister? [*Desk thumping*]

You see, Mr. Deputy Speaker, the Minister also spoke about when they came into Government they only had three days' worth of finances to run the Government. Mr. Deputy Speaker, do you know that the Auditor General's Report of 2017 says that the Exchequer Account has been in overdraft since 2003? Who was there in 2003, 2004, 2005, 2006, 2007, 2008, 2009, 2010? What did they do about it? Absolutely nothing. Is that the turnaround they talk about? [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Deputy Speaker, the Member for Tobago West finally found a voice after one year, having nothing to say while the sea bridge and air bridge collapsed on behalf of the people of Tobago; boasted today about the *Galleons Passage*. If I were that Minister, I would be very ashamed to even say *Galleons Passage* in the mouth of the Member for Tobago West.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, these were just some of the issues that the hon. Minister raised. But, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I want to ask a few questions today. You see, if we are to look at the turnaround in the economy, we have to ask, why, by their own budget documents, we are seeing that the construction sector has declined by minus 6 per cent. Why are we seeing, in the non-energy, by their own documents, a decline by minus 4 per cent?

Mr. Deputy Speaker, there was no mention of VAT refunds, which is very important to many young business people in this country. Many business people, medium, small, large businesses. Mr. Deputy Speaker, why did we not hear about the startling statistics of over 17,000 young people on the breadline; 35,000 people

are now categorized as unemployed, having lost their jobs under this Government. They are asking whether the IMF projected growth of 1.9 per cent took into consideration the closure of the refinery. You know, I want to ask categorically to the Minister of Finance, Member for Diego Martin North/East, did the Minister tell the IMF prior to their report? And I am reliably advised that they withheld this information from the IMF.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, you see all of those economists, all of those Chambers of Commerce, all of those business associations, they are questioning why has our foreign reserves declined so badly from $11 billion under the Member for Siparia to $7 billion today. They are asking about our decline in the competitiveness index. The questionable inflation rate produced by the Minister has raised more than one eyebrow. Therefore, today all of the voices have said the same thing, Mr. Deputy Speaker. They said in the mid-year review there is no turnaround. I want to tell the Minister of Finance, Mr. Deputy Speaker, speak to people like young Vaalmikki Arjoon who has called your budget a market failure budget. Speak to Mariano Browne—and they were quick to rub shoulders with Mariano Browne when he was sitting in the Cabinet to Patrick Manning, when all of them were sitting for their supper. The Member for Arouca/Maloney, the Member for Diego Martin North/East, the Member for Diego Martin West, all sat with Mariano Browne in the Cabinet of Prime Minister Manning. They did not have any issue at that time, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: Thank you. Mr. Deputy Speaker, just for clarification—[*Crosstalk*]. I did not say I stood on a Standing Order. He gave way. He gave way. I did not say I stood on a Standing Order.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Please. The Member gave way. The Member—

Mr. B. Padarath: I am not giving way.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: No, no, no. Hold on, hold on. [*Crosstalk*] You gave way. You gave way.

Mr. B. Padarath: For a Standing Order.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Member, she stood and you gave way. [*Crosstalk*] Members. Proceed.

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: Thank you very much, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Just for clarification, because as usual the Member for Princes Town is giving incorrect information. I did not and never did sit in a Cabinet with Mariano Browne. I was at the time High Commissioner to Canada. Thank you very kindly.

Mr. B. Padarath: Mr. Deputy Speaker—[*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Deputy Speaker: One second. Retract that statement, please, Member for Couva South.

Mr. Indarsingh: Which one?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: All that you did then, but I heard the last one.

Mr. Indarsingh: I retract all.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Thank you. Proceed.

Mr. B. Padarath: Mr. Deputy Speaker, I thank the Minister and Member for Arouca/Maloney for the clarification, and I think probably I got a bit sidetracked because I forgot at that time that is when Mr. Manning had fired her from the Cabinet and sent her elsewhere. [*Desk thumping*] But I will move on, Mr. Deputy Speaker. You see, I have spoken about young economist Vaalmikki Arjoon, I have spoken about, Mr. Mariano Browne—Madam, I do not need to sit in the Cabinet of Trinidad and Tobago to represent the people of Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*] Because I do not need credit card money—[*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Members. Member, hold on. Leader of the House and Member for Princes Town, I am not going to tolerate that crosstalk. I am not going

to tolerate that crosstalk. And secondly, Member for Princes Town, the last statement you made, I think has nothing to do with this debate. I would like you to retract it. Proceed.

Mr. B. Padarath: Mr. Deputy Speaker, I move on.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: No!

Mr. B. Padarath: I retract and move on. Mr. Deputy Speaker—Mr. Mariano Browne, economist—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Member, hold on. Leader of the House, I heard the statement, retract it please. [*Crosstalk*] Just one second.

Mrs. Persad-Bissessar SC: Retract it. I know what you said.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Member for Siparia, I am on my legs. As the Speaker in the Chair, I have ruled. Leader of the House, retract the statement and then you will proceed.

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: Mr. Deputy Speaker, I humbly retract the statement.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Thank you.

Mr. B. Padarath: Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Former Minister, Mariano Browne, said that he has to thank God, and he meant the current Minister of Finance, has to thank God for Kamla Persad-Bissessar and the PP initiatives [*Desk thumping*] in the hydrocarbon sector.

Mala Dookeram tweeted that the Minister of Finance has his stats mixed up on inflation. So, Mr. Deputy Speaker, you can see a common trend that nothing has changed from the positions adopted by these highly qualified persons in the area of finance, and the economy, and management. There is no turnaround, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and therefore today I declare to the hon. Minister of Finance, the Member for Diego Martin North/East, that the people of Trinidad and Tobago will no longer buy cat in bag again. They have learnt their lesson since September

2015. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I want to speak to the young people of Trinidad and Tobago through you. And I know in the budget they were particularly looking for two things. One, they were looking for jobs and two they were looking for opportunities for advancement and betterment. After listening to the budget, Mr. Deputy Speaker, as the young people would say to the Minister of Finance, "rest meh". "Rest meh", because, Mr. Deputy Speaker, the budget did not in any way deal with those two particular areas that young people are concerned about. You see the majority of young people are interested in a sector called ICT outside of the regular profession of law, medicine, accounts, business, et cetera.

And Mr. Deputy Speaker, I want to turn to the Auditor General's Report, because the Auditor General's Report in chapter 5 is a clear indictment on this administration. Mr. Deputy Speaker, while Ministers were not on the job but were paid lofty salaries, I looked into this sector to see how many jobs were created in this sector for young people under the Ministry of Public Administration.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, when you turn to page 73, chapter 5, of the Auditor General's Report as it relates to the one industry worldwide that is drawing the attention of young people, and young professionals— the area of ICT. It is a very telling tale but a very damning tale against this Government. The Auditor General laments that the Ministry of Planning and Development and the Ministry of Public Administration were lazy, lackadaisical and downright incompetent. Mr. Deputy Speaker, this is what the Auditor General's Report had to say about the Government as it relates to ICT.

The Auditor General said there is no cohesion among Ministries and Departments. It said that many cases of duplication without results. Many Ministries and Departments have no policy or plan of integration of ICT in

bringing about greater delivery. Several Ministries led by the Ministry of Planning has no reporting mechanism and is the like the blind leading the blind. Mr. Deputy Speaker, it said billions were being spent by the State without cohesion and results. It also indicated that there was an absence of leadership from the Ministry of Public Administration and the Ministry of Planning and Development.

Now, I heard the Member for Port of Spain South boasting about the close relationship she has working with the Member for Arouca/Maloney. Mr. Deputy Speaker, what is reflected in the Auditor General's Report is nothing of which the Member for Port of Spain South— But you see, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I am not surprised. You know, in local parlance there is a saying, "two bo rat cyar live in one hole". But, Mr. Deputy Speaker, again, when we look at the Auditor General's Report, it also said that the Ministry of Health should pay greater attention to utilizing ICT to create jobs and have a proper functioning system.

You know, Mr. Deputy Speaker, the Leader of the Opposition, two budget speeches ago, two budget speeches ago, spoke about microwork platforms and spoke about informatics. She told the honourable—the Member for Siparia, that is—told the hon. Member for St. Joseph, listen you do not have to wait for the hospitals to be completed. Start the technological programmes through the informatics now where you can computerize the system. [*Desk thumping*] That way you will be able to create jobs and not just any jobs, sustainable jobs. And you will be able to bring about a revolution in how things are being operated from a 21st Century standpoint.

The Auditor General's Report is now telling the Ministry of Health that in the 2017 Auditor General's Report when the Member for Siparia told them that in her first budget response after being Prime Minister in 2015.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, you may be very, very surprised to know, when you

look at page 73, chapter 5, of the Auditor General's Report and you listen to the Minister of National Security, Member for Port of Spain North/St. Ann's West, last Monday, the hon. Minister, on learning of the murder of Inspector Jackman from the Prison Service, had a massive press conference and said, we were engaged in using every technology to bring down the murder rate and to capture the criminals.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, when you turn to page 73, that is not the story the Auditor General's Report tells you. Let us see what is says. It says that there has been no responses as it relates to ICT and data since 2015 from the:

- "Ministry of National Security - General Administration
- Ministry of National Security - Trinidad and Tobago Police Service
- Ministry of National Security - Trinidad and Tobago Defence Force
- Ministry of National Security - Trinidad and Tobago Fire Service"

But see Mr. Deputy Speaker, it goes much more than the Ministry of National Security. The person who is responsible for financing the budget, Minister of Finance, who is telling us that he wants his TTRA so badly, do you know as well what the Auditor General's Report says about the incompetence of this Government? It said it could also be found in a lack of reporting from page 73 in the Customs and Excise Division. It also says the Valuation Division has provided absolutely nothing. And the Minister who loves to boast that she is helping all of her colleagues, I believe that is the Ministry of Planning and Development, you can be found on page 73 chapter 5 under the Auditor General's Report being called not by the UNC, not by any economist, not by any head of organization, but an independent body like the Auditor General who is agreeing with all of these voices in the national community that you have contributed to nothing, that you have done nothing, and there is no turnaround. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Deputy Speaker, the Member for Port of Spain South, in her

contribution, spoke about that there was not data from the People's Partnership. Now, Mr. Deputy Speaker, this is what the Auditor General had to say about that Ministry under that Minister but you see again, I am not surprised. You see, if maybe the Member for Port of Spain—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Member, Member! "That". I will prefer—"that Minister". Use better terms, please.

Mr. B. Padarath: I mean nothing disparaging by it, Mr. Deputy Speaker, but I do apologize and I move on. The Member for Port of Spain South; had the Minister stayed in office longer than she did the first time and the second time without being fired, maybe the Auditor General may not have spoken about the lack of leadership in the Ministry of Public Administration, contributing to—

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: Mr. Deputy Speaker, 48(1), please.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Overruled.

Mr. B. Padarath: Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. You see, Mr. Deputy Speaker, over $1 billion in IT has been spent in three years, and the Government gets a failing grade from the Auditor General. [*Desk thumping*] The Auditor General says there are no jobs. The Auditor General says there are inefficiencies in the service of delivery. The Auditor General says there is no cohesion. There is no data. There is no leadership. There is no turnaround.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, the truth is that the Minister of Finance and his Government need a reality check. The only cheques that the people of Trinidad and Tobago can deposit under this Government is the reality that faces us when we go to the supermarkets, when we go to the market, when we go to the poultry depots, when we go to the hardware, when we go to utility payment centres.

Mr. Deputy Speaker one of the largest hashtag movements in Trinidad and Tobago is something called; #trinidadandtobagoisnotarealplace. You see, Mr.

Deputy Speaker, engaging public reaction with respect to this year's budget, I took to Twitter, I took to Facebook like many other persons, especially young persons, because that is the area and avenue they use to ventilate their feelings on how things are doing. And this hashtag movement has been picking up a lot of steam, and therefore I looked to see what was the trending topic because it tells you—it essentially tells you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, what issues most affect people and it can give you by age group and a breakdown in terms of demographics.

So I took a look at that and I said to myself, let me see what hashtags ware most trending on that day after the Minister delivered the budget. And Mr. Deputy Speaker, in today's episode of #trinidadandtobagoisnotarealplace, it first said:

Budget 2018 the Minister says marginal job loss, full employment in Trinidad and Tobago. Yet, over 35,000 have lost their jobs under the PNM. #trinidadandtobagoisnotarealplace.

Budget 2018, Minister says we have the best health care here, yet there is no medicine in the hospitals, no beds, children are being denied lifesaving surgery. #trinidadandtobagoisnotarealplace under the PNM.

Budget 2018, the Minister says we will take care of the disabled yet for the past three years the Carlson Field disability centre remains shutdown by the PNM after the People's Partnership constructed it in 2015 to assist over 20,000 men, women and children who are disabled. #trinidadandtobagoisnotarealplace under the PNM.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, the Minister said gas price increase will benefit the poor [*Crosstalk*] yet taxi fares have increased. There is no alternative mode of transportation. In his budget contribution in 2012, Mr. Deputy Speaker, would you believe the Member for Diego Martin North/East said on October 08, 2012, only 4 per cent of vehicles use premium all others use super unleaded. By his own words,

96 per cent of vehicles use super in this country. He said that right here in this House in 2012. #trinidadandtobagoisnotarealplace under the PNM. Mr. Deputy. Speaker, the manufacturing sector he said, the Minister, in the non-energy area grew by 7.8 per cent, yet the IMF and the TTMA head has no record of how the Minister arrived at this figure and could not explain how he arrived at this figure, #trinidadandtobagoisnotarealplace under the PNM.

4.15 p.m.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, health centres would be open 24 hours. Yet, under the People's Partnership between 2010 and 2015, health centres were open for 24 hours. When the PNM came in, they closed them at 4.00 p.m. They are now opening things they closed in the first place. [*Desk thumping*] That is not surprising [*Desk thumping*] because you see, when you have achieved nothing of your own to open, you have to close the Partnership projects to come back to reopen them. [*Desk thumping*] Mr. Deputy Speaker, Trinidad and Tobago is not a real place under the PNM.

Budget 2018, we will add $100 value to your TT Food Cards, yet they boasted about removing 18,000 from the card four months ago, #trinidadandtobagoisnotarealplace under the PNM.

Budget 2018, procurement legislation is important to us, yet they bought four boats for over $1.2 billion [*Desk thumping*] without proper procurement just by, what?—the Prime Minister visiting a shipyard in Australia, #trinidadandtobagoisnotarealplace under the PNM.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, budget 2018, we believe in the thrust for information technology through our schools, the Minister said, yet they have removed the laptop programme where children benefited individually. They also promised free broadband throughout the country. Instead, they placed broadband on a PTSC bus

with half of the Cabinet riding from Port of Spain to San Fernando. Mr. Deputy Speaker, #trinidadandtobagoisnotarealplace under the PNM.

Budget 2018, we will move towards removing the fuel subsidy as a priority, yet not a word on any plan to increase the efficiency of public transport. As the young people would say, #trinidadandtobagoisnotarealplace under the PNM.

We are proud of our athletes having medalled and done very well on the international circuit. Mr. Deputy Speaker, the Member for Diego Martin Central also, like the Member for Diego Martin North/East, made that same statement in this House before his political demise. But do you know, Mr. Deputy Speaker, in 2017, at least five athletes came out and said it publicly, disassociating themselves from the Ministry of Sport and Youth Affairs saying: "I want to have nothing to do with you. Do not publish my name on anything because you never helped me in any way?" [*Desk thumping*] But I am not surprised. The Member for Diego Martin North/East comes here and parrots that again, because #trinidadandtobagoisnotarealplace under the PNM.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, Maracas Bay has been developed, yet raw sewage and filth is what greets visitors. Just two days ago, on the social media you see videos surfacing of this. But, again, I am not surprised because, #trinidadandtobagoisnotarealplace under the PNM.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, if we needed further proof, let us look at the head of the Government. If, for instance, maybe we did not believe the Member for Diego Martin North/East and the other Ministers, let us look at the head of the Government. The Prime Minister says we do not have enough land for agriculture to sustain us as an alternative plant for revenue generation. Yet, in parts of the Middle East they utilize hydroponics to grow a trillion-dollar industry without having any arable land. Backward Trinidad with a backward Prime Minister,

Trinidad and Tobago is not a real place under the PNM. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I want to turn to the area of training. The budget document, *Vision 2030* or as we call it, "to be determined document, TBD", Chapter 3, page 46. Mr. Deputy Speaker, for the benefit of my colleagues, I would ask them because I constantly make the point in this House. You see, Government produces documents, but clearly they do not read them. Clearly, they do not even know what are contained because none of the Members opposite have identified or referred to any of the Minister's budget documents. Let us look at page 47, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Mr. Deputy Speaker, *Vision 2030*. Mr. Deputy Speaker, *Vision 2030*. Do you know, Mr. Deputy Speaker, in the "to be determined document", this Government lists as an achievement, a decline from a high of:

> "37 out of 138 countries in 2015"—under Kamla Persad-Bissessar—"to 43…"—as their achievement.

A decline on page 47?

Mr. Deputy Speaker, if that was not bad enough, on page 50, they highlight the upgrade of the NESC and MIC centres, yet they closed down several of these centres throughout the country taking opportunities away from young people. [*Desk thumping*] Mr. Deputy Speaker, let us look at page 53 that highlights that students were receiving GATE as an achievement, but they say the devil is the details. This book is a third part series.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, before the general election 2015, they produced a book of scandal, of untruths. For the Barataria by-election where we gave them a sound licking [*Desk thumping*] they produced another book. Well, for budget 2018, we have *Vision 2030*, a third part series. Mr. Deputy Speaker, turn to page 53. Do you know, Mr. Deputy Speaker, while they boast about GATE, when you break down the numbers, page 53 tells you over 11,583 students have had the

opportunity of tertiary education removed from them. But do you know what they say? They say that is a legacy achievement. That is what is contained here, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Mr. Deputy Speaker, page 53. When you look page 47, they said—Mr. Deputy Speaker, I want to read for you word-for-word of this document.

> We have declined in Mathematics in CSEC. We have declined in English and Language Arts in CSEC—and the next line says—this is our achievement.

This is what their own document says, Mr. Deputy Speaker. This is absolutely pathetic. [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Silence.

Mr. B. Padarath: Mr. Deputy Speaker, so when you see that the people outside there are saying that we are jumping from the frying pan into the fire, you understand why now. [*Desk thumping*] There is no turnaround. [*Desk thumping*] We are just going down, down, down. No turnaround, down, down, down.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I want to turn to the area of training, and a lady that I admire quite a lot, because I have had the opportunity to meet with her, to speak with her, to hear her vision, much like the Member for Siparia, is the hon. Prime Minister of Barbados, someone who resonates personally with me, because despite all of the negatives that were thrown against her, she continued to rise, because she stands for the people of Barbados like the Member for Siparia stands for the people of Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*] You see, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I said to myself, let us see what Prime Minister Mia Mottley was doing in Barbados for young people. Mr. Deputy Speaker, Mia Mottley said Mandarin for young people, Mandarin in schools. Prime Minister Keith Rowley said mandolin for young people—sing and dance outside the shop corner. Mia Mottley says "Mandarin" for young people, Prime Minister Rowley says "mandolin" for young people. That is

the plan that they have for young people in this country. That is the vision of our Prime Minister.

Mia Mottley recognized that China and India are the world's two fastest growing economies, and will now introduce Mandarin in schools and is in the process of also looking at Hindi. This is forward thinking. That is the competitive edge that the Member for Siparia was striving for when she instituted the laptop programme. [*Desk thumping*] In the meanwhile, Mr. Deputy Speaker, with not one initiative geared towards jobs for young people in this budget and training, the Minister of Finance on page 63 of his budget response, under "Creative Industries" says Government will make opportunities easier available to sing and dance in front of rum shops and corner shops. That is the vision.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, Mottley also encouraged small business for young people. You know why, Mr. Deputy Speaker? In Barbados, what she has decided to do is reduce business and corporation tax. On becoming Prime Minister, that is what she did. Here the Government sends it up. She understands that she has to make a more conducive environment so that they can create job and stimulate economic activities. You know, Mr. Deputy Speaker, if you find that sounds familiar, the Member for Siparia said the exact same thing on Friday. [*Desk thumping*] That is vision; that is leadership.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, while Prime Minister Mia Mottley is talking about language services, the stock market, economic zones and financial centres, Asian markets for investing young people, one-stop business development and start-up centres, do you know that while Barbados is focused on that, Jamaica is ranked at No. 5 out of 196 countries on the ease of starting a business. Fifth in the world is Jamaica. Trinidad and Tobago is No. 77, and we ask ourselves: How did they do it? They have made starting a business faster by reinstating next-day service for

company incorporation as a priority.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, with all the economic problems Barbados has staring them in the face, they are ranked at No. 64, in the ease of doing business, while we now move from position 66 under a Prime Minister, Kamla Persad-Bissessar, to the position where Prime Minister Dr. Keith Rowley and his Government has taken us to 102. I ask: Is that the turnaround or we just going down, down, down, Mr. Deputy Speaker?

You see, Mr. Deputy Speaker, the Minister of Trade and Industry came today and spoke in this House, and could not tell us specific foreign direct investment. You know, I heard the Member for Port of Spain South chastised the Member for Siparia. She said she spent $15 million to go India. Now, apparently they have a problem with Calcutta Ship, roti and India. It is a pattern among them. But, Mr. Deputy Speaker, what the Member for Port of Spain South will not tell you is that many of the memorandums of understanding signed by the Member for Siparia on that trip to India is what is bearing fruit today in the manufacturing sector and technical cooperation and advice. [*Desk thumping*]

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: Mr. Deputy Speaker, Standing Order 48(6), specifically in relation to Calcutta Ship and what the Member said about us have a difficulty with India. [*Crosstalk*] Mr. Deputy Speaker, Standing Order 48(6) specifically—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Members. Members. [*Crosstalk*]

Dr. Moonilal: What is this?

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: Specifically—

Mrs. Persad-Bissessar SC: What is the Standing Order? Why are we getting this long explanation?

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: Because the Standing Orders say that you can give an explanation. 48(6)—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: One second. One second Member. Listen, Member for Siparia—

Mrs. Persad-Bissessar SC: Yes, Sir.

Mr. Deputy-Speaker: Member for Siparia—

Mrs. Persad-Bissessar SC: I withdraw.

Mr. Deputy-Speaker:—I have given the Leader of the House the opportunity to her Standing Order, and she is saying what it relates to. Once she has clarified it, I will make a ruling. Proceed.

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: Mr. Deputy Speaker, I have raised Standing Order 48(6), and just for the information of Members, according to Standing Order 47(3) a Member raising a point of order must put the points succinctly and shall be heard in silence so you can make the point.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I am raising Standing Order 48(6) specifically, in relation to what the Member for Princes Town said about us on this side in relation to our belief or feelings about India, and it is totally incorrect and improper. [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Member. Member. [*Crosstalk*] Members. [*Crosstalk*] Members. [*Crosstalk*] Members. [*Crosstalk*] Listen, Members on both sides—Leader of the House, Couva South and Siparia—I am going to make my ruling.

Mrs. Persad-Bissessar SC: Yes, Sir.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Member, I would like you to reword what you havejust said or, if not, retract it and move on in what you are implying based on the Standing Order.

Mr. B. Padarath: Mr. Deputy Speaker, I was merely responding to the Member for Port of Spain South to say that the Member for Siparia, on her trip to India, was able to bring back to Trinidad and Tobago foreign direct investment and I move on

from there. [*Desk thumping*] Mr. Deputy Speaker—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Member. All Members, the next time I have to stand to my feet with regard to any discrepancy with regard to the Standing Order, I am going to ensure that you all take a walk, the next time. Proceed.

Mr. B. Padarath: Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Mr. Deputy Speaker, I draw your attention to page 27 of the *Review of the Economy* and, again, it is as though Members opposite do not read their budget documents. You see, Mr. Deputy Speaker, while all Members may stand up and parrot the statistics provided by the Member for Diego Martin North/East, I ask them to look at page 27 of the *Review of the Economy*. You see, it tells us that the same sectors they are boasting of growth—and the Minister of Trade and Industry came to this House today, and again, parroted exactly what the Member for Diego Martin North/East said—but on page 27 of the *Review of the Economy* tells us that the same sectors that they are boasting of growth are forecast—and I am quoting here, Mr. Deputy Speaker:

> "...forecast to decline…reducing its"—contribution to—"GDP"—by over—
> "1.3 percent."

Now, they need to make up their minds which story they are selling, turnaround or runaround? [*Desk thumping*] They need to determine, Members opposite, whether they are coming or they are going, because whatthey are saying and what is reflecting in their own budget documents is totally contradictory, Mr. Deputy Speaker. But, again, the devil is in the details; tale of two cities: Fantasy Island and the real Trinidad and Tobago under this Government.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, page 53, *Review of the Economy* contradicts what the Minister told us about the non-energy sector. It also says people are not coming to Trinidad and Tobago and, therefore, it helps to explain why this sector is down. I challenge any Member opposite to give us the statistics that show that arrivals have

increased in Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*] You see, that will tell us that the story is very different from what you printed in your *Review of the Economy* on page 53.

But, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that is not the only contradiction that is contained in this budget. I will now turn to the area of Graduate Training Programme, and I want to quote for you exactly from the budget speech of 2015. Mr. Deputy Speaker, Monday October 08, 2016, this is what the Minister of Finance had to say:

> "Madam Speaker, in view of the fact that we have so many unemployed and/or underemployed university graduates in our country today, we are introducing a Graduate Recruitment Programme in 2016 in all twenty-three Ministries and Tobago. In the first instance, I propose to provide $55.0 million for the employment of at least twenty such university graduates in each Ministry and a suitable amount in Tobago, or a total of 500 graduates. The programme will be designed to utilize the core competencies of these graduates in their various areas of study."

Mr. Deputy Speaker, in preparing for today's contribution, I went through every single Ministry. Line Item 34, under "University Graduate Recruitment Programme" 2015 moneys appropriated; 2016, no jobs, no one was hired, no money spent; 2017—2016, sorry—moneys appropriated, no jobs, no one was hired, no money spent; 2017 moneys appropriated, no jobs, no one hired, no money spent; 2017, moneys appropriated, no jobs, no one hired, no money spent. Mr. Deputy Speaker, do you know 2018 and 2019, they come back with the same story again?

Mr. Deputy Speaker, let me tell you the Ministries, because even that, Mr. Deputy Speaker, they are being untruthful about. In 2015, the Minister tells us in

every Ministry, the core competencies they will hire people. Even when they have the money in their hands to employ young people, young professional graduates, they are not doing it. They are stifling young people. Mr. Deputy Speaker, let me tell you the Ministries: Ministry of Finance, 2015, 2016, 2017, 2018 and 2019, going forward, not one young person has been hired in this graduate training programme.

Hon. Member: Shame.

Mr. B. Padarath: Same thing, Mr. Deputy Speaker, under the Ministry of National Security, same thing under the Ministry of the Attorney General and Legal Affairs, same thing under the Ministry of Education, same thing under the Ministry of Health, but they tell young people, we care for you. "We love you, so we take care of you." If this is care, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I would not like to see what is not caring.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, the Ministry of Labour and Small Enterprise Development—this is shameful—who knows the plight, especially of young professionals, have not utilized this Vote at all. Mr. Deputy Speaker, the Ministry of Public Administration, the Ministry of Tourism, the Ministry of Public Utilities, the Ministry of Energy and Energy Industries, Ministry of Rural Development and Local Government, Ministry of Works and Transport, Ministry of Trade and Industry, Ministry of Housing and Urban Development, Ministry of Community Development, Culture and the Arts, Ministry of Planning and Development, Ministry of Foreign and Caricom Affairs, Ministry of Sport and Youth Affairs, Ministry of Social Development and Family Services and Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries.

But, Mr. Deputy Speaker, you know what is more shameful than that? There are three Ministries where they have removed the programme altogether. So

you have done nothing for all these years that you have appropriated the money, and some of you all just realized: "Well, for the next two years all yuh really eh going and do nothing again", so you just decide to move the Vote entirely out from those Ministries. Mr. Deputy Speaker, that is the legacy of this Government. That is what they have done. There is no turnaround as I have told you, is only down, down, down. [*Desk thumping*] Mr. Deputy Speaker, I want to turn to my portfolio area—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Member, before you proceed, your initial speaking time has elapsed, you have an additional 10. You care to avail yourself?

Mr. B. Padarath: Yes.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Proceed.

Mr. B. Padarath: Mr. Deputy Speaker, under the Ministry of Community Development, Culture and the Arts falls the Self-Help Programme, which really should be called "the no-help programme." [*Desk thumping*] You see, Mr. Deputy Speaker, by the Minister's own admission, you will recall when this country was under flood waters for days, the Minister of Social Development and Family Services was quick to tell the people in Debe and Penal, do not build your house on a lagoon, and days later, you know what happened, Mr. Deputy Speaker? All of Port of Spain and north flooded out.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, the Prime Minister who was absent—you could not find the Prime Minister for days—went one week later with his hands swinging—not a Crix, not a Panadol, not a sardine for poor people in this country, but said, "I will establish a $35 million fund for tropical storm victims". Mr. Deputy Speaker, in the company of the Prime Minister's best friend, self-professed best friend, of AV Drilling $100 million in fake-oil fame, this is what we got a few days later right here in this Parliament—and I believe the Member for Arouca/Maloney, in

the absence of the Member for Port of Spain North/St. Ann's West, stood up and gave me these figures.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, under Self-Help, for one entire year, do you know that it takes more to operate the Self-Help as an organization than actual expenditure that they have expended on helping people? I will give you the numbers because the people of Trinidad and Tobago deserve to hear how their taxpayers' dollars are being spent. [*Desk thumping*] Arima, in one year, three grants; Barataria, in one year, five grants; Caroni Central, in one year, one grant; Couva South, one; Couva North, 1; Cumuto/Manzanilla, 1; Diego Martin, 8; Diego Martin North/East, 5; Diego Martin West, 6; La Brea, 5; Mayaro, 4; Naparima 3; Princes Town, 1; Pointe-a-Pierre, 1; San Fernando West, 2; Tabaquite, 2; Tunapuna, 2; Tobago East, 1; Tobago West, 2, but you hear Tobago. "Tobago dey tell yuh they love yuh too bad yuh know." Tobago West Member of Parliament said, they love you, that is why they are doing so much for you in Tobago, but you cannot feel the love. You see, Mr. Deputy Speaker, because there is no turnaround. We are just going down, down, down. Now, you know, Mr. Deputy Speaker, when I saw Diego Martin East only had five in the space of one year, I wonder whether or not the Member for Diego Martin East went and told his constituents that this is the turnaround that they can feel?

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I want to also turn to the area of Stollmeyer's Castle. Mr. Deputy Speaker, in my own constituency, the children of Princes Town, Presbyterian 1 cannot get a school to go to. The Ministry of Education has demolished the school without providing any infrastructure or plans to rebuild a new school. But you know what is contained in this budget? $1.8 million additional to operate Stollmeyer's Castle hidden, but the devil is in the details. So, I ask the Minister to turn to page 316 of the review of estimates of expenditure.

Having spent $48 million already on Stollmeyer's Castle, they could not come up with a business development model to have Stollmeyer's Castle self-sustained, but as the Member for Oropouche East tells us, is castles before schools.

Right now, the Shiva Boys and Parvati Girls College, 80 per cent completed, Ramai Trace Hindu School, but castles before schools, Mr. Deputy Speaker. The children of Princes Town and Siparia and Oropouche they continue to suffer having to sit on the floor, Mr. Deputy Speaker, but the Government's priority is castles before schools.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, we have heard repeated promises again that they will fix Queen's Hall, SAPA and NAPA. All those things are repeated promises from budget 2015, 2016, 2017 and, again, shamelessly it has found its way in 2018.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, with your permission, I would like to turn to the area of sports. Mr. Deputy Speaker, the Member for Tobago West gives us a long tirade and every two sentences that the Minister spoke, all I heard was National Aquatic Centre, National Cycling Centre, National Velodrome, National Tennis Centre, all People's Partnership projects under the vision of the Member for Siparia. [*Desk thumping*] Mr. Deputy Speaker, do you know the Member for Tobago West spoke about the Dwight Yorke Stadium and I wish to remind you, that is how the demise of the Member for Diego Martin Central came about, the excuse of spending $92,000 romping in Tobago was the excuse that they were looking after the Dwight Yorke Stadium. UDeCOTT has said it will take $80 million to fix the Dwight Yorke Stadium but, in the budget, $15 million. Tobago, that is how they love and care for you. That is the turnaround they are speaking of.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, you see I held this budget document—I looked inside, I looked outside, I looked on the cover, I looked up, I looked down—because I was looking for the boat where in the Ministry of Sport and Youth Affairs, a settlement

of $150,000 was expended with taxpayers' money. You see, this is dealing with the budget and the people's money, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and, therefore, I opened the budget books and I said, "Self: where is this $150,000?" Where did it come from? You know, the Attorney General had the audacity, when I raised this issue in this House, you know what the Attorney General said? The Member for Princes Town trying to create scandal. Days later, when it came out in the public domain, the Attorney General had nothing to say.

The Prime Minister tells us that the report is damning and the report is damaging, Mr. Deputy Speaker, damning and damaging, but it is taxpayers' money that jumped up in the air. And, therefore, I called on the Prime Minister to put in the public domain the Wilson Report. [*Desk thumping*] You see, just as you were shielding persons in the Ministry of Sport and Youth Affairs from being exposed, we know that the Jackie Wilson Report does not exonerate the Member for Diego Martin Central. And I tell you, you can run but you cannot hide. [*Desk thumping*] Mr. Deputy Speaker, I would like to give in my first—[*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Indarsingh: Sexual harassment.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Member for Oropouche East. Sorry. Member for Couva South, kindly exit the Chamber, please.

Mr. B. Padarath: Mr. Deputy Speaker—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Hold on.

Mr. B. Padarath: Mr. Deputy Speaker—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Hold on.

[*The Member for Couva South leaves the Chamber*]

Proceed.

Mr. B. Padarath: Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Mr. Deputy Speaker, through you, as a young person, the youngest Member of Parliament in the Eleventh

Parliament, I speak to the people of Trinidad and Tobago, through you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I know what it is like to hold a child, a baby in my hand today and learn of the baby's death the next day. Mr. Deputy Speaker, as a legacy of the Member for Siparia, many times the Member for Siparia, even as Prime Minister and then as Leader of the Opposition, would call me and she would say: "Could you please assist this family in filling out, they may not know how to do the paperwork and so on."

I have gone on behalf of the Member for Siparia, the Children's Life Fund at Mount Hope. Do you know today, Mr. Deputy Speaker, there is no administrative staff at the Children's Life Fund. There is one officer who is a clerical officer, who determines whether you can get a form or you cannot get a form, and I am talking from personal experience. Mr. Deputy Speaker, you may ask yourself, why do I choose to raise this as the last issue in this budget debate in my contribution. You know why, Mr. Deputy Speaker? We have said to them, through the Member for Siparia, amend the legislation to help children—

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

Mr. B. Padarath:—to help children who do not fall within the realm of the current legislation, but need a life-saving surgery anyway.

4.45 p.m.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, if you cannot find compassion for babies, helpless children who are dying on their death beds, you think they will have compassion for you and I, to fix our road and drain, and bridge and food card? [*Desk thumping*] Mr. Deputy Speaker, I will tell you this, then as Prime Minister in 2011, sitting as an advisor to the Prime Minister, opposite the Prime Minister at 10 o'clock in the night in the OPM one Thursday, she comes across a letter from a parent who says, I need life-saving surgery for my child, could you help me Prime

Minister? At 11 o'clock in the night she hands me the letter across the table. I sat there with the letter, she looked up five minutes later and she said, what are you doing? I said, well, Prime Minister, I will deal with it tomorrow. She said, tomorrow? She said, call that parent now. I said, but, Prime Minister, it is 11 o'clock. She said, if that were your child you think you would be asleep, you think you can rest easily? Mr. Deputy Speaker, when she spoke to those parents and assured them that she will do everything in her power to save their child, they wept like babies. Mr. Deputy Speaker, that child was not from Siparia, the child was not from Oropouche, the child was not from Caroni Central; it was not from Princes Town. That child was from the Beetham, because Kamla Persad-Bissessar demonstrated [*Desk thumping*] that every single man, woman and a child in this country was just as important.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I end on that note really to give a voice today, as I said, to the issues confronting young people, but for the issues that confront every man, woman and child in this country; every man, woman and child who cannot feel any turnaround, but only down, down, down, with this Government and this budget. Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Deputy Speaker: I recognize the Member for La Brea. [*Desk thumping*]

The Parliamentary Secretary in the Ministry of Energy and Energy Industries (Ms. Nicole Olivierre): Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, for giving me the opportunity to contribute in this debate, the Appropriation (Financial Year 2019) Bill, 2018. After that high-pitched, elevated contribution that was just assailing the ears of the Members of this House, [*Crosstalk*] I am certain that you would be quite happy—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Members, I made a statement earlier and it still stands. Member for Princes Town, you just entered the debate, please. Leader of

Government Business, Leader of the House, same thing. Proceed, Member for La Brea.

Ms. N. Olivierre: Thank you. I was certain that Members would be quite happy to have a more sober and toned-down contribution, [*Desk thumping*] as I am known to provide. I am here representing the people of La Brea constituency who I know are tuned in because this is the national budget debate and they are all very eager to learn what this budget has to offer for the constituency. They are not looking for cheap entertainment. They are looking for facts and information on how this budget will impact their lives and that is my role here this afternoon. [*Desk thumping*]

So, firstly, I would like to thank our political leader, Prime Minister, Hon. Dr. Keith Christopher Rowley, for bringing this Government into power and rescuing this nation from the "squandermania" of the 2010—2015 period. [*Desk thumping*] Secondly, for delivering what has been a very promising budget, I would like to thank the Minister of Finance. What he has managed to do with this, our fourth budget, he has managed to stabilize the country's economy, he has reduced the excessive spending that was the pattern prior to our entry into Government, he has increased the social safety net with this budget, and he has successfully managed a phased reduction in the fuel subsidy, which is something that this country needed to move into. And he has done that in a manner that is without significant adverse impact on the national population. So, Minister of Finance, thank you very much for your astute management of the economy.

There is one other Ministry that plays a vital, critical role in the national budgeting process that I think does not get enough recognition, and that is the Ministry of Planning and Development [*Desk thumping*] under the astute leadership of the Member for Arouca/Maloney. The Ministry of Planning and

Development is responsible for largely the Development Programme, and it is in the Development Programme that you find where the moneys are allocated. So it is all well and good to talk about all the fantastic plans you have and your intentions for what you are going to do, but you have to look into the Development Programme to see where, which line Items moneys are allocated in, for Infrastructure Development Programme, so you can tell exactly what is likely to happen in the coming fiscal year. I want to go through, in great detail, many of the items within the Development Programme that pertain to projects that would benefit my constituents and my constituency, because the last speaker spoke a lot about whether we read the documents, if we went into great detail in what is in the budget. Two particular documents would spell out exactly where you can find funds allocated for any project that anyone proposes, dreams of, thinks about. Unless there is a line Item that points to that project or unless there are funds that are dedicated to it, nothing will be done, and the Public Sector Investment Programme is where that money would be described, and it is also in the Draft Estimates of Development Programme.

I will go through many of the items there that pertain to projects in my constituency, because there are various projects that we would like to see completed or at least progressed during this fiscal year. I will start with Public Utilities, lighting of recreation grounds. Now, there are a number of recreation grounds in my constituency that remain unlit. During the period 2010—2015, when grounds were being—when every five lots of open space in constituencies like Siparia and Oropouche East and West were being given lights, established recreation grounds in PNM stronghold constituencies were left in darkness, but some of that started to change in 2015 when the PNM came into power. [*Desk thumping*] Under my colleague, my neighbour, the Member for

D'Abadie/O'Meara in 2016, performing as the Minister of Public Utilities, I was able to have recreation grounds lit. Four of my recreation grounds were lit. I believe most constituencies would have gotten an equal number. We really have to thank the Member for D'Abadie/O'Meara for having done that. [*Desk thumping*]

Now, I see that funding has again been put into that particular line Item for lighting of recreation grounds. I see $10 million has been put into there, and I know that the current Minister of Public Utilities has promised that I would get two additional grounds lit out of that allocation. So residents of No. 9 Road, residents of Sobo Village, La Brea, you can expect to see upgrades to your lights being done in this fiscal year courtesy of the Minister of Public Utilities, under the representation from your MP by virtue of you having elected a PNM Government into power. [*Desk thumping*] Under the Ministry of Education, there is another line Item for upgrade of NESC facilities. Yes, we had reason to close one of the NESC facilities in my constituency due to issues with enrolment because of the way the programme was structured and the type of persons it was attracting. We had a reduction in enrolment, but we do have another NESC facility in the constituency that is operating quite well, that is the La Brea Technology Centre. [*Desk thumping*] And $1.5 million has been allocated in this budget to upgrade the NESC Technology Centre in La Brea. This upgrade involves doing some upgrades to the welding shop and the fabrication area.

Again, for the benefit of the Member for Princes Town who likes to identify the document he read and the page number, you can look in the PSIP on page 154 or you can go into the Draft Estimates of Development Programme. It is right there under the Ministry of Education. So all of these figures that I am quoting, if anyone has access to the documents you can go in there, but, you see, once you can pinpoint a line Item, funding has been allocated to something, then you have some

level of assurance that the Government is serious about getting these projects done. [*Desk thumping*] All throughout the constituency, I mean, we have many secondary roads and you know, small bridges and access areas that need work to be done, these works are done under the Ministry—well, under the regional corporations who get their funding from the Ministry of Rural Development and Local Government. The Siparia Regional Corporation, which is the Corporation that governs and controls all of La Brea constituency, they have been allocated some funding in the amount of $13.9 million for projects, including local roads and bridges programme, drainage and irrigation, and upgrade of recreation facilities. I am pleased to say that some projects are currently underway. In the last fiscal year they would have built a pavilion in Parrylands. It is interesting when you look at how politics is played at the local government level. When you have a regional corporation which is run—which is under the control of the UNC, and you look at how they balance their expenditure, they tend not to be very balanced in allocating funding amongst the various councillors under their charge. So you would see that where they have councillors in UNC-held electoral districts, they tend to get projects that are built to a different standard than the ones that would apply in the PNM electoral districts.

During the 2010—2015 period when the UNC was in central government, we would have seen that drastic disparity where they did works in UNC-held corporations. It would have been to one standard, at one cost, one value, but if they were doing an equivalent thing in a PNM area, to appear that they are doing things for us, they would have been grossly substandard. A simple thing like installing recreation ground lights, in the facilities that they install lights, each pole would have had 12 lights on it, in PNM locations where they install lights, each pole would just have eight. So you could see a clear distinction in how they would

have distributed. You would see a clear distinction in how they were distributed, but the PNM does not operate like that. We maintain one standard and in everything that we do, we share it equally and well balanced. [*Desk thumping*] One of the major problems in my constituency, we have a lot of—a lot of my residents work in Port of Spain so they would use public transport. PTSC, very nicely, has a bus service, two buses leave Point Fortin—well, four buses leave Point Fortin, two pass through the South Main Road, two pass through the SS Erin Road, and they would all go full picking up persons, bringing them to Port of Spain. Over the past year I have had lots of complaints about the reliability and efficiency of the supply, sometimes there are not sufficient buses to service the route. So I was very pleased when I looked in the Development Programme, I see that the Ministry of Works and Transport has been given $56.1 million for PTSC to acquire 100 new buses. Now, these are the type of projects that will directly impact on the travelling public.

I know that long-haul service does not only apply to persons down on my side, I know there are buses that come from far in the south-east as well. So my residents, those of you who live in Erin that have been complaining about the paucity of the supply from time to time, and sometimes there are being shortages of buses on evenings, I can assure you that in this fiscal year when PTSC acquires these new buses, that should be a thing of the past. So this is another promise that you can look forward to in 2019. [*Desk thumping*]

The Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries, I see there are some million dollars allocated for upgrade of fish-landing sites, and in the PSIP document I see that the Erin Fishing Facility has been identified as one of those locations where some upgrade work will be done to the fencing, the locker room, net repair and the engine room buildings. This Erin Fishing Facility was once a

very thriving location. Back in the old days there was a very active trade between Trinidad and Venezuela that would have taken place through Erin, where persons would just come in on the fishing boat; we are that close. Now, the nature of the trade is not one that we would like to talk about. It is one that is causing us some national security challenges. However, as far as the fishing site is concerned, we can look forward to an upgrade of the fishing facilities.

One of the projects that I am working on with the community that I hope to get going before the end of this year, is to introduce a "Fish Fry". Many of you know about the "Fish Fry" concept, it is well established in Barbados in Oistins. It is also well established in Grenada as well, and Erin is a prime community for something like this, a traditional fishing area. Last weekend—yesterday, was the Erin RC Church annual harvest which was very, very well attended, and it is something that the community has done in decades gone by. It is something that it is actively working on bringing back. So with the upgrade to the fishing facility we can develop that into a really nice activity. Erin is a small quiet community with very limited activity. Other than football every weekend, we have a team that is in the Super League that is doing quite well and is bringing out the community to support, and I think that a "Fish Fry" would be a nice activity to help, you know, tie and also add some economic activity into the community. So we are looking forward to that once that facility is upgraded.

Hon. Minister: Domestic tourism.

Ms. N. Olivierre: Domestic tourism, of course.

The Ministry of Sport and Youth Affairs, I see $2 million has been allocated for the refurbishment of youth facilities, and the Los Bajos facility has been identified as one of the facilities that would benefit from some refurbishment activity. The Minister of Sport and Youth Affairs recently spoke about the

vacation programme that was done in helping the youths and one of those programmes was held at that facility, and participants were really grateful for the opportunity they had in learning résumé writing and some of these life skills. So kudos to the Ministry of Sport and Youth Affairs for that initiative and for recognizing the need to perform some minor upgrades on the facility.

We also have, under the Infrastructure Development Fund—one the biggest concerns that we have in the constituency in the field of education is the Santa Flora Government Primary School. There are two primary schools that are challenged right now, one is the Rousillac Hindu School and the other is the Santa Flora Government Primary School. Repair of the Rousillac Hindu School would require a great deal of investment, and that is somewhere further behind on the priority listing because of the amount of work that is required there, but the Santa Flora Government School has been identified in the top five schools for completion. Sadly, very little was done in the last fiscal year, but $7 million has been allocated in this fiscal year and we expect that before this fiscal year is completed, the students of the Santa Flora Government Primary School will be able to return to school.

I want to pause here and talk a little bit more about the school because I am noticing—there is a disturbing trend of what is happening throughout the country, and it is all part of this national protest culture. When we first came into Government a number of persons then recognized the change in Government and you have new representatives, and persons have decided, let us protest to gain attention and get quick results. My constituents would have quickly realized that this MP does not respond to protest action. The very first protest was one about roads, I responded to that, I went down. The second one was one about jobs, but after that I have decided I am not responding to protest actions, I do not read

smoke signals. Protests do not solve problems. We have an issue, have a rational discussion with someone and it will be dealt with.

Parents of the Santa Flora Government Primary School in 2015, took some ill advice and staged a noisy protest to try to get some attention. The acting principal at the time had decided that the school was unfit for occupation and they decided to take their children out of the school. Kids remained out of school for 14 weeks which was to their educational detriment. Many of the parents now—there is new leadership in the PTA, there is a new principal at the school, and a new administration and a new leadership, and the PTA has recognized that a protest action is not the way to resolve differences, it does not solve any issues. What that action would have done is further aggravated a situation and now they find themselves in another situation that is not as comfortable as it can be. I want to assure the current principal and the leadership of the PTA that, your patience is appreciated, and I am working with you to see how best we can alleviate your concerns. I want to advise you to keep strong and do not allow the negative influences within the environment who are trying to inveigle you to set a bad example for your students to take over. You are going about it the right way, just a little more patience and the school will be completed within this academic year. Adequate funding has been put into the budget for it, and the Ministers of Education are very well aware of it.

This school is in the top five priority, it will be done. Thank you for your patience and please continue to focus on putting your children's education first and foremost above all else. Under no circumstance should parents and teachers choose to take children out of a school situation as a form of encouraging a government to take action that you want. That is totally unacceptable. Your children's education must always come first, and you should always do what is

necessary to ensure that their education is not disrupted.

Two things that the people of La Brea want, have always needed—well, something that we will share with our neighbour, Point Fortin, is a fire station and a hospital. I know when the Member for Point Fortin speaks he will talk more about it, but I could say that I am certainly comforted that $7 million has been put into the budget for the Point Fortin Fire Station, which I know will assist in serving La Brea and the La Brea Industrial Estate very well. And with the $70 million into the Point Fortin Hospital, I know that that construction is well underway, it is close to completion, expected commissioning on time, and we look forward to seeing the Point Fortin Hospital open when all of the south-west would benefit greatly from that. Even the Member for Fyzabad and his constituents, I am sure, would benefit greatly from the Point Fortin Hospital, so we certainly look forward to hearing praises from the Member for Fyzabad, next year when he does his budget contribution.

In terms of the Solomon Hochoy Highway extension to Point Fortin—

[*Member continuously coughs*]

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Member, are you okay, you can start back?

Ms. N. Olivierre: Well, yeah, I think I can. Just forgive me, I am a little bit under the weather.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Leader of the House.

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: Mr. Deputy Speaker, may I suggest that we take tea now so my colleague who is a little bit under the weather can refresh herself?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Okay, fair enough. Hon. Members, at this time we will break for tea and we will resume at 5.45.

5.08 p.m.: *Sitting suspended.*

5.45 p.m.: *Sitting resumed.*

Madam Speaker: Member for La Brea, you have 24 minutes of original speaking time left.

Ms. N. Olivierre: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. I must say a little thank you to the Member for Fyzabad for availing me with a Chloraseptic. I think it has assisted greatly. So thank you very much for that. [*Desk thumping*] I am by no means recommending him as a doctor when you have a virus, but I am just extending my appreciation for his assistance to me. So do not take it as an advertisement for his medical services.

Yes, so I was speaking about what is in the PSIP that would benefit my constituency. Under the Ministry of Community Development, Culture and the Arts, I see 20 million has been put into the budget for construction of community centres, and listed among those is the Quarry Village Community Centre. [*Desk thumping*] I know the sod was turned on the centre last year. But again, in a situation of limited funds you have to manage how you expend, but we certainly expect to get Quarry Village started within this fiscal year, so constituents you can look forward to that. Also I see 6 million has been put in for repair and refurbishment of existing community centres. I know that Sobo Community Centre, La Brea, is listed as one of the centres to receive repair work, and there is work currently ongoing just outside the centre. It is some drainage works and we expect that that work will be completed shortly. One million has been put into the budget for the Ministry of Works and Transport for the La Brea beach line shore stabilization works, so we can look forward to some ease to the erosion that is taking place along the Point Sabre/Carat Shed beach area.

A major project that will benefit all of the south-west is the Solomon Hochoy Highway extension to Point Fortin. Madam Speaker, 164 million has been allocated for fiscal 2019. There is a number of works still to be done on that

highway, several segments: the Mondesir interchange; the Oropouche River Bridge; the road overpass; the Guapo River Bridge; segment B44 on the Southern Main Road to Dunlop Roundabout; segment of Eccles Trace to La Brea; another segment, Mosquito Creek to the Godineau River; St. Mary's interchange; Grants Road underpass, Delhi Road overpass; segments La Brea to B44 Southern Main Road and Fyzabad to Mondesir, and then the Southern Main Road overpass and the La Brea interchange. There is a significant amount of work still to be done on that highway, and we look forward to the completion of that major artery that will totally transform access to the south west. You see, all of these tie into the impending development of La Brea as a centre for industrial activity. But I will talk a bit more about that when I get to everyone's favourite topic later on in my contribution.

There is another little project, water supply to LABIDCO and Union Estate, $29 million has been allocated this fiscal year. I will go into a little more detail about that major WASA project a little later on.

Now, in my constituency, one of the single biggest concerns by all residents is road infrastructure. There are two main arteries in my constituency. Most constituencies would have one major road that passes through it that everyone will use to access, but due to the geographical make up of my constituency there are two major arteries. One is the Southern Main Road, which would connect persons along the La Brea/Point Fortin end, and the other is the San Fernando/Siparia/Erin Road which would connect persons along the Palo Seco end. Both of these major roads would have been neglected significantly during the 2010 to 2015 period, for obvious reasons. Well, I should not say obvious reasons, but they were in fact neglected.

The San Fernando/Siparia/Erin Road, as the name implies, it starts in San

Fernando, goes via Siparia through Erin. During the 2010 to 2015 period the portion from San Fernando to Siparia was well maintained. I would dare say that up to the intersection, Quarry junction, where Siparia constituency ends and the La Brea constituency begins, up to that point was kept very neatly, nicely paved, and from that point was neglected for the five years.

Within our first year in office, I would have brought then Minister of Works and Transport, the Member for Laventille West. He came and toured my constituency. He looked at the Southern Main Road in the La Brea stretch in particular, and he also looked at the SS Erin Road from Quarry to Erin. The very first road construction project that was done under Laventille West as Minister of Works and Transport, was to repair the La Brea stretch. Many of you may remember the very first protest that we had to face as the Government would have been within our first month in office. There was a huge protest in La Brea over the condition of the road, and I remember a nice little contingent: Member for Point Fortin, Member for La Horquetta/Talparo, the Member for Laventille West and myself, we would have gone down and spoke to the residents, and by early 2016 we had that road repaired.

You know, people talk about the La Brea road being impossible to fix, and no matter what you do it would still deteriorate. Well, back then I would have boasted and said, "Look, we are going to take our time and do a proper job and look for an engineering solution, and look for geo fabrics to ensure that we have the proper sub surface structure", and all that long song and dance. And everybody said, "Yeah, we tried everything, that road would not stand up." Well, I can say that after three years, apart from one or two areas where there is some sinking, the road that was built under Laventille West as Minister of Works and Transport has more or less stood up to this day. And I think that is one of the best jobs that has

ever been done on that road. [*Desk thumping*] So thanks to the Member for Laventille West and the engineers at PURE and the contractor who would have done an excellent job on that. That was the first road works that was done under the Member for Laventille West.

Following that, again, because I have two major arteries I have to balance the work that is done within my constituency. So following that we got about two miles of the roadway repaired from within Quarry Village. That was done in 2017. But there are other areas along the Southern Main Road and then there is the rest of the SS Erin Road that needs repairing. You would recall earlier where I spoke about my abhorrence to protest action. I do not respond to it. There are elements of supporters of Members opposite who live in areas like Rousillac in my constituency. Well, Rousillac is the last area in my constituency where Members opposite get any support, and they would inveigle their supporters to engage in disruptive behaviour.

I recall—was it two years ago?—there was a day long protest, burning tyres, total complete road destruction, and I refused to respond to that because we do not want to encourage and reward negative behaviours. So those persons engaged in an all day long protest, playing a cat and mouse game with the police, at the end of the day all they succeeded in doing was causing further destruction to the road, which is still in some state of disrepair.

Meanwhile constituents on the other end along the SS Erin Road have been faced with significant road deterioration, but they have chosen a different approach to dealing with it. Yes, there are elements that have been trying via various social media posts, because it seems we have a lot of Facebook bullies, Facebook warriors out there. People who, rather than try to contact the MP to report an issue, would prefer to post on Facebook a complaint to the MP. They would not post it

on the MP's page, but they would post, you know, "Well, where is the MP for this and why does the MP not fix that?" But you make no attempt to contact the MP. Again, that is not the way to reach someone. You want to reach someone, contact them. Everyone knows my phone number and my office is available.

So the persons from SS Erin Road side who resisted all calls and all insinuations that they should engage in disruptive behaviour, I thank you for your patience and your understanding. When Minister Sinanan was appointed Minister of Works and Transport and he began a cross country tour of all the road networks I brought him through the constituency. I engaged the Taxi Drivers' Association. They met with him and they followed him throughout all the major roadways, so he would have a first-hand look at all the areas that needed repairs. Naturally repairs could not take place immediately, because he did this tour throughout the country and had to prioritize his work. But I am pleased to say that after all of that, works did start on the SS Erin Road a month ago, and we have works currently ongoing.

And naturally, well they say you cannot please people all the time, so works have started and people are complaining about the pace of the work and the manner in which it is being done. I again appeal to my constituents for patience and understanding. The works are being completed. What you see on the roadway right now is not the final product, the contractor is working. The contractor will not leave the work unfinished. It is different segments of the roadway that have been given to different contractors. I could single out Junior Sammy for having done an excellent job on a two-kilometre stretch that was done within a two-day period. Well, it was a short piece of work that was done quickly, but the other packages involve a greater amount of work, and that is taking a bit longer to complete. But I assure you that when the job is finished you will be satisfied. So

thank you for your patience, and you understand that there is absolutely no need to engage in unnecessary protest action to get your work down. When this package is completed, the Southern Main Road will next get its attention. So just have some patience on that end, and that side will receive attention as well.

The issue of water delivery in my constituency remains a bit of a challenge. Historically, we have always had some challenges with water. When the Member for Chaguanas West was the Minister responsible for WASA and boasted about delivery 24/7 throughout the country, that did not apply to the areas where I live. It did not apply to the areas where I live, and that has not changed much. But I can say that under this administration we are making significant efforts to amend that.

Last year I would have gone into some detail outlining the water supply situation within my constituency. I would have explained the different supply sources at the different locations. So areas from Aripero to Boodoosingh, they are served by the Caroni Water Treatment Plant and the desal plant. So they get water from north of the constituency. Areas from La Brea to Point Fortin are served by the Point Fortin Desalination Plant, and areas from Erin to Quarry Village are served by the Chatham Water Treatment Plant. The challenges that we have is with the capacity of these facilities and the demand for water in these areas.

The Point Fortin Desalination Plant has a maximum capacity of about 5.7 million gallons a day. The demand is 5.1 million gallons a day, so there is a very close relationship. If there is any issue with production at the facility then it would be immediately felt by the customers.

The Chatham water treatment facility on the other hand has a capacity of 1.5 million gallons a day, but a demand of 1.7 million gallons per day, so the demand is higher than the capacity. So this is why that area is on a rotating schedule.

So last day I would have indicated that the proposed solution for this would

come when WASA builds a new pipeline to supply the LABIDCO estate. So with the new supply coming to the LABIDCO estate, less water from the desalination plant would be required to go to La Brea, and as a result that water could then be sent back to supplement the supply from the Chatham Water Treatment Plant. So today I can proudly say that that project has been completed, and is soon to be commissioned. Commissioning will take place within this month, and when that line comes on stream then we will be able to see that increased supply to areas in Quarry Village. [*Desk thumping*] I want to spend a little time talking about this project in particular, because I think it is a singular achievement for WASA. And since the Minister of Public Utilities is not in this House, I think I can take the opportunity to outline what this project meant, not just for my constituency, but what it meant to show how WASA operates.

So the pipeline is the South Oropouche to La Brea pipeline, so it is 14.7 kilometres of transmission lines, 600 mm diameter that starts at the South Oropouche booster station and goes to the Union Estate in La Brea. It was to ensure adequate water supply to feed the new Mitsubishi, well the CGCL plant. The cost of the project was $85 million. Construction started in February 2017 and was finished in July 2018. They are just about to commission it. The pipeline was done in four sections.

So I am drinking the water before I start coughing.

The first segment is a 4.5 kilometre segment from South Oropouche Junction to Delhi Road. A 3.5 kilometre segment along the Solomon Hochoy Highway from Delhi Road to Eccles Road. Another 3.6 kilometres along Boodoosingh and Sobo Extension Road, and then a final 3.1 kilometres into the facility.

What this pipeline represents is an upgrade to the transmission capacity

feeding the south-west. How this directly benefits us is that now that we have this additional volume of water that can be sourced from the Caroni Water Treatment Plant and from the Point Lisas Desalination Plant, that additional water would come and feed into the La Brea area, so that would back off the requirement for water from the Point Fortin Desalination Plant to come to La Brea. So that frees up additional water from the Point Fortin Desalination Plant to serve all of Point Fortin and to feed into Quarry and Erin.

This project, 85 million, on time, within budget, scope and quality was done solely by WASA using in-house resources. [*Desk thump*ing] I think we should congratulate them for that. Now I know under a different administration a project of this nature would probably not have been done in-house, and the cost would certainly not have been what it was, so we really have to recognize this is a project that was done PNM style, the way PNM does things. [*Desk thumping*]

There is another small pipeline that WASA would have constructed and completed just a couple of months ago. So, through representation from the councillor, from the MP, we have a new area being fed by a WASA distribution line, La Union Road, Carapal, with 1,100 metres of pipeline, 1.1 kilometres of pipeline that was installed. This would feed 32 homes who had never had a supply of water before, so thank you WASA for that, thank you Minister of Public Utilities for all the support you have been giving to my constituents. [*Desk thumping*]

The Ministry of Public Utilities has really been treating La Brea special, so I really have to say thank you. We got the installation of fibre in Santa Flora, so persons can now access higher speed Internet, and TSTT, television and video services as well. We get excellent response from T&TEC. Any complaint we have with street lights out of order, new areas requesting street lights, we have no

problems from any of the agencies under the Ministry of Public Utilities. I really have to express my appreciation to the Minister for that.

Over the past two days everyone has been talking about La Brea and our new game changing project, the dry dock. What really disturbs me though is, I would really like to know what Members Opposite have against my constituency.

Hon. Members: We glad for you!

Ms. N. Olivierre: Anytime a PNM Government tries to bring a project into the La Brea constituency, that would lead to the development, the transformation of La Brea constituency, we have all this opposition from Members opposite.

Madam Speaker: Members, the crosstalk.

Ms. N. Olivierre: Is it because you cannot win the constituency that you treat it that way? I heard the Member for Siparia talking about the dry dock who described it as "pie in the sky". No, it was Pointe-a-Pierre who described the dry dock as a "pie in the sky" project. Clearly the Member for Pointe-a-Pierre does not understand the concept of advance planning. You do not come up with a project today and expect it to start tomorrow. It takes time. There is a gestation period for all projects. Siparia was saying to people, what, "You might better dead before it comes". She was implying that we are asking persons to vote for us now for the hope of finding jobs in 2023. She is predicting that the project will collapse. Well that will only happen if, God forbid, we are not in government in 2020. [*Desk thumping*]

This dry dock project is being situated in Trinidad, first and foremost, because Trinidad and Tobago has something—one of the main factors that has led to our success as a petro chemical exporter is our location advantage. We sit at the gateway to the Americas, and that location advantage makes us suitable for any type of investment that requires that access to a multiplicity of markets. That is

why we have been so successful in petro chemicals. That is why we would have been immensely successful in an aluminium downstream industry, and that is why we will be successful with this dry dock project that we have coming on stream. And why La Brea? Because La Brea has natural shelter deep water harbour that makes it ideal for this type of investment.

The proposed facility will comprise of two berths 420 metres long and 68 metres wide. This is long enough and big enough to accommodate post-Panamax size vessels. About half of the dry docks globally that can accommodate vessels this large are located within the Atlantic Basin, and this project is proposing—so the Member for Pointe-a-Pierre was asking specifically about business plans. Well, let me tell you what part of the market that this project is seeking to target. We are looking at targeting just 3 per cent of the Panamax market and 10 per cent of the post-Panamax market.

The existing facilities in Trinidad could only accommodate smaller vessels less than 50 metres big, so this will be complementary then. Not only targeting new types. It is a new business to Trinidad and Tobago. The Minister of Finance, the Minister of Trade and Industry, everyone has spoken about the benefit that this will bring to the country. A single project bring 2.4 per cent of GDP. That is not something to sneeze at. I think it is just that Members Opposite do not want to see development in my constituency, but again this PNM Government will ensure that that will not happen.

To my constituents, you can look for significant job creation. It is a four-year construction period. So the project is not going to happen four years from today, because there are still a lot of commercial negotiations that will take place. Very often commercial negotiations take as long as the construction period. If you have been in business development, Pointe-a-Pierre, you should know that.

Ms. McDonald: Do not answer him.

Ms. N. Olivierre: It is a four-year construction period. During construction you are looking at 3,500 direct jobs, in excess of 5,000 indirect jobs. But during the operating period of the facility, which is more important, you are looking at 2,700 direct jobs and 13,000 indirect jobs. The types of jobs that would be required—now, this is why it is important that we engage the constituents now so that they have time to prepare themselves and become qualified for the suite of employment opportunities that will be available. So please take note.

Shipbuilding and ship repair require most of the civil crafts and trades. You need fitters, electricians, welders, mechanics, paint blasters, pipe processing, a host of actual workers, but the services that would be required for shipbuilding industry, this is where the economic activity really comes into the community, and this is where the community really benefits. La Brea will be transformed once this project is commissioned. There is a total transformation. So please people prepare yourself mentally for what is going to happen out of your small community. It is going to be bustling, it is going to be back as in the heyday.

Madam Speaker: Hon. Member for La Brea, your original speaking time is now spent. You are entitled to 10 more minutes to complete your contribution if you wish.

Ms. Nicole Olivierre: Thank you very much.

Madam Speaker: You may proceed.

Ms. N. Olivierre: Thank you very much. [*Desk thumping*] So let me indicate some of the services that I would like my constituents to start preparing to provide in anticipation of this dry dock coming. You would need a supply of steel. You would need paint; electromagnetic equipment; business facilitation services; banking, insurance, a host of accommodation requirements, residential

accommodation, commercial space and business, restaurants, hotels. Once this facility is going, you would have ship crews coming in. They would have to stay for a while. You would have ship classification agencies. They would be present, they would have to set up shop. So land is going to be at a premium, because persons would want to locate close to the facility. You would need hotels. You would need entertainment.

So there is a great deal to come from this facility. So people of La Brea do not, I beg you, allow yourself to be influenced by persons who do not have your best interest at heart. [*Desk thumping*] That is important. Okay.

We missed out the last time with Alutrint. We allowed a fantastic opportunity to get away from us. Let us not do that again. But this dry dock is—so this is some years in the making. But this is not the only project that the PNM Government has in store for La Brea constituency. The Minister for Trade and Industry would have mentioned the aluminium industries, so the Tamana InTech, the Alutech facility that was—my MOU was signed last week for the Alutech facility but there is a cable and wire rods plant that will be sited in La Brea. We expect an MOU to be signed for that imminently. Before the end of this year we will be signing off something on that. So that is something that we could look forward to. [*Desk thumping*]And we also have, setting up shop in our constituency, Jan de Nul, which is one of the leading dredging and marine construction companies in the world, one of the top three, has signed an agreement to acquire some land space within the Labidco Union Industrial Estate and they will be setting up a yard there. They are already on the ground and they are starting operations soon. So there is a lot of industrial activity that this Government has planned for La Brea. When we came into power, the Prime Minister at a meeting in

La Brea said, La Brea your time has come, and that is a promise that you can take to the bank. [*Desk thumping*]

So, people of La Brea, this budget has been a very good one for you and the coming years will see the constituency develop even greater. Before I finish, there is one other area that I have not touched on yet, and that is agriculture. I remember Cumuto/Manzanilla in her discourse, she was saying that there was nothing in the budget for agriculture and she made mention of Los Iros, said that there was nothing for Los Iros. Not sure, I mean, I appreciate your concern for my constituency, but let me correct you. It is not to say there was nothing for Los Iros. Members may remember that when we had the earthquake, there was a great deal of earth movements that would have taken place in one of the prolific farming areas in my constituency in Los Iros and the earth movements were so drastic. I mean, there are deep chasms; you could actually see earth movements. A lot of the farming lands were destroyed. The road was totally destroyed, the access road, Royal Engineers Road was totally destroyed.

Now, this is one of the areas that the Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries has always been paying a great deal of attention to and that particular road, Royal Engineers Road, if you look at the PSIP and what was done last year, this was one of the roads that would have been maintained and nicely repaved by the Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries last year for access to the farmers. And that road was totally destroyed in the earthquake. And what I can say is, I really have to thank the Minister of Agriculture, Sen. Rambharat, for his efficient response to this area. Within two weeks of the earthquake happening—well, within three days of the earthquake he came and he visited the area and he saw the drastic destruction and recognized, now this is a prolific farming area. I mean, there were acres of peppers, hot peppers, sweet peppers, pimentos. A very rich area and the

soil is quite rich because of the location and what he did, is recognizing that that main access road was totally destroyed and the farmers would not be able to even to access the parts of their acreage that were not destroyed in the earthquake, they identified an alternate route. This is Lorensotte South Trace. This road was more or less a dirt track and within two weeks the Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries was able to do some sort of upgrading work to that access road, to enable now farmers to be able to access the part of their lands that were not destroyed. I really have to thank the Minister of Agriculture for that quick work, and Cumuto/Manzanilla, yes, the Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries is working. I am not sure what your experience is like. I can certainly say for La Brea constituency, I have no problems with any of the delivery Ministers in this Government because they have all been working to ensure that my constituents are satisfied. [*Desk thumping*]

6.15 p.m.

So given that my time is almost up, I would like to say, this budget has been one, as far as I am concerned, this budget has really shown the economy of Trinidad and Tobago is in a turnaround. Okay? I have seen that and I have seen where we have put measures in place to start to ease the burden of some of the harsh measures that we would have had to have taken in the past. [*Desk thumping*]

And I thank the Minister of Finance and the Minister of Planning and Development for their excellent work in going through, looking at all aspects of society and putting together a budget that will ensure that this country remains on a path to economic stability. Madam Speaker, I thank you. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker: Member for Mayaro. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Rushton Paray (*Mayaro*): Thank you very much, Madam Speaker, for recognizing me this evening as I join in this debate to offer my views and the

views of the people of Mayaro as to the quality of the presentation of the Minister of Finance last week.

Before I get started, Madam Speaker, I must not join a chorus, but join a choir because a choir is a larger group of people, and in this way, I think the country is supporting the delivery of the hon. Leader of the Opposition, my political leader, the hon. Kamla Persad-Bissessar. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker, the Leader of the Opposition's contribution on Friday was in a class of its own. It was measured, calculated, it was strategic and people-centred. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker: Order. Order.

Mr. R. Paray: Madam Speaker, people-centeredness is what is missing from this current administration. The hon. Leader of the Opposition, her vision and strategy are destined to lead this country out of the abyss that this PNM Government is taking us down. [*Desk thumping*] I will also tell you that over 70 per cent of the public as shown in the TV6 People Meter Poll, were in complete [*Desk thumping*] support of the delivery of the Leader of the Opposition.

Madam Speaker, this is a caring leader whose compassion and love for all of the people of Trinidad and Tobago cannot be matched by anyone. [*Desk thumping*] What is worth noting, it was that the Opposition Leader's forward-thinking policies and incentives in the energy sector when she was Prime Minister, which have led to the increases in gas production via bp's Juniper and TROC arrangements.

In an interview with Anthony Wilson, published in the *Business Express* of March 14, 2018, the former president of bpTT, Mr. Norman Christie, confirmed that without the incentives that were provided, the investments in Juniper and TROC would have never been made. [*Desk thumping*] This is not Kamla saying

that or Roodie Moonilal saying that, this is "Mr. bp" himself, Mr. Norman Christie.

Madam Speaker, he also went out to describe the incentives as a "stroke of brilliance" on the part of the Government [*Desk thumping*] and just to be pellucid here, by "Government" he was referring to the Government of Kamla Persad-Bissessar. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker, it is these very policies alone which have led to the marginal growth that we are seeing today, and you have a Government that now wants to take credit for the work that was done under the leadership of Kamla Persad-Bissessar.

Madam Speaker, I also want to compliment my colleagues who spoke before me, and on Friday we had four excellent contributions by the Member for Pointe-a-Pierre—

Madam Speaker: I just want to caution you that the crosstalk is becoming a little too loud, it is constant and a little too loud. So, I will ask all Members to curb that tendency. I want to hear the Member for Mayaro. Continue, please.

Mr. R. Paray: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. As I was saying, we had four excellent contributions on Friday, one from the Member for Pointe-a-Pierre, Cumuto/Manzanilla, Fyzabad and Oropouche West, and today we have—we would have combined the excellence of my colleague from Caroni East, Dr. Gopeesingh; Caroni Central and Princes Town, who all gave excellent contributions in the House today. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker, I just want to have a conversation about what my hon. colleague from La Brea, who has left the Chamber—couple of points that she has raised, sorry, the hon. Member has raised and I would want to share some light. Now, I would have thought that as the Parliamentary Secretary in the Ministry of Energy and Energy Industries, the hon. Member should have or could have made a

statement on the issues on Petrotrin, more so, the fact that the OWTU got their injunction today, and how it may be affecting her constituents, which I am sure many of them will be affected by the Petrotrin closure.

Madam Speaker, I also listened to the hon. Member as well and the Member identified that, in her view, nothing was done in her constituency from 2010—2015. But, for the children who are looking at the Parliament channel at this hour, you know, the Member may have them believe that there was not a PNM Government in place from 2002—2009 and nothing was done either.

Hon. Member: 2010.

Mr. R. Paray: So, I mean—2010, thank you Member, 2010. So you know, sometimes I get the feeling that this is an administration that prides themselves in half-truths and that they do not give you the whole story from time to time.

Madam Speaker, the hon. Member also complained that—or she alleged that there were constituents who may have been conspiring to create problems in the constituency and they may be of another political persuasion. But taking from my own experience in my constituency, I listen to every constituent, I listen to them anyhow they come. They come lovingly, some come very harshly and I listen to all of them. I do not look for a political motive, and I see all of them as citizens of this country [*Desk thumping*] and they all have a legitimate need for something, and that is the approach that I take and I would urge my hon. colleague from La Brea to do the same. [*Crosstalk*]

Madam Speaker, my colleague also spoke about the dry-docking facility, and that in her view, the hon. Member felt that we on this side do not like the people of La Brea or we have something against the people of La Brea, and that is the furthest from the truth. It was our administration under Kamla Persad-Bissessar, that signed the MOU for that exact same port in La Brea. So, if

we did not like the people of La Brea, well then why would this MOU have been signed back then? So, clearly I am sure the Member may not have all the information, but I am hoping that by this information that I have provided, her view may change.

Madam Speaker, I would like to go through a bit of my view on the presentation that was made by the hon. Minister of Finance, and I would like to start, basically, how the hon. Member ended when he ended by quoting Frank Sinatra's classic song, "My Way". And I agree with the Leader of the Opposition that it was a very fitting song, because it is a song that is very popular at wakes and funerals and farewells.

After this type of deceptive budget I think the population of Trinidad and Tobago will surely be saying farewell and goodbye to this PNM Government in the not too distant future. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker, like most citizens across the nation, I was shocked to hear the Minister of Finance proudly proclaim that Trinidad and Tobago had turned the corner, and he mentioned that while boasting about this low unemployment figure of 5 per cent and a growth rate of 1.9 per cent.

Madam Speaker, it cannot be to the reasonable man on the road that we have turned the corner when you have thousands of Petrotrin workers who are now on the breadline. [*Desk thumping*] You cannot say we have turned the corner when T&TEC workers are being sent home. [*Desk thumping*] You cannot say we have turned the corner when UNIPET has announced that they will be sending several employees home as well.

Madam Speaker, thousands of businesses throughout the country are finding it very, very, very hard to survive today. And if I could mention in the malls, you have the destruction of small businesses. These malls are emptying, Trincity Mall

alone has about 30 businesses that have closed in the last year. Long Circular Mall is emptying as well. I understand the mall in Tobago is almost a ghost town as well.

So, Madam Speaker, I have complaints from my constituents that when they go to the hospital they are not getting medicine. The pharmacy does not have basic medicine like Panadol. How can that be a turnaround? We are witnessing every other day another video with violence in schools, with kids misbehaving. How can that be a turnaround? It seems like it is more of the same.

Every day we hear of more and more horrific murders, we have the Commissioner of Police, he is a new Commissioner of Police. I know he needs some time to get his hands into the game, but yet the spiralling rate is continuing. Just last week I had two murders in my constituency. Actually, one happened about three or four miles away from my constituency office as well. So, Madam Speaker, how can that be a turnaround?

How can it be a turnaround when you still have Tobago that is still reeling from the collapse of the sea bridge, almost for the last two years? I mean, this is a most shameless and senseless tragedy to ever happen in the history of this country. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker, I understand the *Galleons Passage* did make a sailing today. I understand it had about 85 people and 25 cars. I want to know if this vessel has been rejected by the people of Trinidad and Tobago. Because this vessel has a capacity of 700 passengers and about 200 cars. So, we will see what happens as time goes on.

Madam Speaker, the citizens of this country are living in absolute fear, constant fear. They fear for their lives, for their jobs and for their children, [*Desk thumping*] but as far as this Government thinks, everything is okay.

Madam Speaker, I want to tell the nation that they will not have to fear for much longer because this country will soon return under the fearless and visionary leadership of Kamla Persad-Bissessar. [*Desk thumping*] Once again, the PNM has presented a budget devoid of ideas, plans or policies, and full of very questionable statistics I must add. This budget is not turning the corner, it feels more like backward ever, forward never, because this Government is taking Trinidad and Tobago backwards. We are going back to mass unemployment, we are going back to poor public services, we are going back to outdated ideas. The only thing it seems like this Government can take us back to, is a functioning sea bridge.

Madam Speaker, the Minister of Finance in his budget presentation, quoted a growth rate of 1.9 per cent for the coming fiscal year, but according to the IMF report, as some of my colleagues mentioned before, the growth rate will actually be less than 1 per cent, and with the issue around Petrotrin it has to be a very serious concern. Because when you have these monetary agencies coming to your country and they have to develop a report and you are not on the straight and narrow with them, and you did not tell them that you will be closing this engine in our country, then the report will not reflect the true position of the country, and that will affect us some way down the line.

Madam Speaker, the only reason that we are seeing this nominal growth which is impacting our finances in a very positive way, I must say, it is all because of the success of the Juniper platform and the additional half a—

Madam Speaker: Member for Port of Spain South, I will caution you to please, observe the Standing Orders.

Mr. R. Paray: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Yes, the additional half a billion cubic feet of gas from the Juniper platform.

The Minister of Finance also went on to boast that Trinidad and Tobago has

one of the lowest inflation rates in the world, but according to the IMF report, T & T has an inflation rate of 2.7 per cent which is one of the highest in region. So clearly the data is being skewed in these reports. I mean, it is very difficult to trust these numbers when you are hearing them.

Madam Speaker, I do not know if it is because the Minister of Finance got his numbers mixed up because I know the voter turnout for the elections was so low, he perhaps thought that the voter turnout was the inflation rate. If we had an inflation rate as low as that, I think we would have been in good standing. Madam Speaker—

Madam Speaker: Just one minute. Member for Port of Spain South, the crosstalk is above the permitted volume. All right? And I am going to ask you, if you are having difficulty, you can take a walk and return. Member for Mayaro.

Mr. R. Paray: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. The Minister of Finance in his budget presentation as well, spoke about this position of low unemployment, but just four days before the Minister's budget presentation—sorry, four days after, UNIPET announced massive layoffs as a consequence of his poorly thought-out rise in the price of super gasoline. Gas retailers are already operating on very, very low profit margins of about 4 per cent and it is a fixed amount. So every time the price goes up, that 4 per cent becomes smaller and smaller for these retailers. Madam Speaker, 4 per cent profit margin is unheard in any business that I know of.

Surely any Minister of Finance would have known that raising this price on this fuel without addressing the price structure for the retailers, would lead to some chaos. And, Madam Speaker, we are going to be bracing for, not only the layoffs, but some gas stations may choose to wrap up their operations. And when you have gas stations in communities, rural communities like Mayaro and Toco and I dare say Moruga—I know Moruga has been getting a lot of attention lately, but these

gas stations may not be able to survive because of that price structure that has not come to the attention of the Minister of Finance and that it needs some work.

So I question, you know, sometimes, the Minister of Finance, whether he is being advised in the right way, but this is the same Minister of Finance who would have presided over the collapse of an economic advisory board. I remember the head of the board saying, "he eh want nutting to do with budget and dis Government and dis Minister". And this is the man who was put there, that is Mr. Farrell, he was put there to give advice, give sound advice. And I know he is a man that came out through the university, very, very well trained in economics and so on, and when you frustrate a good man like that, then it leads to some concerns at the end of the day.

Madam Speaker, we have a Minister of Finance who as well—who basically turned this property tax into a fiasco. So, you know, we are looking, the country is looking on and you know, the Minister is giving you this budget and there are so many areas that, you know, are just falling apart under his guidance and is really creating this vacuum. And we want to know: How are we going to proceed when you have a Minister of Finance who is crafting economic policy based on whether people will riot or not, you know? That is a concern for me, when you have a Minister of Finance who says, "Well, they eh riot as yet", and we went on and we just raised the gas again, I have a serious concern with that.

Madam Speaker, the citizens of this country must now, on top of contending with these higher fuel prices, deal with this conversation that: Why are taxi drivers raising their prices? Now, I remember two years ago when the price of premium went up, the argument was, well, you know, very few people using it. It would not affect the "small man", and the "small man" are the people who are using super. Now today, we have run the price up by 25 per cent, and then the argument is that,

it was done for the "small man's" benefit. So, I do not know how you juxtapose those two arguments and clearly, clearly the policy directions of this Government are very, very mixed, it is sending mixed signals to the business community, it is sending mixed signals to the international community as well.

Madam Speaker, the taxi drivers, I mean, I have some guys who are plying their trade between Mayaro and Sangre Grande, and when I spoke to them, their complaint was that "MP, I have my mortgage to pay, increase in rent, you know, bills in general, food, taxes and now gas. How you telling meh, 'I cannot raise my fares'". So, they have no choice other than to do that.

It is not that there is not any good reason, if I have to perhaps paraphrase the Minister of Finance, he said that "there is no good reason why the taxi drivers should be raising their fares". But I want to tell the Minister of Finance, there is no good reason for this Government to still be in power today [*Desk thumping*] after four failed budgets.

Madam Speaker, the Minister of Finance also crafted his budget based on this "six game changers" which he spoke about in his budget. But one of my constituents, when we had a meeting over the weekend, he said that the only game that the Minister is perhaps playing is "scooch", when you pelt and you hope to hit something, and he is hoping perhaps if he pelts a plan, it hits and it becomes something positive. I told my constituent, I mean, "I wish it was more cricket so that he could have had a good run up and be able to, you know, get a ball, hit a wicket and do something positive for the economy" which has clearly, clearly eluded this Minister of Finance over the last four years.

Madam Speaker, another area that the Minister of Finance talked about as a game changer is this arrangement with Venezuela and the Dragon field. While I will not want to comment on the relationship that governments must have with

governments, I do believe that as citizens of this country we must have a concern that when you see every international business is packing up and leaving Venezuela, not only are their own citizens leaving Venezuela in droves, what does that say for us as business partners?

Madam Speaker, according to several news outlets, the current regime in Venezuela is being referred to the International Criminal Court by several of their Latin American partners. So when we as a country have to do business with a partner that has these things hanging over, and especially, we are going to ask this partner to hold a valve for our gas, our energy, well then, that must make serious concerns for the people of this country. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker, right now, I read in the Jackson School of Geosciences, it is a publication by the University of Texas, where there is a gas deal that is over 10 years old, between Colombia and Venezuela that has not been honoured up to today. So, I mean, we must look at all these things and I trust that the Government would have looked at all of these things before they would have made their arrangements with the Government of Venezuela.

I understand as well that the Dragon field in our arrangements, while I know there were no conversations around pricing and so on, I understand that we will be getting about $150 million standard cubic feet of gas per day, but this only accounts for 4 per cent of our total local gas production.

I want to say that just last week, the Bongos-2 well, BHP announced that they had a considerable find, and there is an expected reserve of over five trillion cubic feet of gas in that well. And you know what, Madam Speaker?—that deal, that arrangement was signed under the leadership of Kamla Persad-Bissessar. [*Desk thumping*] So it is very unfair to tell when Ministers of Government on that side stand up every time and say that the People's Partnership did nothing for

energy in the five years that they were there, knowing it is because of the work that was done, we are encountering a bit of hope, a bit of light at the end of the tunnel.

Madam Speaker, I want to talk now a bit about the National Investment Fund that was spoken about in the budget of the Minister of Finance. The Minister of Finance indicated that the National Investment Fund was a success. Now, I do not know how you determine success when people buy shares in anything. I suspect success would be determined when you get your pay-outs, when you get your interest payments. So, I do not know in what terms is the Minister referring as being "a success". But what I did notice though was that there was no mention that the NIB, the National Insurance Board was the highest purchaser of bonds; they purchased about $1 billion in shares.

Madam Speaker, the Minister of Finance also spoke in glowing terms about, this bond would have been something for the "small man", to give the "small man" a piece of the action in the finance sector. But I understand that it is a little over 7,000 "small men" that would have bought shares in this fund. The majority of the fund was purchased by conglomerates [*Desk thumping*] which took up the fund. But what is more scary about this NIB thing, the NIB used up $1 billion. But you know, just a few weeks ago, the NIB themselves admitted that they are facing the prospect of going bankrupt in 12 years.

So, you are facing, if there is no structural change in the NIB scheme, you are going to go bankrupt in 12 years but yet you take up a billion dollars of funds and put it in this scheme that has no government guarantee whatsoever. So, you know, as the common man on the street, and the businessmen on the street, and the people who I talk to every day, they say, "Well, MP, that eh make sense". So it really resounds to me that did the Minister of Finance think through these things thoroughly and properly? And I know that the hon. Member would have had

several technocrats that would have worked with him on this, but I cannot believe that the NIB would take that money, knowing their current position and put it into this fund.

6.45 p.m.

Madam Speaker, as I said, this fund has no government guarantee, and more amazingly, the biggest game changer I think, of all of them, according to the Minister of Finance, is the closing-down of Petrotrin as one of the highlights. Now, I do not know if Petrotrin's closing is a game changer for Petrotrin, but I am sure it is a game changer for the thousands of families who are now on the breadline just three days—three months, I mean—before Divali and Christmas. [*Desk thumping*] It is really game over, right. And only today, on the newspaper there is a report that TSTT as well, they are on the verge of doing the same.

So, Madam Speaker, these game changers are really going to impact people's lives—and you know, sometimes in business, and I am a businessman as well, Madam Speaker, and I can tell you that the nuclear option of pressing a button to shut a business down is the last, last option. You look at options of re-engineering, cutting costs, asking staff to take lower pay, shedding off the load that you do not need, and if all else fails, well then you look for a smooth way out, but you put the love and care for your employees. And I do not know if that is being done in the right way in this particular matter with Petrotrin. If it is being done, it is not showing, it is not being reflected in the news, and I am not hearing it from Petrotrin employees.

Madam Speaker, I do not think the Government has been very clear on what is its plan for Petrotrin as well. And you know, I told my colleagues today that I must speak on Petrotrin a bit, because Mayaro is a constituency that is really energy-based. Petrotrin has been a neighbourhood corporate partner for years,

since Randolph Ross drilled the first well in 1904, and I have more than even employees, Mayaro has hundreds, if not thousands of retirees, Petrotrin retirees who are living in the constituency, and I gave them the assurance that I will speak on Petrotrin on their behalf.

And what is confusing from the Government is that one minute they say that they are going to create a separate exploration and production company and decommission the refinery, and then they come and say, "Well, nobody want the refinery", and then all of a sudden they say, "Well, we might sell the refinery", and then they say, "Well, we go give the OWTU the first option." But, this is where the deception, I feel, lies a bit. On the one hand, the Government has been towing the OWTU along for a couple weeks, saying, "Well, bring yuh plans, leh meh hear some ideas, yuh know, we will give you the first option, we will listen to any reasonable offering." But yet, you have fixed dates for the shutdown, and only to be told on Friday that by the 17th of this month the first shipment of fuel is going to be here.

So, Madam Speaker, the question is, why did this Government tag the OWTU along? So, I mean, they may have the best of intentions in the world, they know their plans, but it is how it looks in the public domain, it is not looking well for the Government. It shows your level of dishonesty, and this is what our citizens are saying, because the Government, the Petrotrin board never intended to deviate from their original plan.

Madam Speaker, the Government has yet to tell us how this new company will be any different from the old company that failed to manage properly. I have some questions here and perhaps in the wrap-up later in the week the Minister of Finance can answer it. What if the Government fails to negotiate the Petrotrin existing debt? What happens? If not, the country's debt-to-GDP ratio will reach

over 70 per cent, seriously impacting our credit rating and our borrowing capacity. It is my understanding that the investment that is required in the Trinmar part, the marine operations, to really get the exploration going—because I know we have quite a huge acreage in the marine blocks that has the potential for oil and gas—it would require about a billion dollars US. Where are we going to get that money? How are we going to finance that? Now, as I say, the Government may have a perfectly sound answer, but they are not saying it, they are not telling the public, and I do not think saying how we are going to finance those things, and I am assuming it is from taxpayers' money, that there should be any secret to that. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker, the final part of that question that I have is, what is the true cost for closing down the company when severance packages and decommissioning costs are totalled? Nobody knows. I find that hard to believe. You know what it reminds me of? It reminds me of a comment that the Minister of Works and Transport made on Saturday when the media asked, the *Trinidad Guardian* asked him, "What would be the duration of time when the *Galleons Passage* is at full load to go from Trinidad to Tobago? This Minister of Works and Transport says, "Your guess is as good as mines." Madam Speaker, that cannot be a response from a responsible Government. Speed is a factor of time and distance and vice versa. Load—when a plane has to take off, Madam Speaker, the pilot knows what is the weight on the plane, what is the speed he needs to go down the runway to know what lift and thrust that he needs to go up. So, I find it hard to believe. So, when you are saying that you do not know what it is going to cost you, your guess is as good as mine. That is not what I want from a responsible Government.

Madam Speaker, these costs will need to be financed and it is the taxpayer

who will eventually foot these bills. I was wondering if this money that we have to put out, all these components, could we use that money and fix the problem with Petrotrin. Because Petrotrin is a brand for us in Trinidad. The rest of the world sees us, you know. Twenty or 30 years ago Petrotrin was the largest refinery in the western hemisphere. When you talk about Trinidad and Tobago you talk Petrotrin. So, it has a place in our culture, in our heart. So perhaps, taking that into consideration we could have looked at other options.

And if we were to take the examples of CNMG, Caribbean Airlines, TIDCO, you know, we have converted all these companies but yet even this issue with TTT, nobody has said how is this company going to be any different from CNMG and how we are going to be making money. So, Madam Speaker, we are using the same models for all of these things, and that could not be right. That could not work. It is not going to work.

Madam Speaker, we had a perfectly functioning sea bridge two years ago again and, again, by a wishy-washy arrangement this ship left, we have been suffering on that sea bridge for two years. I mean, we had a perfectly functioning thing, and this Government "come and mash it up", for whatever reason, I do not know. Madam Speaker, this Government has not been able to provide one proper fast ferry, and I understand we have two more coming, and there is nothing in place to convince me and the citizens of this country that they have an idea of doing this. And there is no shared learning. Clearly, they are not learning as they go along, because apparently, from my view, they are making the same mistakes over and over, and over again. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker, perhaps the name of the budget should have really been "Your guess is as good as mines." [*Laughter*] The Minister of Finance, again, in his closing salvo, as the Member started to sing his tune of "My way", part of that

song says that "the end is near".

Hon. Member: The end of the UNC.

Mr. R. Paray: Well, perhaps, perhaps, that is your view. But what I can tell you for sure, what is near—the end of Petrotrin is near; the end of agriculture is near; the end of law-abiding tax-paying citizens who seek medical care and cannot access treatment or medication in the hospital, their end is near. The end of those elderly and disabled patients who are seeking support in the medical fraternity, their end is near, and the Minister clearly has a vision, and he knows that it is coming. And I have no doubt in my mind that the end of this administration, led by Dr. Keith Rowley, is very, very close to the end.

Madam Speaker, I want to touch a bit on issues around the business sector from a trade and industry perspective. I listened attentively to the hon. Minister as the Member spoke in the Lower House earlier today, and I want to lay to rest something that I have been hearing for the last three years, and Sen. Khan when he spoke on Friday he opened his batting, as he called it, that, "you know, the last administration left the Treasury bankrupt". And they keep saying it. But, I want to read something here for you, Madam Speaker, and I will tell you who says it when I am finished reading it. And I am quoting here from page 2 of this document. It is a news report carried by the—this is the News TT. It is the Government Service website, and it says:

> Now, I want to emphasize that our accumulated savings are not insignificant. But even so, they can only carry us for a little while. We have approximately $10 billion in official reserves. We have $5.6 billion in the Heritage and Stabilisation Fund.

And, the person who is speaking goes on to tell the country that:

> Trinidad and Tobago has approximately $3.6 billion in deposits in local

commercial banks, and hundreds of millions of dollars in cash lying overseas.

Madam Speaker, does that sound like a country that is bankrupt to you?

Hon. Members: No.

Mr. R. Paray: No. It does not. And this is from the word of no other person less than the hon. Prime Minister [*Desk thumping*] when he addressed—when the hon. Prime Minister addressed the nation in December of 2015, shortly after the election.

So, Madam Speaker, that should put this talk about bankruptcy to rest. There is another fallacy here where, and I think it was Sen. Khan, the Minister of Energy and Energy Industries, during his contribution as well. He said that the Governor of the Central Bank ran to the Minister and say "Boss, boss we only have three days' money left in the current account", but perhaps that may have been true. "I doh know." But that is only half the story, Madam Speaker. Because I am sure the Governor of the Central Bank at that time, brilliant man as he is, he would have told the Minister of Finance: "But you know what, the third quarter has now finished at the end of September and we are going to be getting revenues from taxes of $4 billion at the end of September, early October; we are going to be getting $2 billion from the TGU, another $500 million from Republic Bank, and some funds from other places—totalling to about six or $7 billion in the current account."

So, Madam Speaker, you cannot give half of a story when you are telling it. Give the whole story and allow people to judge. [*Desk thumping*] And you know, you hear that they peddle these two things as a mantra, and the problem with that, Madam Speaker, is if you say it often enough you start believing it, and when you start believing it, in a leadership organization your decisions will always be wrong.

Because, what they eventually did, they created this conversation about bankruptcy, and we broke, and the country in chaos, and you know what? That sucked the energy and the life out of confidence in this economy, and today we are still reeling from that. Reeling from that, Madam Speaker. [*Desk thumping*] So for pure politics, they demitted, the people had a position and they say look, we want to give someone else a try, that is fine. But they took the wrong position, and today we are suffering for that. And this is the word of the hon. Dr. Keith Rowley. So this thing about bankruptcy, out the window.

Madam Speaker, the Minister of Trade and Industry, again, started her batting this morning again with this issue of rampant corruption. Rampant. Rampant corruption where? Thirty-six months down the road, one or two frivolous matters in the courts against contractors, where is the rampant corruption? But clearly, clearly we have issues. We have issues now, over the last 36 months, with the *Ocean Flower*—

Hon. Members: Yes.

Mr. R. Paray: The *Cabo Star*.

Hon. Members: "Oooh."

Mr. R. Paray: Scandals, sorry Sandals. My apologies. AV Drilling, questionable THA spending, *Galleons Passage*, and I can make a whole list. So, Madam Speaker, my grandmother used to say, "be very careful when you dig hole for other people, you may just fall in it". So, I want to tell the hon. Minister that that position is the wrong position to start from. You should have said, what are we doing to drive trade and industry in this country? [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker, the Minister spoke about this Eximbank, and there was a hue and cry, and it is about two years old—

Madam Speaker: Hon. Member, your original speaking time is now spent, you

are entitled to 10 more minutes, if you wish, to complete your contribution.

Mr. R. Paray: Thank you, Madam Speaker. [*Desk thumping*] Madam Speaker, the Eximbank for the last two years we have heard this song about a hundred million dollars in forex that is going to be put in there for our manufacturers and all will be well. My information is that so far only $4 million have gone into that account. Four million. But yet the Minister comes again in this year's budget and beats this proverbial chest that this Eximbank and this money is going to be taking us somewhere.

Madam Speaker, $4 million is the only release that Eximbank has gotten so far. So, there is really no real support in terms of the forex market, and on top of that I understand from quite a few of the manufacturers that many of them who gave supplies, who send supplies to Venezuela, there is still an outstanding amount of $900 million.

Hon. Member: Maduro. Maduro.

Mr. R. Paray: So, I mean, where are these manufacturers going to get the cash that is required to buy back raw materials to get their factories going? So, Madam Speaker, that could not be the way forward if we are trying to encourage our manufacturers to go forward and save our country. [*Desk thumping*] Madam Speaker, I listened to the Minister, and he spoke about this, there is a framework that he is going to put in place for foreign exchange by putting a foreign exchange tax credit. But, you know, I read back the 2018 budget statement, and you know that is in it as well. So, again, I do not think it is a turnaround, it is more like a merry-go-round because every time is the same thing: property tax, Eximbank. I mean, foreign exchange tax credit, nothing new. No new ideas, Madam Speaker. It is just a rehash of the same proposals. It is another failure to execute plans to deal with foreign exchange in this country.

Madam Speaker, I want to touch on this issue of the manufacturing increase, and I know one or two Members would have spoken about it, but I have a piece of information that is a little different, so I would indulge you a little bit on it. When the Minister spoke this morning, the hon. Member quoted a page number from the *Review of the Economy* in 2018, and boasted about all the different categories of manufacturing that would have increased in its capacity over the last 12 months. But you know on that very same page, if you look two tables down it shows that if you took out the petroleum and chemicals component from it, the sector in 2017 declined by 8.9 per cent, and the few increases that the Minister spoke of, the true growth in manufacturing sector for 2018 is more like 2.8 per cent. I mean, there is such a cry about this 7.3 per cent, a boast really, about the manufacturing sector, but, I mean, why is this Government being smart with numbers? And it is on the same page.

So, I was amazed to see that the Minister stood here and she spoke of that, and she did not read the table below it. So, I mean, again, to the man on the street, to the people who are reading, to my business colleagues, to the manufacturing association, people who form that association—I mean, what is the message we are sending to them? If we as a Government cannot deal with the truth and the facts, how are we going to drive real changes in our policy position to move the country forward? It is not going to happen.

Madam Speaker, growth in any economy is a result of good policy. As far as I know, as far as I have read in four budget presentations, this Government has not put one policy in place that would have led to any kind of growth in this economy. None. So, what has this Minister of Trade and Industry been doing for the last four budgets, three years? I mean, besides one or two things on KC Confectionery. I see some ice cream plants opening up lately, but let me touch

base on that very quickly.

When a manufacturer talks about a $50-million investment to improve production, my little knowledge of business, is that you do not get up a morning and say, "Well, I am going and spend $50 million tomorrow". These things have a horizon, a year, two years, sometimes three years between when you make the decision and when you execute. And I can tell you, those very same manufacturers who the Minister has cut ribbon for, those manufacturers would have had to take a look at what is the confidence in the sector, sometime before 2015, and support the work of the People's Partnership and say, "you know what, when I spend this $50 million ah go get it back". So, all of those ribbons that are cutting all over the country, from manufacturing to stadium, to what else, it is because of work that the People's Partnership has done. [*Desk thumping*] And it is unfair, and it borders on dishonesty when the Government comes and can stand here and say that, those on this side, we did nothing for five years, and I have a serious problem with that.

Madam Speaker, the IMF report of 2015 also noted that several companies, large forex users, the ones who could generate taxes, hire staff to pay the downstream, all the parts of the economy where you collect money. Because of poor foreign exchange management, these companies have left. It is in the 2018 IMF report, Madam Speaker.

Before my time runs out, I really want to speak about some issues in my constituency. Trade and industry is such a wide area to speak on, but I want to take the opportunity very, very quickly to ask the Minister of Tourism, if—I know he is not in the Chamber—but if the Minister could consider the conversation around safe bathing zones. One of the biggest challenges I am having in Mayaro is sargassum, the funding to clean it, lack of facilities for our tourists who are coming to Mayaro. And in Australia, Australia has developed safe bathing zones, where

you can concentrate your funding in four or five or six areas, and you put concession, you put bathroom facilities, you put parking, you put whatever facilities that you need for when you and your family come to Mayaro, and it is well secured and well cleaned at the end of the day. So, I am hoping that the Minister of Finance could give some attention—sorry, not the Minister of Finance, the Minister of Tourism—and I would be happy to talk to him about that.

Madam Speaker, our school bus issue is a nagging issues for us here in Mayaro. We have a shortage of school buses still. I know the Minister has been trying his best to get payments going. The maxis are back out, but we are still short. I had one person say, "Well, Paray, why all yuh doh send all yuh chiren to school in Mayaro and Rio Claro? Why yuh sending dem Princes Town and San Fernando?" But it is unfair, because our children in Mayaro have been doing much better over the years. And if because of the work that they are doing they can be placed in schools further for a betterment then it is unfair to tell them stay in Mayaro, stay in Rio Claro. So, I am asking the Minister—I know funds are tight—but please if you can look at getting a few additional buses, PTSC in San Fernando is fully aware of our needs in Mayaro and Rio Claro, and I hope at some point in time they address it with you.

Madam Speaker, on my way to Parliament here today my driver asked: Are we driving through the Manzanilla forest this morning? The grass on the side of the road in Manzanilla is as tall as the Member for Caroni Central. It is very dangerous, especially in the night, especially when you have heavy rains. And I know the Ministry of Works and Transport, over the last couple weeks, they have been on a go-slow, a work to rule, and they are not coming out to cut the grass and so on. So, Madam Speaker, I am hoping the Minister could take some action and deal with some of those things.

Madam Speaker, and lastly, I want to make a plug for our Naparima/Mayaro Road, which has been left in such of an abeyance that it is really causing a lot of distress with our drivers. So, Madam Speaker, with those few words I want to thank you for the opportunity to make my contribution today, and I continue to wish everyone well. Thank you very much. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Esmond Forde (*Tunapuna*): Good evening, Madam Speaker. As the Member of Parliament for Tunapuna, I now thank you and also the Leader of Government Business for entering this debate on this day, Monday the 8th of October, 2018. I will stick to my script. No need saying anything about what MP for Mayaro would have said. I know we on this side, the Ministers and MPs that have spoken to date, have stated clearly what we have done in order to ensure that this country was placed on a good footing to ensure a turnaround from 2019 and beyond. [*Desk thumping*] To ensure that what I have to say I would like to seek your leave with regard to Standing Order 44(10), and maintain this debate as the Member of Parliament for Tunapuna, and not as the Deputy Speaker today. So, I need to ensure that we go according to the Standing Orders.

I would like to thank, first of all congratulate the Minister of Finance and his team, also the hon. Prime Minister, and also the Minister of Planning and Development, for a presentation of the fourth budget presented by this Government themed "Turnaround". Madam Speaker, I recall like it was only yesterday, when the Minister presented his initial budget statement on September day in 2015, entitled Restoring Confidence and Rebuilding Trust. We know what we went through from 2010 to 2015, and the Minister of Finance would have entered into office and decided that is the theme that we are going with for 2015. It was a time when the cry in town was "pressure". All "man jack" was hoping and praying against any suggestion of an appeal to the IMF, the International Monetary Fund, for support

or heeding the advice of the other groups of criers, "let us devalue the Trinidad and Tobago dollar". We have been hearing that mantra for the last three years, let us devalue, let us devalue. But our Minister of Finance and our hon. Prime Minister has seen it fit in order to ensure that we do not go to the IMF, and also to ensure that we stabilize the Trinidad and Tobago dollar. [*Desk thumping*]

Subsequent budgets were presented, Shaping a Brighter Future; Changing the Paradigm: Putting the Economy on a Sustainable Path; and then this year, budget 2019, Turnaround. We would have heard all the comments from those on the other side, the naysayers about turnaround, merry-go-round, and everything going down, but we on this side know, and the people outside there know, that the turnaround is going to come.

We have laid the path for the last three years and we are going to ensure on this side that the turnaround does come in 2019 and for years to come.

7.15 p.m.

Madam Speaker, the budget statements follow a trend in keeping with this Government's policy, goals and vision as outlined in our Vision 2020 and updated with Vision 2030. The theme for the previous year's budget speaks of "Changing the Paradigm: Putting the Country on a Sustainable Path". I reference the budget theme particularly with respect to the hottest topic of the day, Petrotrin. I think everybody would have mentioned on the other side with regard to Petrotrin. The Minister of Finance would have made a statement; the Minister of Energy and Energy Industries would have laid a clear path as to what transpired with Petrotrin throughout the years and what is going forward with regard to Petrotrin. However, if time permits, I will return on a later stage to the theme and its impact one year later.

Madam Speaker, this time of the year is a time when all the prophets of our

society burst forth and make pronouncements on our past, our present and our future. However, when pondering my own contribution to this debate, the first thoughts coming my way were those of the revered Prophet Isaiah. And we would quote from Isaiah 40:31:

> "But they that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up"—on—"wings like eagles; they shall run, and not"—fail—"…they shall walk, and not faint."

And that is where we need to look at. We on this side, we are not going to fall; we are not going to faint. We are going to keep it rolling to ensure that our beloved country, Trinidad and Tobago, reaches to the point that it needs to be with this 2019 budget, "Turnaround", [*Desk thumping*] as identified by the Minister of Finance in this august House.

Madam Speaker, the thing that triggered my alertness was that the verse speaks to the movement over time and the different methods being utilized. However, please note the continuous movement and no stopping. We have never stopped from since 2015 to 2018. I noted that the hon. Leader of the Opposition, in her contribution or comment on the budget, stated that there was no turning. Madam Speaker, movement and turning exhibits similarities that their discernment is not always known by the passenger or observer since it can either vary from rapid, meaning fast, or to discreet and hardly discerned with occurrences. [*Desk thumping*] We know where we are heading. We know where we are heading.

Madam Speaker, the budget documents speak to requests for housing received by the Housing Development Corporation at some 176,000 applications. This represents 13 per cent of our population. Of this I am certain a large amount is most likely constituents of my Tunapuna constituency and the surrounding Tunapuna/Piarco Regional Corporation area.

Incidentally, Madam Speaker, the Tunapuna/Piarco Regional Corporation, while being spatially the third largest in terms of population, it is the largest being home to 211,000 persons or 16 per cent of Trinidad and Tobago. It is who is in the kitchen "does" feel the heat and, boy, the heat is on. But we will continue to ponder and ensure that we seek the need of each and every individual in our beloved Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*]

This Government spoke of the paradigm shift in 2017. In the area of housing it has made that shift and it is continuing to make and accelerate the shift to meet these needs. Among the initiatives currently being undertaken and already bearing fruit is the expansion of the supplier base, contractors and investors for the market in its private/public partnership arrangement which have already yielded some 15 contractors and investors who will initially supply some 1,845 housing units of single and multiple occupancy. Additionally, this Government has delineated plans to supply low and middle income family units in some 24 communities throughout Trinidad. The Tobago House of Assembly will continue to seek the needs of housing in Tobago. We will hear more of that from the Minister of Housing and Urban Development because I know he still has his opportunity to enter the debate.

Madam Speaker, of particular interest to my constituents is the development earmarked for the Curepe area in the constituency of St. Augustine and other areas within the Tunapuna/Piarco Regional Corporation. The Minister of Finance has already mentioned the shift, and new approaches and harmonization of procurement processes have resulted in 50 per cent reduction in the unit construction cost from some 1,200 per square foot to approximately 600. That is almost 50 per cent. That is a cut by 50 per cent in the square footage with regard to these housing units.

Additionally, Madam Speaker, the Minister of Finance has already served notice that in his thrust to further develop our capital market he is going to raise a bond similar to the National Investment Fund (NIF) with specific regard to housing and first-time ownership to all in Trinidad and Tobago. What else can the people of Trinidad and Tobago ask for in order to ensure housing for all? Madam Speaker, there has always been a sturdy demand for housing, but previously the affordability factors have fluctuated, and these fluctuations impacted on many allied areas, such as the employment demands within the sector and social dynamics of most communities. With this programme coming on stream it represents only a win-win situation and that is where the paradigm shift as mentioned by the Minister of Finance is taking place. It is only a win-win situation.

Madam Speaker, we as a people have been spending so much time looking and reminiscing on our past that we seem to be losing touch with our present and see the past as our future. In my initial contribution on a budget to this House I alluded to my constituency of Tunapuna and the tremendous intellectual capacity and human resource resident in this area and the potential for its utilization in the growth and development of our economy as well as the ability to generate foreign exchange through invisible exports such as the export of services.

Madam Speaker, in terms of education we are often overwhelmed with comments of not enough jobs being created or available for our people, especially in terms of our tertiary graduates. These graduates have been trained by the taxpayers of this nation to lead, create and innovate and apply entrepreneurship to our society. I stand corrected, but I was always under the impression that one of the expected outcomes from exposure, especially tertiary education, was by the process of observation as well as investigations to identify the problems and by

application of principles and processes gained from this exposure to higher learning solutions, adjustments can be found for constraints and problems in everyday life thereby creating innovations, jobs and improvements for our quality of life by all individuals.

Madam Speaker, the question I must ask is: Where are our leaders? Where are our new innovators? Where are our new entrepreneurs we have educated over the last three decades? Where are those individuals today? Madam Speaker, we have more paper qualifications per capita over this period than any other time in our short history combined with the trumpeting of the need for private sector leadership in our development. Surprisingly, the data would show that the State, which is the Government, has always been the employer of choice ever since creation.

Madam Speaker, the question must be asked, in spite of the improved conditions and incentives created for business over the period, coupled with the improved educational exposure, training and support for our human resource, what has changed? What is this needed for change? It cannot be the lack of budget statements, plans and programmes and, of course, Government incentives, which is to say, we continue to read the budgets, we continue to provide programmes, plans, incentives. But where are the new innovators? Where are the new entrepreneurs in order to take these incentives and programmes in order to move forward, in order to ensure that the Government can continue to provide the policies, provide the incentives and these entrepreneurs take off?

Madam Speaker, earlier a request was made for Members of this House with regard to pointing at a person or object. Madam Speaker, once again I crave the indulgences of the honourable House and by extension our nation and ask each one of us to state what they individually would like to see happen in terms of the

quality of their lives or their loved ones and simultaneously what are they prepared to do to ensure the attainment of this desired outcome? [*Desk thumping*] What can we continue to do for our country? What can we continue to do for our country? We continue to blame the Government. Do this. Do that. But what have we as individuals taken upon ourselves to do in order to make a worthwhile contribution?

Madam Speaker, where are the new and improved Ken Juliens? Where are the new Ken Juliens? Where are the new Cyril Dupreys? The Robert Montanos? "Y'all remember those names? "Y'all remember those names?" The Vijay Narinesinghs; the Lloyd Best; the Trevors; Boopsingh and Farrell. Where are those guys? Fitz Blackman; the Fergusons; Joseph Charles; Mr. Solo. Where are the new innovators? Where are the new entrepreneurs?

Dr. Moonilal: Gopeesinghs.

Mr. E. Forde: When you get your turn you will call his name, "nah". We are talking about new entrepreneurs; new ones. Helen Bhagwansingh, the steel queen. Where are the new ones? But we continue to play the blame game. We continue to put the strain on the Government to do everything: provide the budget statement; provide the plan; provide the incentives; and also to come and work the plan at the end of the day. And many, many men and women who have gone before, they did not wait on and comment on budgets. They were entrepreneurs in the true sense.

Madam Speaker, some of the aforementioned persons and many others over the years never saw the cup as half empty. They saw it as half filled. And they proceeded to top it up. That is the key; see it as half-filled and do your part to top it up. Many were given lemons in life circumstances, singularly or combined by birth and or business and other personal occurrences. However, they all came to the conclusion that something can be done with lemons. Something can be done with the budget, whether you say it is a good budget, whether you say it is a bad

budget. But there are things in the budget that individuals can take and make use of it. However, it required action on their part. I believe they concluded it was not an orange so it could not be sucked dry. [*Crosstalk*] However, some concluded that lemon could be cut open, the juice squeezed, water and sugar added and you will get lemonade; and you will get lemonade from a lemon. So choose something from the budget and make use of it, work at it. [*Desk thumping*] That is the key, that is the key [*Crosstalk*] to be enjoyed. Others decided—[*Interruption*]

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: Madam Speaker, Standing Order, 53(1)(e) please.

Madam Speaker: Okay, so, Members, I think we now really, if we self-regulate, we will understand. Okay so, I know it is late in the day and some of us may be a little restless; a little walk always helps. Continue.

Mr. E. Forde: Thank you, Madam Speaker. [*Desk thumping*] So we are on the lemons. So make use of the lemon. Others decided that the bitterness of the juice—

Dr. Moonilal: Madam Speaker, on a Standing Order 44(10).

Madam Speaker: Overruled. The Member sought leave. It is the budget and usually Standing Order 44(10) is usually interpreted lax. Continue Member.

Mr. E. Forde: You came to the Chamber late, Member for Oropouche East? As the Deputy Speaker, I need to abide by the Standing Order.

Madam Speaker: Member. Member, you do not be distracted. [*Laughter and crosstalk*]

Mr. E. Forde: Others decided that the juice and the rind could be made into a tonic. The pectin of the inner skin was a necessary nutrient and some even decided that the lemon can be processed. The outer skin could be used for hygienic purposes for our skin. So find something to do. We need to find something to do.

Madam Speaker, it is not so much what we get, but it is what we do with

what we get; and I am going to repeat that. It is not so much with what we get, but what we do with what we get. [*Desk thumping*] That is important. Madam Speaker, in my opinion a budget always represents a lemon in some persons' circumstances. And I do not know, you on the other side, it is only the lemon you all seeing in the budget? A dollar increase in fuel.

Dr. Moonilal: Focus on the Chair. [*Laughter*]

Mr. E. Forde: A dollar—that is all you are seeing on the other side. Look at all the other prerequisites that have gone before. Madam Speaker, in my opinion a budget always represents a lemon in some persons' or person's circumstances. The question then becomes: What do we do with the budget? Madam Speaker, there are a myriad of actions we could engage around the budget, all this with special reference to the budget, 2019, titled "Turnaround" as presented by the Minister of Finance in this Chamber on Monday 1st of October, 2018.

Nevertheless, Madam Speaker, I recently had the privilege to attend the pre-budget seminar of the Greater Tunapuna Chamber of Industry & Commerce. One of the presenters from the University of the West Indies, actually one of my constituents, Tunapuna constituent, presented on a concept entitled: "The Triple Helix for Development". What I gathered from this term, "the triple helix", the concept allowed for greater and more complementary economic development involving the State, the private sector and the communities patterned after life's DNA molecule, which is called the helix structure, which is, simply put, one of the parameters or the paradigm shift that we this Government are entertaining, [*Crosstalk*] Private Government Partnership. And those are some of the things that we are looking at.

Madam Speaker, from where I sit, the present prevailing circumstances—I believe the Tunapuna/Piarco Regional Corporation, with the Piarco International

Airport and its available Trincity Industrial Estate or park, the many tertiary institutions in the immediate vicinity are well organized, an active business and commercial grouping, an enormous and highly qualified and skilled population resident in close proximity. They signal willingness of labour force or the communities to engage in a capital industrial development. Madam Speaker, coupled with the initiatives and incentives of, this Government can fuel diversification in this region and the wider Trinidad and Tobago; then this budget can certainly be a turning point for a turnaround in 2019. And to simply put, we need to ensure that the Government, the labour parties, the private investors come together in order to ensure that this development can work in Trinidad and Tobago.

Another of the initiatives outlined in this budget is that of La Brea dry docking facility. You would have heard mentioned by the Minister of Finance and also by the Member for La Brea; it is a blast from the past but now is the time and our circumstances calls for the rallying of our forces and resources to ensure our ship of state, Trinidad and Tobago, makes the journey. Let us go for it. So we are going with the La Brea dry dock facility to ensure employment, to ensure investment, to ensure all the positives that have been mentioned by the Minister of Finance and likewise the MP for La Brea here this evening.

It was with a great sense of relief—like many people in this country, I was very worried and even a little scared when the oil revenue collapsed as they did a few years ago. I was in no doubt that the challenge faced by the new PNM Government in September 2015 was one that would demand all the strength and courage we had. However, I was sure that with the measures we planned to take under the leadership of our fearless leader, Dr. The Hon. Keith Christopher Rowley, the Government would turn the situation around, and we have started to see that turnaround already. [*Desk thumping*] After a period of sustained

contraction reaching below 6 per cent in 2016, we are now on the road to a positive rate of growth to close to 2 per cent in the current year and expect to grow more than this in the years ahead.

Madam Speaker, I spoke about strength and courage, because as you know, sometimes even when we know what the right thing to do is, we choose not to do it out of weakness and fear for the fear of being criticized. This is not how it was with our Government. We knew that it would be rough when we took on the challenge of reducing the level of Government expenditure and, boy, we know it was high. Madam Speaker, in a sense we can understand why the previous Government took our expenditure level to an unsustainable level above $60 billion. Should I repeat that?

Hon. Member: Yes.

Mr. E. Forde: Sixty billion dollars. [*Desk thumping*] The fact is that it is easy to increase expenditure—and you all so know well how to do that on the other side, even when it is the wrong thing to do in the economic circumstances of our country at this time. Madam Speaker, we knew as a Government that we would not bring the economy under control if we did not cut expenditure and we did what we knew was right for the economy. [*Desk thumping*] We did what was right for the economy. We are not living for today. This PNM Government is not living for today. We are living for the future. We are living for our grandchildren and our great grandchildren. [*Desk thumping*] We need to ensure that stability. And it was started since 1956 under the great hon. Dr. Eric Williams, living for the future. All the things our previous Governments would have put in place to ensure the stability is maintained today in 2018.

Madam Speaker, of course when you cut expenditure there are many things which cannot be done no matter how badly we want to do them. People get very

upset when this happens. There is no joy when you cut expenditure. There is no joy. There is no joy in cutting expenditure, but again certain things have to be done in order to ensure that our country remains on a stable footing. The Minister of Finance could have gone through many sleepless nights to cut GATE in order to do all those necessary things as we continue along. But, as we continue, those are the things we need to do to ensure that we continue in Trinidad and Tobago. People get very upset when this happens. There is no joy when you cut expenditure. The Government was fully aware of this. However, we also knew that if we did not cut expenditure now the situation in the country would get 100 times worse. This is why courage was necessary. It takes courage to make tough decisions. [*Desk thumping*] And I must say, in terms of our leader, Dr. Keith Christopher Rowley, a courageous man, along with the Minister of Finance, to ensure that what we put in the last budgets for the last three years and the budget of 2019 to ensure a turnaround as we continue into 2019. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker, the Government knows that the people of this country are not stupid. We are all right-thinking people in Trinidad and Tobago. Government therefore knows that in spite of the hard times we have been through, the people of this country will realize that the expenditure cuts were good for the country. The expenditure cuts will benefit the country in the long run. [*Desk thumping*] The people of Trinidad and Tobago know that. And that is the people I am speaking to. Yes, I know there are others on the other side who are listening but it is the people of Trinidad and Tobago that I am listening to—the right-thinking people of Trinidad and Tobago. What we are doing is to ensure that we live to see another day. We are not living for today. We need to live to see another day. This is why we can now look forward with hope to better times ahead. It would be a completely different story if we had continued spending, spending as we did in

earlier times.

We know that a major feature of the expenditure cuts was the cut in the fuel subsidy. Again, everybody would have spoken about the fuel subsidy. But, Madam Speaker, nobody likes it when gas prices go up. Nobody likes it when gas prices go up. Because we as MPs have to face the same gas prices. But, if we have choice between paying a little more for gas versus giving people more food cards or old age pensioners an increase and the differently abled population a little more money I know the country would chose to help the people in the event. And that is the key in order to ensure that the pensioners, the socially displaced, in order for TT Food Cards and to ensure the differently abled are given something in order to survive. This is precisely what the Minister of Finance has done in this 2019 budget turnaround.

Madam Speaker, I want to turn now to the very troubling matter of Petrotrin. It is always a painful experience when thousands of persons are severed from their employment. If there is a better alternative no Government will take measures which will put people out of employment or jobs as there are going to be, [*Desk thumping*] if there is a better alternative. I heard the last speaker talking about the Government already has its timeline and so on. But ample opportunities—over a year now the Cabinet has been meeting on this Petrotrin deal. What you all did with it when you all were in power? What was done while the People's Partnership was in power with regard to Petrotrin?

Hon. Members: Nothing.

Mr. E. Forde: The Minister of Finance will answer that when he is responding. What has been done? This Government decided that we are going to go forward in looking at it, various committees were set up, consultants were put in place in order to ensure. The OWTU was given the opportunity to be part of the

arrangement, to be part of the breakdown, to be part of the meetings and they never showed up. They never offered members to be part of the committee, to be part of the board in order to go forward. Now, when the rubber hits the road and when they did not believe that the People's National Movement had the courage in order to do what it had to do to ensure that the 1.3 million persons of Trinidad and Tobago benefit in the long run, the decision had to be made. [*Desk thumping*] The decision had to be made. The decision had to be made.

And, again, those of you all who know the Member of Parliament for Tunapuna, I am on relationships. I am strong on personalities. It is a difficult decision. I have to face my constituents to explain why we are going that way. That is the information; it is all about the facts. State the facts and we go forward. If there is a better alternative no government will take these measures. The heart of this Government goes out to the workers of Petrotrin and their families and we will do our best to assist them in this very difficult period.

7.45 p.m.

We have heard the various cushions and comforts that will be extended with regard to severing these individuals, and as a caring Government it is going to be done. We have stated it and it is going to be placed on the table to ensure that, again, this severing takes place in the calmest and most relaxed fashion that it can be. Yes, it is a tough decision, but tough men take tough decisions.

But the fact is that the refinery of Petrotrin was posing a threat to the country's finances and something had to be done. Of course, if, as in the past, the rest of the company was making enough profit to more than cover the losses of the refinery, we could keep it going as we made attempts to stem the losses. However, Madam Speaker, when that situation had become one where the company was becoming a burden to the Treasury—it is a burden. It was not just becoming a

burden to Petrotrin itself; it was becoming a burden to the Treasury. With the refinery losing $2 billion annually, the need to restructure the company is now very obvious. It is now very obvious. But I know it is politics that we are into, so at the end of the day, you on that side will find all the negative things in order to bring forward. But the facts are there online; the information is there in the public domain in order to ensure that all would know at the end of the day.

For the workers, all is not lost, since the restructured company will certainly be needing some of them very soon, and as the company gets stronger, employment levels will rise. So stay tuned. Let us stay tuned. Stay tuned as we continue along.

Madam Speaker, this is a very serious issue and one that strikes at the heart of what it means to be an independent country. This is a time when it is not the things that we have that will make the difference for us, but it is the kind of people we are. It is all about the people that will be important. If we know that we have something which is haemorrhaging our country and we choose to do nothing about it, then, as our parents would say, "crapaud smoke our pipe". The bleeding has to stop. It has to stop somewhere. It is continuous and the bleeding is heavy—$2 billion. It is $2 billion we are talking about. We are not talking about millions; it is billions. So we have to stop the bleeding. Let us be good parents.

This is why I find it hard to understand those who are trying to confuse the country by saying that the refinery was making a profit. Madam Speaker, the information on Petrotrin and on the refinery is public information, on the company's website and in the public domain. The Government has been studying the Petrotrin problem for more than a year and has engaged local and overseas consultants to advise them. Much of the information in these reports is now in the public domain.

This is a time to look to the future, a future with an oil company concentrating on exploration and production; a future of a company that will help to move the current daily production from 40,000 barrels to over 100,000 barrels. That is the next aim that we looking at, to ensure exploration and production and to carry up the amount of barrels done on a daily basis, to 100,000 barrels; a future of a company that will employ thousands of our young people, many in highly skilled positions. Making changes is almost never without pain, but often, because of the pain, we put ourselves in a much stronger position as before.

Madam Speaker, I want to say a few words about Tobago. We all know that the problems with the sea bridge made headlines in the months past. It is therefore with immense relief that we see the promise of two state-of-the-art fast ferries in the 2019 budget. [*Desk thumping*] And as the Member for Tobago West said this morning, we are purchasing those ferries. We are purchasing those ferries, not leasing. It will belong to the people of Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*] Together with the brand new ferry recently acquired, there is great hope that the problems of the sea bridge will soon be behind us.

When we combine the two fast ferries with the present ferry and the present ferries on the sea bridge: one, the planned construction of a new terminal at the ANR Robinson Airport, that is planned for 2019; two, a soon-to-be newly re-branded Magdalena Grand Beach and Golf Resort carded for Tobago; [*Desk thumping*] three, a swanky 1,000 room—I am wondering, Madam Speaker, if those on the other side would be going to Tobago anytime in the near future, or when these things come to fruition. Which airport you all will enter in? Which hotel would they stay in? You know, those are the questions. So you all have to be careful [*Desk thumping*] in terms of what you all are saying. Which ferry you all are going to use? Which airline you all are going to use? Those are the questions.

Could you all answer? Give credit where credit is due. [*Desk thumping*] Give credit where credit is due. Scandal and scandal, and so on. You all will be the first persons to go to the Sandals when it comes on stream—the first set of individuals—a 1,000 room Sandals and Beach Resort in Tobago.

We have to say that the future of Tobago looks good, looks bright, as our sister island moves closer [*Desk thumping*] to greater self-determination. It is my hope, Madam Speaker, that the ties between our islands will deepen and roots will be planted even stronger. The plans and measures outlined in the budget 2019, are all aimed at making our twin-island State much stronger, and as long as we are prepared to put our shoulders to the wheel, there is no reason why we should not expect to rebound to full prosperity in the not-too-distant future. "Turnaround 2019" is assured.

Madam Speaker, I would like to spend some time on my constituency of Tunapuna. We continue to work hard in Tunapuna. As the Member of Parliament for Tunapuna, for the last three years we have been working very hard with the constituents. And, as I say, the 27,000-plus constituents—not only the persons that would have voted for me. To date, we would have seen 7,000-plus individuals, because we track the individuals that come to the office—over 7,000-plus constituents. And not only Tunapuna constituents, individuals from the neighbouring St. Augustine. The Member for St. Augustine is not here. But a lot of people from the St. Augustine constituency—which is just across the road because the boundary is the Eastern Main Road—visit my office and we try our best to assist everyone on a fair basis, rest assured.

We continue to work hard to ensure that infrastructure development takes place. Yes, we got some, but there is always need for more, and, you know, the Ministry of Works and Transport, the Minister of Local Government and Urban

Development, the Tunapuna/Piarco Regional Corporation, as the MP we continue to liaise with them to ensure that we get our roads paved, that we get our drains repaired; deal with the various public utilities to ensure that things are in place with regard to streetlights, with regard to other infrastructure needs, and so on, as we continue along.

So we have a series of roads that were paved; a series of drains that were put in place in the Maracas area, and all areas, from Tacarigua in the east to St. Augustine and then up into the Maracas area, Riverside Road and up into Maracas as far as the Acono area. We continue to look at the series of other things with regard to maintenance of most of the recreation grounds. We continue to work along with the Tunapuna/Piarco Regional Corporation in order to ensure that these facilities are well taken care of, to ensure that T&TEC and the street-lighting department sees about the lighting at the various facilities.

With regard to the Ministry of Social Development and Family Services, we continue to liaise with them in order to ensure that the individuals that require food cards are qualified for their food cards; the individuals that qualify for the disability, that no runaround is extended; those that are pensioners, that we need to assist with application forms. You know, we assist right around within the constituency. So I would like to thank the Minister of Social Development and Family Services for all the things that they would have extended: the wheelchairs, the walking sticks, the prosthetic legs. Everything with regard to that, that they supply, we make sure that our constituents benefit.

To the Minister of Community Development, Culture and the Arts, for the Self-Help—some Member this morning was quoting Self-Help. Oh, it was the Member for Princes Town. Yeah. And he said "Tunapuna, 2". And I was wondering which Tunapuna he was talking to.

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: The one in Princes Town.

Mr. E. Forde: Oh, there is a Tunapuna in Princes Town? You know what I mean? So talk—and this is the problem that I have. Speak facts on what you know. If you do not know, do not call Tunapuna's name. [*Desk thumping*] Do not call Tunapuna constituency. Again, I do not know if the Speaker will—I was in the Chair at the time so I could not have said anything, but I made note of it.

Madam Speaker, the Tunapuna constituency has received to date, from 2015 to now, over 200 Self-Help applications approved, [*Desk thumping*] whether for communal services, whether for projects, and also with regard to individual persons for home repairs ownership. And that is a fact. So two zeros were left out at the "two" that he would have placed this morning, and that is where I have the problem. Let us, you know, ask a question.

Mr. Hinds: You know, Princes Town all over the place.

Mr. E. Forde: Looking forward, as we go forward, we are looking forward for, in 2019, the refurbishing of the St. Johns/St. Augustine Regional Complex from the Minister of Community Development, Culture and the Arts. We are also looking at, with regard to the La Seiva Village Community Centre. That is work that is earmarked for the 2019 budget. With regard to the Ministry of Rural Development Local Government, CEPEP contractors were renewed. We have a quota of CEPEP contractors in the community and we are working together, along with the Tunapuna/Piarco Regional Corporation, to ensure that no areas—

Madam Speaker: Hon. Member for Tunapuna, your original speaking time is now expired. You are entitled to 10 more minutes to complete your contribution if you so wish. You may proceed.

Mr. E. Forde: Thank you, Madam Speaker. [*Desk thumping*] So, again, we work along with the Tunapuna/Piarco Regional Corporation to ensure that no areas

are left unturned. All areas are clean, including the Priority Bus Route, even the highways and also within Tunapuna, all the NGOs, all the Government Departments: fire station; police station, are properly maintained with regard to the CEPEP contractors. So we are keeping a clean scene in Tunapuna and we are remaining on board with this Government as we plan to turn around the country from 2019.

To the Minister in the Gender and Child Affairs, under the Office of the Prime Minister: thanks for the continued financial assistance and funding and resources for the St. Mary's Children's Home, Tacarigua. [*Desk thumping*] I want to thank you for the continued support. Thank you for the continued support to the Cyril Ross Nursery also in El Dorado, Tunapuna, which are the two facilities within my community that benefit from this particular Ministry.

To the Minister of Education: all my schools continue to be open. All my schools continue to be maintained, whether primary, whether secondary, whether Early Childhood Centres. All are maintained. All were opened. [*Desk thumping*] Whether the earthquake did damage or whether the earthquake did not do damage, they have been checked and they have been cleared to ensure that school continues within the schools in Tunapuna. And every denominational school, plus Government schools, are represented within my constituency. We have the Presbyterian, we have the Roman Catholics, we have the Hindus, we have the Muslims, we have the Anglicans, and each one of them benefits as a result of working closely with the Member of Parliament for Tunapuna. [*Desk thumping*] And if you want to go to the churches, likewise. Each one of the respective denominationals are maintained.

Hon. Member: The Good Shepherd.

Mr. E. Forde: Any one. The Good Shepherd Anglican. Not forgetting the

Presbyterian, the Aramalaya, the mandir, the Muslim, Hindu, as the case may be. And we continue to work hard and smart within the Tunapuna constituency. So I thank you, Minister of Education.

Going forward now, futuristic. Traffic continues to be a main bugbear within the Tunapuna constituency. We continue to have serious traffic congestion with most of the persons on the East-West Corridor, coming down from as far as Toco/Mayaro, coming through the Tunapuna constituency. And I am in discussion with the Minister of Works and Transport, where plans are being afoot in order to look at a Caura/Tunapuna bypass road running from St. Michael Road at the back of Paradise Gardens on the northern area, and crossing the Caura River, where a bridge will also be installed. That, Madam Speaker, will ensure that—and create an ease within traffic congestion within that area. Because, again, factual information. From Curepe to Tacarigua is one of the most densely populated areas with regard to the Ministry of Education schools. There are a total of 52 schools within that area between Curepe to Tacarigua, inclusive of the university, inclusive of SAMs, inclusive of Early Childhood Centres, primary schools and secondary schools. Some of the most prestigious schools are also within that area: Hillview College, my alma mater; we have the Lakshmi Girls'; we have the El Dorado secondary schools; we have the Tunapuna Government schools and a series of schools within those areas.

So, again, this is one thing that I am looking forward for, that between now and 2020, to get that bypass road—Caura/Tunapuna bypass road—with a bridge crossing the Caura River and coming out on Caura Road. So that is one of the things I am looking to. With regard to a traffic management plan, again, that is something that we are working along very closely with traffic management to ensure that that plan comes to fruition in order, again, to minimize traffic within

that area, from Tacarigua to, let us say, Curepe Junction, or even as far as the Mount Hope facility, to ensure that we minimize that traffic arrangement.

Again, not everything can be as rosy as you would like it to be. Within the area, with regard to the Ministry of Public Utilities, ongoing discussions are happening with the Water and Sewerage Authority, which is WASA. And I am making a plea from this end—because we have been having meetings and a series of site visits, and so on. We continue to not get the supply of water that we would really like to appreciate within the upper areas in the Tunapuna constituency. We can talk from Madoo Hill to Mingo Road; from Mingo Road to St. John; from St. John to Ragbir Street; from Ragbir Street to Santa Margarita and then from Santa Margarita we are talking about going into Maracas: La Seiva, Mountain View, Maracas Gardens, Acono Village.

Water is vital, Madam Speaker, and if it is we cannot get a supply of water on a regular basis, it becomes difficult. As a Member of Parliament, I know, I have been meeting with Public Utilities in order to ensure those things happen, but again, I think that it should be registered in the *Hansard* as we continue to go forward. Again, Public Utilities, WASA, they do a fine job with the potholes and those— regular stuff. But with regard to—

Hon. Members: What? What?

Mr. E. Forde: In Tunapuna. I am talking from facts. The situation is: water is vital. I would like water. [*Desk thumping*] Plan a schedule, WASA, and let us stick to the schedule for those areas in the upper areas of Tunapuna.

To the numerous community and social and sporting events that I would partake in as the Member of Parliament, where I visit all the NGO sporting clubs, all the sports groups, and so on; to the various functions and also social activities that I would be part of; also to the 27,000-plus members of my constituency who

continue to visit my office, who continue to come from all races, from all walks of life, from all political affiliations, from all areas of the constituency—they come far and wide and as Member of Parliament, I see to their various needs. I would like to thank the constituency for continuing to have confidence in me, for having the trust in me and for also continuing to be there when I need them, as well as when they need me.

Madam Speaker, I know my colleagues on the other side would attempt to comment on the lemon story, so I must go back to that lemon story. However, before they enjoin the lemon commentary, allow me to put before this House a statement of definite fact and truth. The best tasting orange fruits are the product of trees grafted on seedlings of the lemon fruit. The best orange comes from being grafted from the lemon tree. So rest assured, when you are coming on the lemon story, come with your facts.

Madam Speaker, I must extend congratulations—and it is in definite order—to the hon. Minister of Finance and his budget team at the Ministry for this 2019 budget. [*Desk thumping*] The Minister of Finance and his team were like the eagle. They were prepared and they undertook the process of rejuvenation for our nation's re-emergence, flying high and in fine style.

Hon. Member: Yes, man. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. E. Forde: Like the eagle, the Minister of Finance did not run from the storm, but rose up in the storm. Up to last night I was actually—when I was finishing, they had a movie called the *Twister* last night, where these people actually go into the storm in order to put down their gadgets in the thing. That is what he did. [*Desk thumping*] He went into the system. [*Desk thumping*] He did not run. It is now our task as Trinidad and Tobago nationals and as patriotic citizens of our beloved nation of Trinidad and Tobago, to turn into the wind and rise up as eagles

to ensure a turnaround for the 2019 budget and beyond. Madam Speaker, I thank you. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker: Member for Barataria/San Juan. [*Desk thumping*]

Dr. Fuad Khan (*Barataria/San Juan*): Thank you, Madam Speaker. First, let me start by congratulating the Leader of the Opposition for a very good contribution that dealt with every single aspect of the budget and really put the Minister of Finance in a shorter pants, like a school boy. I want to say congratulations to the Members on this side who have spoken so far, and have given such straightforward and didactic contributions that, if the Government takes it on board, Madam Speaker, they will basically learn a lot.

Now, the Minister of Finance gave his budget presentation, and while he was giving the budget presentation—and when we went over the budget presentation—I realized that a lot was said and absolutely nothing was—and there was no content. And I have realized that the Members on the other side have taken that cue, saying plenty and really with very little substance. You see, Madam Speaker, when I looked at the budget presentation and I dissected it out, I checked it out and I said: Why would the Minister of Finance call this "Turnaround"? Why will it be called "Turnaround"? And then he ended the budget presentation, he said, he is doing it his way. So when I put the two of them together: "Turnaround"; and "he is doing it his way", I realized they had overturned the buggery laws in Trinidad and Tobago, and I was wondering, basically, if that is what was the thought pattern of the Minister of Finance. You see, Madam Speaker, when you look at the—[*Crosstalk and laughter*]

Hon. Member: Princes Town rubbing off on you, boy.

Madam Speaker: Okay, I know it is late in the day and we might all be a little restless, but I want to hear the Member for Barataria San/Juan. I will ask Members

to, you know, keep their composure and let us get through this.

Dr. F. Khan: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, you know, when you have dirty water flung on you—[*Crosstalk*]

Madam Speaker: While I understand banter, I think we are making light of something that has—is a criminal offence and I would expect us to rise to a little greater sense of responsibility. Okay?

Dr. F. Khan: I withdraw that, Madam Speaker. Next time I hope it would be more than $400.

Madam Speaker, the Minister of Health this morning, he spoke in glowing terms about his ability to be called up by the World Bank for the maternal mortality decline and also the decline of the infant mortality rate. Madam Speaker, I am so happy that he has gotten called by the World Bank to present to him, and to indicate to them what was done. But I would like to say, on record, that the People's Partnership, in 2013, because of a couple of deaths that were occurring at that time, we were able to put the Maternal Review Committee in place in May 10, 2013. And I just want to read out certain aspects of it. The Members of the committee were the Member for Fyzabad, Dr. Lackram Boodoo, who was the chairman; you had Ms. Valerie Alleyne-Rawlins who is now, I think, the Chairman of South/West; Dr. Kerry Brahim; Dr. Maria Dillon-Remy; Ms. Celia Hudson; Dr. Spencer Perkins; Prof. Ramsawak; Dr. Sonia Roach; Mrs. Marcia Rollock; Prof. Seetaram; Dr. Adesh Sirjusingh; Dr. Vanessa Stewart; Dr. Victor Wheeler.

I read these names out, Madam Speaker, because I think the kudos should be given to that team, for what the Minister is enjoying today. Now, the Maternal Service Review Committee—and I am reading from the book directly—the terms of reference at that time was:

(a) To review existing practice in the provision of maternity care in the public health sector;

(b) To identify deficiencies in the current system, including human resources challenges;

(c) To assess the main causes of/and trends in maternal and perinatal deaths, including identification of any avoidable or substandard factors;

(d) To recommend measures to improve clinical care and service provisions with the goal of reducing maternal and perinatal mortality rates, and;

(e) To suggest directions for future areas of research and audit at the regional and national levels.

You see, Madam Speaker, those were the terms of reference, and the implementation factors that came about from that, it went for immediate implementation to a long-term implementation. And the first thing was the creation of a Director for Women's Health, including maternal and child health at the Ministry of Health, to provide leadership and policy formation; the creation of a post of clinical risk coordinator for each maternity unit.

And I took a note to Cabinet about 2014, for the Director of Women's Health, as well as the director for breast-feeding in the country, Madam Speaker. Now, the other thing, we also, for immediate implementation which—all this was done—was improving staffing of obstetricians, neonatologists, midwives, neonatal nurses, registered nurses and support staff. The minimum midwife/client ratio would be one-in-two in early labour; one-in-one in active labour and two-in-one in immediate delivery.

Adherence to all antenatal, neonatal delivery units to minimum accreditation standards; improving the infrastructure delivery room, bed capacity, monitor emergency; improving access and quality of antenatal care; providing training

and equipment for emergency deliveries; ensuring a primary care physician, medical officer on site between 8.00 a.m. and 4.00 p.m. at all health centres.

And it goes on, Madam Speaker. The reason I am reading this out directly, because it has not been said before, but if that committee was not in existence and if the implementation was not done, today the Minister of Health would not be enjoying the success of the maternal mortality rate that is occurring today [*Desk thumping*] and also the perinatal mortality rate. I am very happy that the results of what we did have come to fruition and I hope it will continue in that manner.

Madam Speaker, the other thing, when I read that the Minister of Finance had—and to loud thumping—decided to open the remote health centres of Blanchisseuse, Grand Riviere and Cedros for 24 hours, seven days a week, that means to say year-round, we started that programme and I did it for Blanchisseuse and I did it for Maracas and I did it for, I think it was Cedros. What we found, that after four o'clock in the evening, hardly anybody came to the health centre. But you would have a cadre of nurses, doctors, pharmacists, ancillary staff, ambulance drivers, everyone there, and the cost factor was high. And on weekends—when the most amount of people came about were on weekends when they went to enjoy the areas: Grand Riviere, Maracas, Blanchisseuse, et cetera, then we decided to basically do it on a sort of a systematic basis. A couple of days we would put things in place. But also in Cedros and in Blanchisseuse, we installed an ambulance driver and an ambulance to be on call 24/7.

Now, that worked quite well and it continues to work. But, however, in areas that had a high population, where the people of Trinidad and Tobago would go to enjoy the activities, throughout the weekend we would have 24-hour service at that point in time.

8.15 p.m.

I would like to say that the Carenage health office was built purposely, Madam Speaker, for a 24 hours, seven days a week approach. However, today, I understand it is being closed at four o'clock and it is closed on weekends. The Carenage health office is a health office that was purposely built for emergencies. It was purposely built for normal health office activities and it was purposely built to be opened 24/7 and I will ask the Minister of Health if he can look into it and see if that could occur because a lot of activities take place in that peninsula, as well as a lot of activities take place in Maracas and Blanchisseuse, and weekend opening of these health centres is absolutely necessary.

You see, Madam Speaker, when we looked at it, to put a doctor— it is a costly exercise—we started to look into the aspects of telemedicine and telehealth so people could go to these areas, and there were telehealth facilities that could digitally beam to a central area and a nurse practitioner would have been the one taking the information, as well as examining the patients, as well as prescribing and giving injections. However, the nurse practitioner—it has now been three years. We passed the law for the nursing personnel Act, and in that Act has the area to have a nurse practitioner. All that is necessary for the nurse practitioner to come on stream were the regulations for affirmative action that should have been brought to Parliament where the qualifications of the nurse practitioner had to be passed by Parliament. That is the only thing left on that law. It has not come for three years and I ask the Minister of Health if he could look into that and bring to Parliament for affirmative resolution the qualifications for the nurse practitioner. I make that because nurse practitioners are found in Jamaica and throughout the region, where they are the ones who man the remote health centres. They are the ones who understand the telemedicine, and they are the ones who could work

together. They are similar to paramedics, not the EMTs, the paramedics' level. And these nurse practitioners, in fact, they are hired.

It is necessary that we look in this, Madam Speaker, because the nurses have been clamouring for it and we passed the law to suit. Now, when I hear things about the People's Partnership spent X amount of dollars and this was not done, and that was not done, I just want to read out something, Madam Speaker. Well, we built the Carenage health office, a state-of-the-art centre; the Palo Seco health office; we also started work on the Sangre Grande Enhanced Health Centre which is next to the Sangre Grande Hospital; we developed a lot of infrastructure in the Sangre Grande Hospital, paediatric, neonatology unit, paediatric unit, blood transfusion, pharmacies, et cetera; the Maracas health office we opened; we did over the Blanchisseuse health office; the Arima Health Facility was done with Unit A, Unit B and we started to gut out the internal part of the health facility to redo it; we did the Arima—we started the Arima Hospital and the Point Fortin Hospital. And the reason why I am going to say something, and I want to stick to that, the Minister is on record as saying that we took current money, I think it is, and we spent it.

Madam Speaker, how this works—concessional loans work in a very strange way. The Ministry of Health has to have an item. It goes to the Ministry of Finance. The Ministry of Finance then goes to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs writes back the Ministry of Finance and then writes back the embassy of the country that we are going to. The embassy of the country then goes and liaises with the bank of the other country, let us say the Bank of China. They then write back to the embassy who writes to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, who then goes back to the Ministry of Finance and comes back to the Ministry of Health. It is that roundabout. Sometimes they say no, sometimes

they say you do not have enough facts and sometimes you do not have this; and it takes a while. It could take about three years from the start of an idea if you get an approval.

In these concessional loans we are allowed to—it is usually 85 per cent concession and 15 per cent of your own local money. In order to fast-forward it, while I was sitting down there, not twiddling my thumbs, I decided that for Point Fortin and for Arima, I will start the foundation with the 15 per cent of what we had to put out. And in doing so, we were able to start Arima Hospital and Point Fortin Hospital while the concession loan was going on. So when the Minister of Health indicates today that the concessional loan only came out a certain time and we used our current money, that, Madam Speaker, is true, but if it was not done like that you would not be able to boast that the Arima Hospital is going to be finished in 2019 and the Point Fortin Hospital is going to be finished in 2019 or parts; and that is the hard, hard facts.

You see, Madam Speaker, we also started—and 99 per cent finished, the Women's and Children Outpatient Centre in—a state-of-the-art centre—in Eric Williams. [*Desk thumping*] It is a state of the art. It has everything to do with it because that was born out of the maternal review committee, and today the Minister is enjoying it. He opened it and I want say that he has indicated to me how it is a job well done. We also did the San Fernando teaching facility. It was a shell. Dr. Bodoe was then the Chairman of south-west, and the Ministry of Health. We were able to put—it is 18 floors?

Dr. Bodoe: Yes.

Dr. F. Khan: Eighteen floors and most of it were different levels of clinics. UWI was supposed to be there also as part of the teaching system. We also did the—well, we did the Couva Hospital, Madam Speaker, and that is yet to be opened.

We started and we tried to complete the oncology centre.

Now I want to say a little bit about that oncology centre. That oncology centre was going to be a state-of-the-art oncology cancer centre equivalent to the MD Anderson Cancer Centre. It was that level. And the reason behind that, that would have had two linear accelerators, what they call a cyber-knife, a PET CT Scan, ultrasound to collaborate with it, beds, and something called a synchrotron. The synchrotron was a machine that builds and makes radiopharmaceuticals to be exported. All these fancy names were cancer treatment systems and they were meant specifically for medical tourism, and we would have been the number one cancer centre in this part of the world [*Desk thumping*] had that gone forward. We had some snags because the Faro Partnership that we bought the plans from, they went into receivership. They went into bankruptcy and receivership and we could not get back the plans. So it took a while for us to go through and we dealt with it again, and that was up and running. It started with the new negotiations with a new contractor and it was almost completed. I would like to know what has happened to the oncology centre.

Now, when I was faced with that receivership and the lack of plans, it dawned on me that whenever you went for a contract and a tender and you said, "Okay I am going to build a hospital", and the contractor that does the plans to build the hospital, it is theirs. It is not the Ministry of Health's. So I started a process where we would take A, B, C and D plans and use those plans to build hospitals using the same plans depending on the different levels, and in doing so, that is why the Minister could boast that the Point Fortin Hospital plan can be used in Grande. [*Desk thumping*] That is why it could be used there because of the system we put in place, Madam Speaker, that we could take a plan of a hospital and the contractor cannot own the plan. The plan would be owned by the Ministry.

You see, Madam Speaker, this is what we had in plan. That is what we did, so we could use— It was also done for health offices. Now the Minister boasts, and I am glad, that there is a wellness centre in—I think, north-central?

Mr. Deyalsingh: Yes.

Dr. F. Khan:—north-central. The Couva health facility—not the Couva, sorry. The Chaguanas Health Facility, Minister, look into that. That was purposely designed—it has been evaluated already. It is designed properly to be a stage A facility to put around the country. It also has in it a built-in wellness centre as well as a mini hospital, CT scans, et cetera, to service the people of Chaguanas. It was ready just to roll. The plans are finished, the contractor was already checked out though NIPDEC, et cetera, it was evaluated, expect that the financing was of need to be available

Madam Speaker, we talked about wellness centres. We talk about the need to bring under control the non-communicable diseases. In fact, we started in 2011 looking at the obesity rate in this country, obesity of children, young adults, and I think it was the steps programme that we looked at and we found that the obesity levels were rising, rising in this country to such an extent that 20 years before we had 15 per cent of children obese and about 10 per cent— By the time I left the Ministry, we were trying our best to bring that into control and over that period of time you had a 15 per cent obesity rate, as well as in children I think it was almost 30/40 per cent. So we went along and did a non-communicable disease programme with Prof. George Alleyne, and we brought down into Trinidad and Tobago world conferences on the non-communicable diseases. We brought it to Trinidad. We had about two of them.

Now, I have always been an advocate, Madam Speaker, that I would have liked to have seen a sugar tax because Mexico has done it, Chile has done it, and

the UK has recently done it. It is a tax on high sugar items and it has been bearing fruit in both Mexico as well as Chile, and England has been saying indicatively that there is the child obesity programme and the sugar tax is part of it. It would have been wise to raise the tax on sugar and leave the gas at the level it was. It might have been better that way. [*Desk thumping*] You would get a benefit rather than a push back.

Now, Madam Speaker, the Couva hospital is not yet opened. Three years have gone and I understand that there will be meetings with the University of the West Indies as well as the Ministry of Health and, hopefully, a supplier. Now everyone is speaking about the public-private partnership. The public-private partnership is a difficult thing to do because of the legislation, more so than opening up a system. If you have to have a person who is going to be a private person who is going to run a health facility, you have to have legislation intact to last 30 years, and they usually hammer it out back and forth. What is put in place now—a lot of the people who are put in place now will be not there when the contract is over. So it has to be airtight for maintenance and running of this institution with a public-private partnership for 30 years, and that is the problem that takes place with public-private partnerships. I am telling them up front now, if you intend to put a public-private partnership with the Couva hospital you are going to have a very hard time for about three years again and it will not be open. So when you look at *Vision 2030* and you see that the target is 1.63 beds, hopefully by 2018/2019 that will not be realized and you have 220 beds waiting, sitting there in the Couva hospital.

Madam Speaker, another thing. If you are going to make a hospital a paying hospital, what tends to happen, people who pay for medical services want to get the best of course. That does not mean to say that those who are not paying are not

getting the best. But they demand that there will be a consultant. They would not want any registrars or junior officers to see them, they want to get things right away and that is what comes about, and also you cannot really let students touch them. So if it is going to be a teaching hospital, and a paying hospital, it is going to be a problem because paying people do not allow any and everybody to touch them. So you cannot run an offshore medical school and say you are going to pay it. Now, how do you pay for the health sector?

If you look at the Singapore model, Madam Speaker, the Singapore model is a model that people look at worldwide and try to duplicate. You see, there is a public sector and there is a private sector. The public sector, people contribute to that fund—it is a provident fund compulsory; working people of Singapore. They have different levels, the provident fund as well as the MediShield fund, the ElderShield fund and different funds, different systems, where different ages go and they receive medical treatment—the best in the world for contribution into the fund—and that pays for the hospitals. Now, there are approximately 10,000 beds in Singapore. There are about 25 hospitals, and if you notice, Singapore is two times the size of Tobago and they are reclaiming for land. They have about 5 million people there. So I think it is one in 500 for doctors, et cetera.

Now, Singapore has a national health insurance system, and the national health insurance system pays for the running of the hospital, et cetera. I want to indicate to the Minister that you have spoken about national health insurance and nothing is being done. 2017, 2018 national insurance, nothing in 2019—this budget. We started off starting the foundation of the national health insurance by bringing about the national health card, the CDAP card. The reason behind that: that was the start of the national health insurance plan. Once we could have given everybody in Trinidad a card to put their medical records on it to be able to get the

accountability and the transparency on the CDAP drugs based on non-duplication and also at the same time tracking centrally who was using the drugs and where they were going, the next step was to put the HIV drugs on it, the next step was to put the cancer drugs on it because that is where you lose stuff and that is where you cannot know—right now there is no accountability. You can go to a pharmacy now, here, get a CDAP drug, tomorrow go to another pharmacy, next go to another pharmacy. It is no longer connected centrally. When we had the health card going for the 275 pharmacies, if you go to one pharmacy and you get your items, you go to Mayaro and try it, it is linked to see what you got yesterday.

On that health card would have been medical records. It would be linked to labs; it would be linked to doctors' offices; it would be linked to hospitals, everything else. So it was the foundation of the start. By stopping the national health card—and I think you are going to have to bring it back—you basically put the national health insurance on the backburner because you cannot just wake up in the morning and start a national health insurance. You cannot do that. In Singapore everything is tagged. People know exactly what is happening and where they are going. All the records are tagged. If you go to Mount Hope now you find that a lot of records—you cannot find records. They will give you a piece of paper and say, "Okay, put it on this". Your past history is lost. The health card was going to take care of that negativity, Madam Speaker.

Now, Madam Speaker, we were going to develop a teaching system for specialists. Now, you cannot have medical tourism. You cannot have hospitals all around the country and you do not have specialists. The University of the West Indies—and the Minister of Health will agree with me—kind of stymied the production of specialists. Keep the numbers down so you do not have to go all overload the system. We had gone to the British system, the British Royal Society

of Medicine, and the ACGME in the United States of America, and we had gotten together with them. They were going to put a curriculum in place for different programmes, accredited programmes, accredited systems, and in doing so anybody could go to any part of this country in any institution, not just Port of Spain, not just Mount Hope, not just San Fernando. It could be in Grande, Arima as it is coming on stream, and any private sector, and you would learn from somebody who has been a specialist for a very long time following a specific curriculum. The University of the West Indies, the Royal Society of Medicine and the others would set an exam, which, like England, you have to go and write the exam, and when you write the exam there is a 90 per cent failure rate. So you get about 10 per cent of people passing and that is how it rolls over, but you could write it as much as you want.

Now, that is the pro system that we were trying to put in place for the specialist movement, and I am telling you up now, Minister, the University of the West Indies is not going to do it. So you are going to give them Couva hospital as a training centre and you are going to be very, very shocked that that—because they have to link with Barbados, they have to link with Jamaica and Trinidad, and everybody has to be on the same page. Jamaica says, no, nothing happens; and that is what happens. It would have been better if you had gone with UTT or another university, Royal Society of Medicine, or an external university to do that Couva hospital.

Now, Madam Speaker, the nursing we started, we took—looking at the system of medical interns, we were able to bring into the forefront, with the nursing personnel Act, the new concept of the nurse intern. The nurse intern—what used to happen before, you would train a lot of nurses and some of them would not be getting their practical studies moving—they would not get enough

practical experience. They would have to write the exam for the licence exam. Although they have passed their normal nursing exam, they had to write a licence exam and there is a practical part of the exam which they fail. So after three times they would be kicked out after five years. So we put in place the nursing intern system, where the nurses would go straight into an internship programme, learn the practical aspect under the supervision of a senior nurse, and then they would then write the licence exam at their own time. It is working quite well and, in fact, I will tell you something, England has been looking at that system to try to implement the same thing in England.

Madam Speaker, I do not want to say much more about health because the Member of Parliament for Fyzabad and the Member of Parliament for Caroni East dealt with a lot of aspects of the part of health. I just want to say that when you look at the *Review of the Economy*, you find that a majority of items are all in decline. You have declined manufacturing. I mean everything is in decline. So I would love to know where the "Turnaround" came about. We also came—you know there is a decline in birth rate and decline in death rates, so we have an aging population. If the birth rate is declining and the death rating is declining, you have an ageing population and it is going to have an ageing population with a lot of health problems. So we have to start looking at a different aspect of health in this country. Also, there is a need to—believe it or not if you have a declining birth rate, what will eventually happen you will have a lot of elderly people using the resources and you will have not many young people to pay for it. So you see that the National Insurance Board is going to be bankrupt in how many years. You may have it coming earlier than that because the pension plan, et cetera, will have to be satisfied in some manner.

Now, I want to talk a little bit about the foreign exchange, Madam Speaker.

The foreign exchange, the Minister of Finance and the Members on that side they have boasted that there was no devaluation and everybody dumped their desk. Venezuela, if you look at the records you will look at the bolivar in the XE records, it is 10 bolivars to US $1, but the black market rate for that is out of this world. To get a US dollar in Venezuela you have to pay a lot of bolivars, not the exchange rate. So basically the bolivar has declined, but not officially. So too in Trinidad. To get a US dollar people buy it on the black market at 7.58, nine and 10. That is the rate on the black market to get a US dollar. And you cannot get it in the banks. The banks could never give you a cent. You have to line up, you have to put your name down, and sometimes nine or 10 times you do not get a cent. So if you buy it on the black market you are paying $8, $9 and $10 for it. So it has devalued. So you cannot sit there and say it has not devalued. It may not be devalued like the Venezuelan bolivar which its record shows that it is 10 to one, but you are looking about three and four, and 1,000 bolivars to US $1 and that is a pure fact.

Now you looked at the fact that you have the declines, Madam Speaker. When I looked at this budget I realized that this is what we call in budgetary language a non-productive budget. First, it was a productive budget. [*Desk thumping*] A productive budget gets things produced. In this budget there are no incentives, there is no revenue generation, but they have taken money—more money on taxes and you could say the gas increased also—from the productive sector and he has increased the expenditure on the non-productive sector. Nobody is saying do not give them anything, but you do not, as you say, attack the productive sector, decrease the revenues in the productive sector [*Desk thumping*] to hand it across to the non-productive sector which does not create any revenues. It has to go hand in hand. Donald Trump, in the United States, he started the tax cuts. There is a new programme, I think, jump-start your own business, and in

doing that they were able to have more amount of jobs. If you take money out of the productive sector you will automatically contract the productive sector and cause less jobs, and this is what he is doing.

This is what this budget has done. This budget has contracted the productive sector and it has now increased the non-productive sector. So you get all these goodies going across and when you look at it $150 for increases at each level I think for the programmes. You have $150 increase for one person, $150 for two people, $150 for three people, and four people and onwards. The most they will be getting is $150 increase. If you divide that by the amount of people, some get 50 cents, some get $50, some get $150. So basically, you really have not gotten anything because at the end of the day you think you have gotten an increase. It is sort of a sleight of the hand.

Madam Speaker, if you walk down the streets sometime in Carnival, and you walk down the streets in London, you walk the streets in New York and Paris, you will see there are some gentlemen playing the three card where you have to guess which one is the card, but you could never guess right because it is a con game. So you feel you could guess it right, you feel it is happening in front of you, you think you are seeing it, but it is not there. And I am telling you this is exactly what this man has done. [*Desk thumping*] This is what the Ministry of Finance has done. You feel you are getting an increase, you feel that everything is going nice, but at the end of the day when you look for it you realize that it is not there. It is like the three card monte. It is call the three card monte. It is the three card monte.

Madam Speaker, I just want to say something about tourism. It is not my forte, but tourism. Madam Speaker, have you ever been to Sandals? You should go. I recommend to everybody to go to Sandals. I will tell you why. I went to

Sandals twice to see exactly what the Sandals thing was about. What I found out, here is Sandals, you pay for it with your credit card before you go. You pay for it on the Sandals website, your credit card, to wherever you go—[*Interruption*]

Mr. Lee: And it goes out of Miami.

Dr. F. Khan:—and it goes out to Miami. Your credit card is gone there. So the money goes to that credit card. You take your flights and you—now sometimes they actually give you flights, but we took our own flights. We landed in the airport. We said where we going to, we are going to Sandals. Bam you went to this line because you are going to Sandals, and they put you in a certain catchment area where the Sandals' bus picks you up. The Sandals' bus. Not the taxi drivers, not anybody else. The Sandals' bus takes you up and drops you in Sandals.

Madam Speaker: Member for Pointe-a-Pierre, the Member for Barataria/San Juan, he does not need any assistance. All right. I would like to hear.

Dr. F. Khan: The Sandals' bus picks you up and drops you in Sandals front office where you put your name, address, your telephone number, the works and you put your credit card again.

You spend all your time in Sandals for the three days or four days, how long you stay there. You have in that area, you have jewellery, food, clothes—you name it, everything. Even if you have to go on a tour, you have to go through the tour or the concierge. If you try to go to one of the guys outside, you might want to go on a tour, he say "Okay, come" and thing. It is cheaper. And once you tell the Sandals you are going this place, "they carry on".

8.45 p.m.

In that place, you have only Jamaican liquor and everything that comes out of that place comes from basically Jamaica. Most of the staff are foreign. They have one or two locals from the area. Most of the staff are foreign. "When yuh

finished, they put you back in the Sandals car and they drop you to the airport, Madam Speaker, and you are gone." They keep you so busy in that Sandals area that you do not go outside, you do not see the country unless you really, really push to go and do it. So if you think Sandals is going to be bringing jobs and giving the taxi people of Tobago, you have another thought coming and you have been warned now. [*Desk thumping*] Mia Mottley said the same thing as well as I think it was Gaston Brown or one of them. Same thing. They said the same thing about the Sandals, but we are looking at Sandals as the be all or end all of Tobago.

We have Magdalena Grand in Tobago, Madam Speaker. Magdalena Grand is an excellent, nice institute, very nice. That is going to die. Coco Reef is nice. However, the Government owns Magdalena Grand. I always wondered—in fact, I brought it up in Cabinet when I was there. Magdalena Grand is ideal for two things: a time sharing approach as well as a high-level rehab centre for women and men. You will be able to get the tourism product at a different level. Tobago has also been fitted—because of the Scarborough Hospital which we opened and I put an MRI/CT scan, et cetera. That was for an offshore medical school for clinical studies in that area to have educational tourism.

You see, Madam Speaker, tourism is not just sun, sand, sea. It is educational tourism, ecotourism—all types of tourism. Everything you could think about, Madam Speaker. So when you look at tourism in Tobago, you look at the whole aspect of tourism in Tobago. But I will say to you, Madam Speaker, if you are going to do tourism in Tobago, you have to do better with your airlift, your sea bridge, your attitude of the people towards people and also the attitude of the entrance and exit of what—security, et cetera. It is the only place—I have travelled to London, Europe. Tobago is the only place "make yuh take off everything, yuh chain and yuh watch". I mean, it is crazy when you are going

through that system. You think to God that you are going to go to a country that—

[*Interruption*]

Mr. Lee: Baghdad.

Dr. F. Khan: Yeah or something. Madam Speaker, I am saying this because if you are going to build your tourism product, we could stand up in this House and we could say nice things about nice things. We could say it nice, we could sound nice but the reality is that if you do not look at the reality, you are not aware of the reality, "yuh cyah fix the reality, yuh cyah fix it". Because you will be telling everybody how great it is, come to this place, come to that place and at the end of the day, when a tourist comes in there and they see the horror story that they get from service attitude as well as the product itself needs to be upgraded. We have to do better. So I mean, people will say I am not patriotic but I am giving you the facts as it is and at the end of the day, if you do not deal with it, you are not going to go anywhere. Imagine we have to build a building for Sandals. We have to build the hotel. I mean, use Magdalena, give Sandals Magdalena and say "run it". [*Laughter*] Madam Speaker, it is sad.

Now, the Minister of Finance has indicated that he is going to give the Crime Stoppers $100,000 for people that are going to, "as yuh say", bring information to catch criminals. Madam Speaker, that is laughable. I will tell you why it is laughable. It is nice, nice idea, nice talk. Who in this country will be bringing information to Crime Stoppers when "somebody hear is them, kill them"? Madam Speaker, that is the reality. It is the reality. Why do you not give the police the $100,000 to bring them in? "Dais wah yuh should do. Yuh should give the police and say every criminal yuh bring in, yuh get $10,000. Yuh might get more that way. Yuh not gonna get any from Crime Stoppers." And it sounds nice, Madam Speaker, that we are going to give Crime Stoppers $100,000 and they are

going to bring in this, they are going to bring in that, they are going to bring this. Madam Speaker, "yuh not even gonna geh one criminal from that", because people in this country, they are afraid to even say what they see or what they hear because they are going to be killed, and at the end of the day, nobody is going to be detected, nobody is being caught. So we have to spruce up our detect—

Madam Speaker: Member for Barataria/San Juan, your original time is now spent, you are entitled to 10 more minutes to complete your contribution, if you wish.

Dr. F. Khan: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, the reality is and recently, it has been alleged, a young man was sitting in a bar in Penal and somebody just walked up and shot him because "they say" he was the witness to a crime. So Witness Protection Programme, in this country, needs to be updated.

The other thing, too, bush fires. Bush fires, Madam Speaker, $5,000? For setting a bush fire in this country, you should charge them $100,000, not $5,000. At the end of the day, Madam Speaker, I see the whole of Lady Young Road, the whole of Hololo and Cascade, I looked at all the bush fires that have taken place and now there are houses and squatters in that area and this has been going down for years. I remember Eden Shand, in the NAR Government, told the population that if you continue burning down the hills, you are going to pay for it on the plains. You are going to get flooding on the plains. Everybody laughed at Eden Shand. He was an environmentalist and he said that, I think he said it here. And as a result of that, the run off that is occurring now and the flooding that is taking place is the result of the destruction of the hills. So if you are going to put a tax on somebody, put a proper tax. If somebody burns down something, let them pay for it. In Singapore, if you walk in with drugs, as the Member for Chaguanas East had told me, the first thing they ask you, if you walk in with drugs, you are not going to

see your family again and there are no drugs in Singapore. So what I am saying to you, if you want to stop the burning in this country and the destruction of the hills, put a premium penalty on it.

Madam Speaker, I just want to touch on one small thing, again. I just want to talk about one other thing. The Minister of Finance has said that he is going to have an HDC fund and people will put money into the HDC fund. They will be first in line to get a house or whatever it is and they could put some of that money into whatever it is. It is a laudable idea. This weekend, I was driving on the Lady Young Road and I saw a backhoe and a truck and they are cleaning out parts of Lady Young Road to squat. And you know it dawned on me, why would the young people be so stupid to put money into a fund when they could go and take land for free in Trinidad and Tobago? Because people are taking it for free and they are getting squatters' certificates. They are getting everything this way eventually and these people, with the backhoe, were cleaning Lady Young Road, and I saw it today. Cars are there now. They are going to put up a structure and the whole of Lady Young Road is new structures, new squatters, new everything. It has happened in Valencia, it is happening all over.

And I am asking myself: How do you tell a young person that you have to pay one point something or $2 million or how much million dollars for land when people in this country are just taking it with no penalties? If this happened in Bahamas, within two days, "police come after yuh and deal with yuh, yuh know". In this country, you get certificates of comfort; you get squatter regularization. So, I am telling the young people in this country, you might as well go and squat because you will eventually get a lot of land anyway and at the end of the day—

Madam Speaker, last budget debate, I spoke about the decriminalization of marijuana. My good friend, the Attorney General, "tell meh why ah didnt do it". I

am so glad that he has now decided to do it and to go ahead and listen to the plans for decriminalization of marijuana. That and all is another tourist industry we could use, the recreational marijuana industry and the medical marijuana.

Madam Speaker, I just want to say something. I was reading on today's papers or I think it was yesterday's papers where some Colombian women were held for pimping; human trafficking. Young girls. They were given the assurance that they were coming to Trinidad for jobs. And I realized that the young people and the people who are being trafficked as prostitutes in this country, they are afraid to go to the police because the police will hold them for prostitution. I am making a call now and in fact, it is going on through the United Nations, et cetera, for the decriminalization of prostitution in order to decrease the human trafficking and allow those people who are being trafficked, as well as prostitutes, to be able to go to the police. [*Laughter*] "They will laugh."

I remember, Madam Speaker—and I see the Minister of Finance laughing—2002, when I said in the Red House, I was in the Opposition at the time, that it is time we start to train and teach our children Mandarin and Hindi. The Minister of Finance, the Member for Diego Martin North/East, you know what he said? "Why yuh doh talk to Yetming, he on your side there" and he laughed. Look at it today, everybody learning Mandarin and Hindi. I am saying to you, Madam Speaker, I am calling for the decriminalization of prostitution to stop human trafficking. It is important that we go that way and think about it and start the conversation.

Madam Speaker, with those few words, I want to thank you. [*Desk thumping*]

The Minister of State in the Ministry of Education (Hon. Dr. Lovell Francis): Madam Speaker, good evening. Good evening to the House, Members on both sides. It is a privilege and a pleasure and an honour to stand and contribute on the

fourth budget presentation in the House. Madam Speaker, speaking at this time, on the second day of the budget, is an unusual circumstance for me. It has been my experience thus far to either open the bowling or the batting, depending on your perspective, or to come first change. But there is concern on this side of my overexposure to hazardous material so I have been allowed to not go first up this year. And because of that, I had the dubious experience of sitting in my seat as opposed to standing on my feet right after and listening to the contribution of the Leader of the Opposition.

And whereas I noted on the Friday of the budget contribution that the leader was taking notes and that might somehow foreshadow that we would, for the first time in four years, hear a different speech, something different that was actually consistent with what was presented by the Minister of Finance, we were once again to be disappointed. What we heard instead was a redux, a rehash of what we have heard before. Another attempt to defend the indefensible. Another attempt to talk about achievements we have neither seen nor experienced. Another attempt to present the tenure from 2010 to 2015 in a light that none of us who lived here experienced. Even Benjai would have been fed up at the end of that presentation. Madam Speaker, and it, of course, has set a trend where every Member on that side will stand and say that that fumbling, slurred, barely coherent speech from a prepared text was a fantastic speech, but one understands that the nature of politics leads one to say what is expected of one depending on the side that you sit. So that is perfectly understandable.

Madam Speaker, it is very easy for me to stand here and to give kudos to the Minister of Finance, the Minister of Planning and Development [*Desk thumping*] and the Prime Minister for, on the first part, the presentation of an astute budget; in the case of the Prime Minister for his very frank and very straightforward brand of

leadership that has steered us through, to use an overused cliché, very troubled waters. Madam Speaker, and I could go on editorializing but time does not permit me. So I will instead focus on what I have really come here to do which is to give an account of what has been happening in the constituency of Moruga/Tableland for the last year and to project as to what will come in the future.

Madam Speaker, there is an overused cliché in history which says that history goes in cycles so that this event that happens in this generation is the same as that event that happens after because somehow history is cyclical. No serious historian actually accepts that but sometimes you have to wonder. Madam Speaker, I stood in this House three years ago and I talked about the fact that my constituency office had been given to a school because of circumstances within which a school collapsed and there was literally nowhere else in the constituency to house the students. Three years later and it is not only ironic, I find myself in the same circumstance where once again, my constituency office is now, once again, the venue of a school. The circumstances are different because of the earthquake that we faced. One particular school, the Santa Maria RC has nowhere else to be decanted and I have decided to have them housed in my constituency office because the alternative is to have children home for an entire term until we can make repairs and for me, that is unthinkable and untenable. So those students are now housed in my office.

And whereas, Madam Speaker, just that capsule might give you a sense that as the world turns and as circumstances stand, nothing has changed in Moruga/Tableland, there has already been ample evidence presented by other Members of the Government that nothing could be further from the truth. In fact, I can stand here with great confidence with substantial evidence that that constituency, perhaps the "poster child" for a constituency that has a history of

being undeveloped, is going through a transformation of the likes it has never seen before and I will go through an explanation of it relatively quickly.

Madam Speaker, I have stood in this House on numerous occasions and talked about situations that, in other constituencies, would be mundane, would not be worthy of consideration in a discourse like this, and made the case that because of the history of Moruga/Tableland and because of the extant circumstances there, that what might appear mundane somewhere else is of tremendous importance there. And the easiest and the most straightforward place to start is discussing the road situation throughout the entire constituency.

Now, put very simply, the soils, in that constituency, in my constituency, tend generally to be heavy clays. They have a high water absorption capacity; tends to get very, very waterlogged, tends to be very, very prone to slippage, tends to have, because of that, judging the landscape, a great number of landslips, Mr. Deputy Speaker, as we welcome you to the Chair.

[MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

That circumstance, Mr. Deputy Speaker, makes road construction a very, very perilous and very costly thing and because of that and because of the aforementioned history of, if you want to call it neglect or underdevelopment, the road situation throughout the entire constituency has not historically or traditionally been what we would want to or would like to accept in our nation of relative well.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I am pleased to state that there are two major thoroughfares that run through the constituency that I represent. One is the Naparima Mayaro Road that I share with the Member for Mayaro, the other is the Moruga Road. And whereas there are plans afoot to do some major upgrading of the Naparima Mayaro Road, I am tremendously pleased to state that at this

moment, the Moruga Road, historically and traditionally one of the worst major roads in the nation, is going through a significant upgrade. Now, that is very important. It has been the recent history of this nation that we only expend significant sums on infrastructure work, particularly road works, when there are elections around the corner. So the more cynical amongst us will expect that in 2019 or 2020, with a local government election around the corner and then 2020 with a general election around the corner, that there would be a haste, a speed to focus on doing a major road upgrade. The Moruga Road is undergoing a significant upgrade without a whiff of an election in the air and for that— [*Desk thumping*] Despite the airy-fairy hopes of the Opposition, Mr. Deputy Speaker, the road is being ungraded without a whiff of an election in the area. It has been ongoing for a year.

And as someone who is my own constituent because I live in the constituency, meaning the material circumstances of the people I represent are my material circumstances, this is a very profound and a very important thing. And I will contend that kudos must be extended to the Minister of Works and Transport, the Ministry of Works and Transport, the PURE Division of the Ministry of Works and Transport for doing what is a monumental and very difficult job and doing it in a manner that makes sense. What do I mean by that, Mr. Deputy Speaker? The bane of all the roads in my constituency and I see the Member for Tabaquite looking at me because he should have some knowledge of this. The bane of the roads in my constituency, the constituency that I represent, is water. When you have heavy clay soils, water is insidious, water is dangerous. Water will undermine a road so quickly, you will wonder what has happened.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, there is a road in my constituency that falls under the purview of the Ministry of Works and Transport called the Lengua Road. On this

road, a WASA line burst a number of months ago. It was not visible to the eye and water was undermining. What was once a very smooth road, well maintained on a hill, is now a landslip so large that if you did not know better, you would assume a bomb had dropped on the community. It is such a massive cavern that the Ministry of Works and Transport now has to fix and it will be fixed. But it gives you an understanding of how very dangerous the unchannelled flow of water can be in areas like the ones I represent.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, there has been a concerted effort not just to begin the simplest thing, which is to fix a road, not pave but fundamentally fix, meaning you alter and improve the service. There has been a concerted effort to look at the many landslips that dot the landscape. There are a number of them, a number of contractors. There has been a concerted effort to look at the drainage. There has been, more significantly, a concerted effort to look at some of the retrograde bridges that dot the landscape. On that main road which is the main thoroughfare, we still have bridges that are so narrow, they only allow a single vehicle to pass at a time.

I am pleased to also say that not only has there been a focus on the roads and the landslips which one expects, there has also been a focus on upgrading the bridges. So much so, I could add a very interesting historical anecdote. There is a community very close to the end of Moruga called La Lune where I remember vaguely, as a child, there was a scandal about a bridge being built there, maybe late '70s, '80s. There was a bridge built in La Lune very close to the La Lune Savannah. It literally took a generation to build but that was not the interesting thing.

The interesting thing is that at the end of the process, after all that time that was utilized to build this bridge, which really ought not to have been, it was a very

simple bridge, not too much distance, when they checked the manifest of the materials that were ordered to construct the bridge, they found interestingly—you might remember this, Member for Tabaquite—sliding doors in the manifest and it became a cause célèbre, it became a scandal. Flash forward 2018, we have built a larger bridge in the same community, it only took a few months, no sliding doors anywhere. Total upgrade without the headaches of the past.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I have made the point before and I will reiterate. If you live in Moruga, you are from Moruga, you have become so habituated to having bad roads that you accept it almost as a norm. We have come to the point in our history now, as a community, as a constituency, both in Moruga and in Tableland, where the kinds of roads that we have been habituated to are no longer acceptable. I am pleased and proud to be part of a Government that has made a concerted effort on one hand to ensure a real thing called rural development in general but more significantly, that is making an effort to fundamentally improve the roads throughout the constituency. It is a significant task. There are many, many roads that require upgrade, the majority of which fall under the regional corporation which presents issues I will not get into here.

But suffice it to say that the upgrade of the Moruga Road is not an anomaly. There are other roads that need significant work. I have already mentioned Lengua Road that massive landslide. The Penal Rock Road, which traditionally connects Moruga to Penal, needs significant upgrade and I have already spoken with the Minister of Works in terms of adding that road to the work schedule. There are many secondary roads that the Ministry of Rural Development and Local Government might have to intercede to help but it is our intention. We may not be able to fix all of them immediately but to significantly upgrade the road services in the constituency and you will have a very, very grateful and very, very thankful

and very, very happy populace in that constituency at the end of that process and it is ongoing.

Another mundane issue I could add, I could talk about is the water situation. Many Members in this House might live in areas where it is normal to have water every single day and it is not something you think about. It is only a thing when there is a disruption. It is very different to live in a constituency where, as I have mentioned before, for one half of the year, what used to be known traditionally as the dry season, you would have severe water difficulties. I have lived that for most of my 40 years of life. And one of the things I made a concerted effort to address, as a Member of Parliament, was that water situation. If a person from Moruga did not do everything possible to alleviate the water situation for the people of Moruga, then that would be a travesty. Any time spent in this profession, any time spent here would have ultimately been wasteful and wasted.

I have made a number of efforts to alleviate the situation and they have been bearing fruits. I sat down with WASA, took us a while and we made a serious structured, organized plan to bring relief and relieve the hardship of the people of Moruga/Tableland in terms of water.

9.15 p.m.

There were a number of circumstances that aided that. There were a number of difficulties that went with it. One of the good things is that Moruga, which is one-half of the constituency, as I have mentioned before, has its own supply of water. It is called the Trinity Dam. It was a water facility that fell under Petrotrin, that was, over time, taken over by WASA and literally was used to supply water to the Moruga half of the constituency. I visited there very early in my tenure and I have recounted here what I saw; a very underdeveloped plant, basically skeleton equipment that was not up to the task of providing water to the constituency.

So, you have the irony of a large body of water in the constituency, but because of the infrastructure there, people were fortunate to receive water on schedule just once a week. My first pass, my first step, was to make sure that regardless of whatever circumstances existed, we would try our very best to ensure there would be a strict adherence by WASA to the schedule, so that whatever village is supposed to receive water once a week, you would get that water on that day, you could plan your life. Literally, every house in the constituency is a tank farm, so people have adjusted to that situation. But that was not good enough. That was simply the first pass. The real intention is to get a decent and regular supply of water.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, the circumstances in this constituency, in most of the villages, are this. They are not happy. They are reasonably satisfied with a reliable supply of water once or twice a week, but this is 2018. These are human beings. These are people, though they live in a rural constituency, they have no less of a right to have a decent supply of water compared to anyone else in this country. What we are aiming for, what I want to get at, is getting water to them four times a week, five times a week. So that, the idea of not having water becomes a memory, not something you live with every single day.

To that end, we have had to do a number of things. We have had to decide that we are going to have to spend some money to upgrade the plant at Trinity. WASA has already agreed to do it. There were other considerations that have halted part of it, but we have already began the process.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, not to knock my friend, my colleague from Chaguanas West and his grandiose claims of "Water for all" and all of the boasting that went on—[*Member for Chaguanas East enters Chamber*]—and here he is, on cue entering, the hon. Member for Chaguanas West, all of the grandiose claims of

water for all. I have stated before, many communities in this country, including those in my constituency, were not part of that "all". I am not blaming him for that. That was just the existing circumstance. You cannot bring a supply of water to everyone if there are villages or parts of entire villages that have no pipes in the ground and have no chance of getting pipe-borne water.

I am very pleased to report that, as part of our larger scheme to regularize that water situation in the constituency, we have started that process and continue the process of laying pipes, no pun intended, in areas where none existed before. Herrera Trace in Penal Rock Road, there were no pipes in the ground. The pipes are now there. More significant than that, Marac Village, at the very end of Moruga, there are parts of Marac, no pipes in the ground. You cannot have pipe-borne water without pipes. Happy to report that this year, for the first time, we laid pipes in the ground in parts of Marac Village. [*Desk thumping*] All that is required now is for those people to go and pay for their connections and they will have, for the first time in their history, pipe-borne water.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, governance does not matter if it does not change the fundamental life of the citizens, and water is fundamental. And if you bring a pipe- borne supply of water to a community, to a village that never had it before, you have altered their lives. And this PNM Government is altering the lives of the constituents of Moruga/Tableland. [*Desk thumping*]

I am happy and pleased and proud to play a small part in that. And if one thinks that it is only centered on Moruga, it is just part of a larger plan. We have finished in Marac. We are moving on to Sixth Company in the Company Villages. We will knock that off. When we finish that, we are moving to Hindustan, which is closer to Tableland. When we knock that off, we are moving to Corosan in Tableland. All of these communities, no pipe-borne water. It is our intention, as

far as we can, as much as we can, to put the pipes in the ground, to give them connections, to give them that water that is life, that will change their circumstances. And this programme is proceeding. The communities are getting what they have a right to, and it is affecting and changing their communities as we speak, and I will leave the water alone.

In terms of housing, Mr. Deputy Speaker, most MPs here who seriously do their jobs, will say that when constituents come to them the number one demand is housing. And given the circumstances as they are, there are many people who would be described as middle-class, who can no longer afford a house in the open market. I am happy to say that every single Member on my side who has served as the Minister of Housing, my colleague next to me, my friend Randall Mitchell, now my friend from Point Fortin, have all assisted, in terms of getting houses, supplying houses, building houses, ensuring that the people of the constituency have a chance to access a house at a price that they can afford. [*Desk thumping*]

But more than that, there is a project in the constituency, of which we are all very proud, that the nation needs to know about where, in 2015, during the election campaign the now Prime Minister came to walk with me through what could fairly be called one of the most deprived communities in the constituency. And when he saw the level of housing there, he was adamant that we should do something about it and he placed on myself and the then Minister of Housing and Urban Development, hon. Randall Mitchell, the responsibility of drafting a plan, which we did. And in due course, it has borne fruit. And at the end of this year, we will be providing 30 houses [*Desk thumping*] to people who lived in standards of housing that were so abysmal that the Prime Minister concluded that no one in an oil-rich country like this one should have to live in houses like that.

Through an aided self-help programme, we have been not only building

houses, we have been transforming an entire community, adding for them a small community meeting place, adding for them significant and important drainage works that have begun the process of transforming their community in entirety.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I could literally go on all night. I could talk about the hill rice. I could talk about the hill rice that this seemingly, in the minds of the *New York Times*, forgotten product has emerged and what it means for Moruga farmers. I could talk about the agro-processing plant and the fact that it would provide an economic basis for the community that never existed before in a formalized manner. I could talk about the youth facility and the fact that we have all this talent literally walking around all of our communities in all sports—cricket, football, basketball, volleyball, you name it, athletics—that is not being channelled properly, that is not being developed in part because of the lack of facilities.

I could talk about the fact that last year, to paraphrase my colleague from Diego Martin Central, if you sneezed too loudly the place flooded. And this year, because of the work done by the Minister of Works and Transport, in clearing those natural waterways, in building those culverts to have water moving, we have not had a major flood for the year. [*Desk thumping*] I spent half of last year almost up to my neck in water; something that the Member for Mayaro could relate to. This year, not one major flood. [*Crosstalk*] All of this is accomplished by work and I could go on—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Silence.

Hon. Dr. L. Francis:—and on and on. Mr. Deputy Speaker, this is it in a nutshell. I did not get into this profession for my own aggrandizement, financial or otherwise. I came here because I thought I had a chance to serve my people, my community. I still live there. My heart and my hope and my love is there. They said to me: "We will vote for you but we do not want somebody who is going to

become ah-come tuh-visit MP. You have to stay here. You have to live here. You have to invest your time and your life with us. You have be with us through this." And I said yes. I put my hand up and I have held to that bargain. [*Desk thumping*] I still live in Moruga. If you see me here in Port of Spain, I commute here every single

day. When I am finished talking tonight and this House shuts down tonight, I have to commute home. [*Crosstalk*] I am a part of my community. I am invested there.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Members, please.

Hon. Dr. L. Francis: I work hard for them. I will continue to work hard for them. I am pleased and proud to be a part of a Government led by a Prime Minister that cares about rural people and cares about rural development. [*Desk thumping*] Mr. Deputy Speaker, I have lived what it means to have a Government that could not care about you at all. I lived that between 2010 and 2015. I know what that feels like. I know what it looks like and I know what it looks like when you get one that is serious and is doing something.

We have not accomplished all we need to accomplish, but it will come. We have worked hard. We are transforming a community that has been sleeping, that is going to awake and is going to contribute tremendous sums to the continued development of this nation. Mr. Deputy Speaker, I thank you. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Deputy Speaker: I recognize the Member for Couva North. [*Desk thumping*]

Ms. Ramona Ramdial (*Couva North*): Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. First of all, Mr. Deputy Speaker, let me take the pleasure to, first of all, commend the Member for Siparia for bringing a stellar contribution with respect to the response to the Minister of Finance [*Desk thumping*] on behalf of the Opposition. I think what was missing from the Minister of Finance's contribution is where the

Opposition Leader brought that picture of reality, of what is actually existing on the ground at this point in time and the disenchantment and discontentment of the people of Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Deputy Speaker, in this budget, the Minister's fourth budget, the Minister said a lot of things. But on closer inspection we realize that it was a rehash of previous budgets, with nothing new except the increase in gas, super gas, by $1. And as my colleague from Caroni East mentioned this morning, he could have cut his contribution by two hours, come to the House, make that announcement and leave it there.

Mr. Indarsingh: Two hours and 15 minutes.

Ms. R. Ramdial: Yes. Mr. Deputy Speaker, it is no surprise that again, on closer inspection, we have realized the strategy that the Minister of Finance comes with here for every budget debate. First of all, Mr. Deputy Speaker, he likes to blame the previous Government for leaving the Treasury in "fumes", so he likes to say. And after three years in Government, the entire Government side actually believes thatfallacy that he comes to the House with—leaving the Treasury in fumes. And my colleague MP for Mayaro would have stated and would have quoted the Prime Minister's statements in 2015 that showed that that was furthest from the truth. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Deputy Speaker, just to remind the public, again, I want to reiterate as my colleagues, that by August 2015, there was a net foreign reserve of US $10.5 billion. By August 2018, this fell sharply to US $7.6 billion and the source for this data is, of course, the Central Bank of Trinidad and Tobago Data Centre.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, the facts are that the previous administration left 12 months' import cover. Today, that has fallen to seven months. Mr. Deputy Speaker, the facts are the HSF fund had US $5.7 billion in September 2015, [*Desk*

thumping] and today this future-generation fund has around US $6 billion, which grew only as a result of interest payments. This, after they raided the fund by $2.5 billion in May of 2016. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Deputy Speaker, just to remind the public, between 2010 and 2015, the Partnership Government added $8 billion to the Heritage and Stabilisation Fund. [*Desk thumping*] Mr. Deputy Speaker, [*Interruption*] I ask for your protection please from the Member for Port of Spain South.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Member for Port of Spain South, there is a certain decorum that is expected of Members of this House and it is going to be maintained. Right? I would not tolerate from on both sides. I know it is late in the evening but we have the business at hand and I will only recognize at this time the Member for Couva North. So please, keep the tones down, please.

Ms. R. Ramdial: Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. In addition to that, I want to remind the public that between September to December 2015—and the Member of Parliament for Port of Spain South spoke about NGC—they spent $3.5 billion from NGC dividends. [*Desk thumping*] So where did that come from? So they like to sit there, pontificate and accuse us of spending wildly $16 billion of NGC funds but they themselves are guilty of what they accuse us of. And that has been happening for the past three years.

[MADAM SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Madam Speaker, welcome back. Madam Speaker, I also want to state here in the House that the second narrative or the other narrative that they like to come with to the House year after year is that of corruption; the previous Government and corruption.

Madam Speaker, in three years the Member for Port of Spain North/St. Ann's West, the Member for Diego Martin North/East, the Member for San

Fernando West and the Member for Diego Martin West, whether it is in the House or out of the House: "corruption, corruption, the former Government stole X amount of moneys", and after three years, no evidence "tuh jail somebody". Nothing. And what has been happening? The population has read through your story and your strategies. [*Desk thumping*] They have seen it. And do you know what they are telling us now as MPs in the Opposition? They are saying to us: "Look at them, they are the ones who are engaging in corrupted activities now." [*Desk thumping*] "They are the ones engaging in that."

Mr. Al-Rawi: Standing Order 48(6), Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker: I uphold your objection. Member for Couva North, I would like you to retract that and please continue.

Ms. R. Ramdial: Madam Speaker, I retract, but I am going to say something here as this point in time. Within the constituency of Couva North, there is a large farming community, huge farming community, hundreds of acres of land, under the control of EMBD, under the control of Caroni (1975) Limited, and also under the control of the Commissioner of State Lands.

And as I said before, karma is a serious thing and a true thing, and the farmers from within the constituency of Couva North approached me not too long ago, and they said to me—and I want the Member for Port of Spain North/St. Ann's West to listen carefully. They said to me: "MP, there is a cartel of large farmers moving through the constituency and illegally grabbing lands and farming on them, to the detriment of registered farmers who cannot, who have applied and cannot get the land to farm on."

And I want them tonight to know that it is one of their own. It is alleged, Madam Speaker.

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: Madam Speaker, Standing Order 48(6). Give us evidence.

Madam Speaker: Again, I will uphold the objection. I ask you to withdraw that. I am sure that you can find another way to bring across your point.

Ms. R. Ramdial: Madam Speaker, it is someone that they know. [*Crosstalk*] "Hold on nah. Gih meh ah chance. Give meh ah chance." You had your time, Member. [*Crosstalk*]

Ms. Mc Donald: What we know?

Madam Speaker: Members, I know it is late, but we have our business to get on with. First of all, Member for Couva North, I had asked to retract what you said. You have not done so. I then said to you, you could retract and find a better way to put across your point. So I want you to retract first and then find your better way.

Ms. R. Ramdial: Madam Speaker, I retract. But we all know the individual. We know the individual. [*Interruption*] Yes, we will get back to that story at a later date. But, Madam Speaker, my point that I am making is that—[*Crosstalk*]—hold on. Madam Speaker, I ask for your protection, please. The Member for Moruga is disturbing me.

Madam Speaker: I do not think the Member for Moruga/Tableland really intends to disturb you. I think at this hour there is a general sort of trend where people are restless and, therefore, I would give you my protection. I would ask all Members to be more temperate at this time of the night. I want to hear the Member for Couva North. Please continue. [*Desk thumping*]

Ms. R. Ramdial: So, Madam Speaker, to cut a long story short, within the constituency of Couva North, we have viable agricultural lands that are illegally being taken by a cartel of farmers and these farmers are, of course, sidelining the legitimate registered farmers by squatting on these lands and cultivating them. And they have come to my office, as Member of Parliament. They have come to my office complaining about this cartel of farmers who are moving around and

probably, not probably but I am certain, Madam Speaker that it is not just within the constituency of Couva North and I will highlight the areas that they have complained to me about: the Felicity area. There is an area called the Coconut. That land is under the control of EMBD. It has not been earmarked for anything. And those lands are being cultivated by these illegal farmers who are not registered for that area to go on and to cultivate.

There is another location, Madam Speaker, and it is right also in Felicity and it was earmarked. Those lands were once earmarked for an army base. Probably the Minister of National Security can clarify later when he speaks, whether or not that plan is still in train to have an army base. But those lands there in Felicity, they are also being illegally occupied by this cartel of farmers and being farmed on.

Factory Road, Madam Speaker, that falls in my constituency, those lands, hundreds of acres of lands, are also being taken illegally by this cartel of farmers. And apparently they are not afraid of authority. They are not afraid of the authorities. Somehow they have an assurance, maybe so, maybe not, that they can go on to these lands and farm without legitimate documentation giving them authorization to do that. Probably it is one of their friends, who knows?

Madam Speaker, this is something that is very serious. The farmers from within the constituency are very annoyed. They feel as though they do not have an avenue to complain. Because when they go to the agricultural offices, there is one located right next to my constituency office, when they go there, they are not given the ear by the officials there at that office, the agricultural office in Chase Village. And in addition to that, Madam Speaker, when they go to their respective persons, there are sitting Government Senators who live within the central constituency, who live in the Felicity area and they themselves are unable to help. But who

knows? They themselves might be in on it. We do not know. [*Crosstalk*]

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: Madam Speaker, Standing Order 48(6).

Ms. Mc Donald: Couva North, Couva North.

Madam Speaker: Member for Couva North, it seems that you have a certain penchant to make the point in a particular way, and again I caution you. This would be the third time. So, again, retract. As I said, you are seasoned. You can find another way to bring across your point. So retract and please carry on.

Ms. R. Ramdial: Thank you, Madam Speaker, I think I have made my point and I retract. Thank you very much. So, Madam Speaker, that is one of the issues hampering the farmers from within the constituency. And since we are on the constituency issues, I will delve into some other issues that are affecting my constituents.

Madam Speaker, the economic activity within the constituency comprises of farming, fishing, industrialization and business activity within the constituency of Couva North. We have parts of Point Lisas that fall within the constituency. And we would have had a terrible fallout a couple years ago, well not a couple years, about two years ago, with the closure of the steel plant ArcelorMittal, where we had hundreds of workers going on to the breadline and, of course, those workers lived, most of them, surrounding the Point Lisas Industrial Estate. So they would have had to find alternative employment, and we know how that story goes. So, from day one, under this regime led by Dr. Keith Rowley, we have been seeing mass unemployment occurring, and it is affecting constituents, all constituents across the board.

Madam Speaker, the fishing community of Couva North: I have written. I have spoken to Minister of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries a number of times about the fishing villages within the constituency, that of Orange Valley, that of

Carli Bay and just a couple weeks ago there was flooding in the constituency that eroded the Carli Bay road that leads to the fishing area on that beach. Before that, not too long ago, the Minister of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries would have visited at a function where we met and I showed to him what needed to be done, with respect to road infrastructure. So at this point in time, Madam Speaker, that entire road has been completely eroded, gone with the floods, and I am awaiting, because the Minister of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries has assured me that he will speak to the Minister of Works and Infrastructure to get that road rehabilitated.

But, Madam Speaker, my point is, these constituents depend on going out to fish on a daily basis. So what they have to do at this point in time is go to Orange Valley, which is far, and they have to launch from Orange Valley to go out fishing because they cannot use the Carli Bay fishing area, because the road no longer exists. So that is a serious problem that we need to rectify and, therefore, I make that appeal to the Minister of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries.

Now, Madam Speaker, with the impending or the ongoing shutdown of Petrotrin, well today, I must say that I was very heartened about the ruling at the Industrial Court. [*Crosstalk*] It is not. I was very heartened by the ruling of the Industrial Court and, therefore, I think the workers now have an avenue and they are further inspired by this judgment to continue to fight for their jobs at Petrotrin. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker, it is not a joke and it is no laughing matter. You know, a famous politician not too long ago said that what the country needed was new politics. I want to disagree a little bit with that and say what the country needs is serious politics. That is what we need. Because I cannot understand or fathom, from where I sit, what will, of course-—and no matter what excuses they come with and whatever so-called facts that they come with—that would encourage a

government, a sitting Government, to shut down a refinery employing thousands of workers, and it is not just UNC supporters, or PNM supporters. Let us take the politics out of it. At the end of the day, they are all citizens of Trinidad and Tobago and there has been no clear case or no clear argument as to what is going to happen after. What are we going to do with these workers?

I heard the Prime Minister not too long ago, at a political meeting speaking about healthy and handsome packages that would be given to these workers. Madam Speaker, I want to tell you something, I have family working at Petrotrin and they have been there for quite a number of years and when they compute and calculate what they are going to be going home with, it is next to nothing. That would not even last or sustain their families for a year, much less six months.

9.45 p.m.

So I think that they have really done a serious con job on the population into believing—[*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker: Member, I would ask you to find another word. Withdraw that word and just find another word, please.

Ms. R. Ramdial: Madam Speaker, I retract that word, and I said that they have really done a number on the population of Trinidad and Tobago—thank you, Member for Pointe-a-Pierre—with respect to really deflecting, deflecting from the true nature of the facts and drilling down deep into the details as to these packages for the workers.

And tonight—and everybody knows this, I have been highly critical of the OWTU leader, Ancil Roget; I have been highly critical of him, when we were in government and even after, to a certain extent. But I must say tonight, Madam Speaker, that he is giving his all in representing the workers of Petrotrin and trying to save the jobs of thousands of workers. [*Desk thumping*] He is giving his all and

I respect him for that. Because it is not about him, it is not about the Prime Minister, it is not about the Prime Minister, it is not about the Opposition Leader, it is about the workers of Petrotrin who are going to be deeply affected.

And I speak so strongly about it, because I have family who are directly impacted upon by what is taking place in Petrotrin, family, friends, everybody knows somebody who is working in Petrotrin—

Ms. Mc Donald: Not me.

Ms. R. Ramdial:—everybody. [*Crosstalk*] So, Madam Speaker, I just wanted to put that on the table and to say to the population of Trinidad and Tobago—because, Madam Speaker, they have a strategy. They like to sensitize the public, and bring a case against what is happening. They spoke about $45,000 overtime for workers, for janitors at Petrotrin and all of that kind of—a carpenter making $45,000 overtime and all of that.

Madam Speaker, that is not true. They have demonized the working population at Petrotrin. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Al-Rawi: That is not true?

Ms. R. Ramdial: That is not true. No, you should not talk AG.

Madam Speaker: Member for Couva North, you direct your contribution this way, I am sure you can rise above the crosstalk, please.

Ms. R. Ramdial: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, I understand the AG's position and the issue of collective responsibility. So, I will not take him on too much.

So, Madam Speaker, what I am saying at the end of the day is that as the Opposition Leader said, we would not have gone down that road of shutting down the refinery. There are alternative plans in place. There would have been—I am sure that something else could have been done. The OWTU leader himself said

that the problem at Petrotrin was not the workers, it was the middle managers and the top managers and the big pay packages that they were making. The contractors, the outsourcing of work by outside contractors, the bad decisions by Malcolm Jones and World GTL—[*Desk thumping*]—those are the issues that the Government should have gone after, and try to fix. You had three years, you come in 2018 because you realize you have two more years to a general election you are not going to do anything about Petrotrin even though you cannot do anything really, at this point in time to restructure effectively. So hear what the best plan, let us just shut down the entire operations and start over again.

Madam Speaker, Dr. Eric Williams must be rolling in his grave at this point in time, because his vision was all about investing in state enterprises. He believed in nationalization, not privatization, Madam Speaker. [*Crosstalk*] Nationalization and what this PNM Government has done. [*Crosstalk*]

Madam Speaker: Member for Port of Spain South, please let this be the last time that I have to stand and caution you. Again, as I said, if it is difficult for you to control yourself, you are invited, you could take a little walk and return. We will gladly welcome you back, but please maintain the decorum of the House. Member for Couva North.

Ms. R. Ramdial: Thank you, Madam Speaker. They do not like to hear the truth, you know, that is why they mumble so much. They do not like to hear the truth. [*Desk thumping*]

So, Madam Speaker, all of these persons who have knowledge, who have institutional knowledge, who have been there for years in the oil and gas sector have come out and said, categorically so, that there was no need to shut down the refinery operations; that there are alternative plans and measures that could have been instituted to save the jobs of all of these workers. And not just the direct jobs

within the refinery, but also the business community that surrounds Pointe-a-Pierre, Marabella—my good friend from Pointe-a-Pierre, the fallout with business community in Marabella and—[*Crosstalk*]—environs.

So, Madam Speaker, this was a bad decision by Dr. Rowley, seriously and by the board, sorry, of Petrotrin.

Hon. Member: He too, he too.

Ms. R. Ramdial: Well, yes. Because he is supporting it. So, Madam Speaker, my question is tonight, what is going to be the legacy of Dr. Rowley? What really is going to be the legacy of our Prime Minister?

Hon. Member: The Red House.

Ms. R. Ramdial: After three years, there is nothing to show in the area of national development as 99 per cent of Government projects being opened and re-opened are from the previous government. [*Desk thumping*] The dry docking port in La Brea that the Member of Parliament spoke about, that happened under us. All of the gas initiatives, oil and gas initiatives happened under us. I mean, I do not have to repeat, my colleagues said it.

But at the end of the day, Madam Speaker, it is important, that as a leader and as our Prime Minister, people are not going to remember him for probably whatever is going to happen within the next two years. They are not going to remember him for Sandals. You know what they are going to remember Dr. Rowley for, Madam Speaker? Because this has impacted an entire nation, the shutdown of the Petrotrin refinery. [*Desk thumping*] The shutdown of something that, as my colleague from Mayaro has said, it is part of our culture. Trinidad and Tobago is associated to a vibrant, viable oil and gas sector.

Hon. Member: Like Royal Castle.

Ms. R. Ramdial: Madam Speaker, so these—as well as again as I said before, the

ongoing shutdown of the refinery also impacts heavily on my constituency, and as I said, we all know somebody who works at Petrotrin. [*Crosstalk*] The Member for Moruga/Tableland, you know, Madam Speaker, the Member for Moruga/Tableland gave his contribution and I am quite surprised as a former lecturer he never takes up all his time. So I really do not understand what he is bugging me about. [*Crosstalk*]

Madam Speaker, in addition to that—so I spoke about the fishing industry, within the constituency, I spoke about the constituency issues. There is also a need for regular maintenance of our natural water courses, our rivers, and our drains. The Minister of Works and Infrastructure has many letters from me, Madam Speaker, I do not need to go into that in detail. What I can safely say, is that there have been little work with respect to clearing of rivers, but again, you need to clear the entire length of the river to really alleviate that problem of flooding.

There are other works to be done, and therefore I hope that in the new fiscal year—because I heard the Member for Moruga/Tableland, all of the Government MPs who have already spoken, talked about all the work that they are getting in their constituency, and all I have to say is that when we were in government, we helped them out, we gave resources—[*Laughter*] No, no, no, Madam Speaker—

Madam Speaker: Member for Moruga/Tableland, while the Member for Couva North might be entertaining you, I just want you to remember the sort of forum we are in. Right? So that the loud outburst like that will not be tolerated.

Ms. R. Ramdial: Thank you, Madam Speaker. You know, Madam Speaker, they do not know what I am speaking about because they are all, most of them are all first time MPs. So when we were in government, there were 12 of them on this side as former PNM MPs and we would have collaborated and cooperated and assisted with resources—[*Crosstalk*]—in different constituencies, and the Member

for Oropouche East can tell the Member for Port of Spain South exactly how he helped her.

Ms. Mc Donald: Hello.

Madam Speaker: Member for Port of Spain South, Member for Port of Spain South! I am on my legs, and you are too seasoned in this not to understand banter and to be able to tolerate it, all right. Members, it is late, okay, and again if I have to rise again for these kinds of outbursts, I am going to exercise my authority.

Ms. R. Ramdial: Thank you, Madam Speaker. [*Desk thumping*] So, Madam Speaker, what I am saying is that what we have seen on this side, especially after or during this budget debate, is that the PNM-held constituencies are getting everything. They are getting all of the resources. I am not, how to put it, I am not annoyed because of that, but what I am annoyed about, Madam Speaker, show some equality, show some fairness—[*Desk thumping*] send some this way to the UNC constituencies, give us a little bit—I mean, five years we were in government, yes. But five years is not enough to do everything. We had a programme of works, we had a Minister who brought a budget and spoke about projects in different areas, different constituencies. But, Madam Speaker, the reality is, the constituents in the UNC-held constituencies are being discriminated against by this Government. [*Desk thumping*]

And I am sure my other colleagues will speak about—

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: Madam Speaker, Standing Order 48(6).

Madam Speaker: Member, I will allow you to continue.

Ms. R. Ramdial: Thank you, Madam Speaker. And again, I will give an example. A simple facility like the CEPEP workers and the CEPEP programme. There are no contractors in any of the UNC-held constituencies. [*Desk thumping*] So where we would have depended on these contractors to assist local government and the

councillors and the regional corporations with respect to helping with the cutting of grass on playgrounds, along the side. Schools, assisting schools, because we know that within the local government environment, and the boroughs and the corporations, that there is a shortage of resources there, that is why we have CEPEP and sometimes URP aiding the Local government bodies to get work done. There is a total and virtual absence of CEPEP contractors within UNC-held constituencies and, Madam Speaker, I want to say during our tenure as a former government there were CEPEP contractors in PNM-held constituencies. [*Desk thumping*] There were.

Hon. Member: Share the love.

Dr. Moonilal: In fact, their MPs were contractors.

Ms. R. Ramdial: Right. Okay, I will not go there. So, Madam Speaker, what I am trying to say as an MP representing constituents, we all know the trials and tribulations that we go through, they were in Opposition also, some of the MPs sitting there they were Opposition Members, the hon. Prime Minister knows about that very well. So, I am just asking for a little bit of equality, a little bit of consideration, not for the MPs, you are not doing me a favour, you are doing the constituents, the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago. You are helping them. If your Prime Minister can speak about a Prime Minister for all, clearly, his Ministers and his MPs are not listening to him. Because it is not happening. [*Crosstalk*]

So, Madam Speaker, I will move on. Let us move onto the Tobago House of Assembly, because I am also responsible for speaking on Tobago matters. Madam Speaker, the recurrent expenditure for the THA amounts to $196 million, an increase for the THA, all right. And I just want to identify some of the funding or finances as to where this is going into with respect to the THA—the PNM-led THA, all right. The Assembly legislation has gotten an overall increase by $89.3

million.

And, Madam Speaker, I just want to flag the Votes that it has gone under; Rent/Lease, Office Accommodation and Storage has increased by 4.8 million; Rent/Lease Vehicles and Equipment increase by 2.7 million; Contract Employment, Madam Speaker, and this is a feature of where the budget estimates are with respect to the THA. For Contract Employment for the Assembly Legislature there is an increase by $12.2 million.

Hon. Members: What!

Ms. R. Ramdial: So here it is we have a Minister of Finance talking about cutting funding for different Ministries here in Trinidad but apparently, Madam Speaker, all of that savings, is going across to the PNM-run THA in Tobago. Because, I will continue. Other Contracted Services, an increase by 3 million; Janitorial Services, an increase by 2 million: Security Services, an increase by $13 million; Festivals, Madam Speaker, [*Crosstalk*] going to the THA for the festivals in Tobago that we have spoken about over and over here in the House, $25 million. In recurrent expenditure for the Tobago Heritage Festival, that has gone up to 20 million; Cultural Programmes, Folk Arts and Festivals, Tobago Traditional Art, 1.5 million, 3 million, 1 million; an increase for vehicles, 25 million. An increase for vehicles, 25 million? [*Crosstalk*] Tobago roads will be congested and packed and polluted with the amount of vehicles you all are going to buy there.

And I will continue, Madam Speaker, under the office of the Chief Secretary, under the office of the Chief Secretary there has been an increase to his office by $7.5 million. [*Crosstalk*] Contract Employment, an increase by 1 million; Fees, an increase by 1.1 million for Promotions, Publicity and Printing. The Public Admin Department under the office of the Chief Secretary for Contract Employment, again we have an increase of .6 million. Security Services, 1

million; Housing Accommodation, 1 million; Vehicles again, Madam Speaker, 1 million. Land Management, Contract Employment under the Land Management Department, 1 million. Listen to this one, Madam Speaker, the Establishment of a Public Service Academy (new project). I want some clarification on this. What is the Establishment of a Public Service Academy, an increase by $5 million, Madam Speaker?

So I am just flagging some of the increases. Because, Madam Speaker, we need to identify hypocrisy when it is due. The Minister of Finance, this is his fourth budget, came in 2015 saying because of corruption, waste and mismanagement, we have to cut, cut, cut, cut spending across the board. But here it is we are seeing in the fourth budget that the Tobago House of Assembly is getting an increase in nearly every area for every secretariat. And that is red flag for me. A $196 million increase to the PNM-run THA. [*Crosstalk*] So I hope Watson Duke is listening. For the secretariat of Finance and Economy, Madam Speaker, again, I want to flag. Contract Employment, Janitorial Services, Security, an increase of $8.3 million just under the secretariat of Finance and Economy. Under Food Production, Forestry and Fisheries. Again Security Services, Contract Employment—Contract Employment under Marine Resources and Fisheries Department, Security Services, an increase by 2.6 million. Under Agriculture, an increase by 4 million, Vehicles—for vehicles under the agricultural secretariat 3 million, Marketing, 1 million, Natural Resources and Forestry, 4.5 million increase. And we go on and on.

Not forgetting, Madam Speaker, during the mid-term review right here in this House, there was a request for an additional 20 million for agricultural access roads, Madam Speaker. And in the budget for the new fiscal year, there is an additional 15 million.

Madam Speaker, in 2017, 44 million was requested plus the 20 million and now another 15 million. Madam Speaker, where is this money going? Are there so many agricultural access roads in Tobago, Tobago East that you need so much money? Or is it that—[*Crosstalk*]—no, but I am in Tobago a lot, quite often. All over Tobago, all over Tobago. [*Crosstalk*] All right. So, Madam Speaker, I want to ask that question for whoever is responding to my contribution. I want a list, name these agricultural access roads because over the span of three years, over $100 million in agricultural access roads—

Hon. Member: Wow.

Ms. R. Ramdial:—does that not pique your interest members?

Hon. Member: Yes, of course.

Ms. R. Ramdial: So we need to know, where are these roads? Pictures, bring evidence. I mean, show us, $100 million for access roads in Tobago, over the span of three years. [*Crosstalk*]

And I move on, Madam Speaker. Under the secretariat for Tourism Culture and Transportation, 20 million increase; Community Development and Enterprise, Development and Labour, an increase by 4.6 million; Health and Wellness Family Development, an increase by 2.6 million; Public Health, Social Services, 2.2 million; Settlement, Urban Renewal and Public Utilities Secretariat, .8 million; Sport and Youth Affairs, .6 million, and under the Youth secretariat .8 million for vehicles, again. [*Crosstalk*] I mean, if you add all of the funding that goes for vehicles for the new fiscal year as I said before, Tobago do not have enough roads for those numbers of vehicles, if you translate it to how many vehicles that can be bought with the funding.

So, Madam Speaker, it is very worrying and concerning, $196.4 million increase to the THA for just recurrent expenditure, because I have not gone into the

development programmes as yet. I have not gone into the Sandals project as yet, also where additional funding, the refurbishment of the airport also. So, those are all additional moneys that could have been put, well I am not speaking about the development programmes, but with respect to recurrent expenditure. Where it is that the Minister of Finance is cutting Ministries here, they are then sending those moneys, those saved finances across to the THA and, Madam Speaker, I really want proper answers with respect to the spending of this increase. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker, with respect to the Tobago revenue stream in fiscal 2017/2018, the tax revenues for Tobago amounted to $214,290,550. The non-tax revenue amounted to about 7.4 million. The Development Programme expenditure under the THA is $231,630,000. So, Madam Speaker, for the Development Programme for the Tobago House of Assembly we have—right so the Development Programme is 231,630,000 and some of these projects for which moneys are being directed to under fishing, well we have a lot going for the fishing industry. Improvement to beaches and landing facilities, land management services, agricultural access roads, as I spoke about before. A lot into the land management area, research and development. We also have tourism, with respect to tourism, Madam, the estimate for 2018/2019 is 13.4 million and there are a number of projects listed for either refurbishment upgrades and it goes on and on.

So, Madam Speaker, my point exactly is, I hope, I really, really hope that the funding that is going across to the THA and I am not speaking about the recurrent expenditure, Madam, because those resources are not reaching out to the people of Tobago. That is my point. It is not reaching out—you have $196 million increase that is going for recurrent expenditure namely for Contract Employment, Janitorial, Vehicles and Security Services. Namely, millions and millions of dollars.

So these resources are not reaching down to the people of Tobago. And this

is so unpatriotic, Madam Speaker, extremely unpatriotic. [*Desk thumping*] because just today we had the maiden voyage of the *Galleons Passage* to Tobago and there was a comment I was reading on a *Newsday* article where one Tobagonian is saying "we want a fast ferry not a donkey", Madam Speaker. And that in itself explains what is going on in Tobago. They have traumatized the people of Tobago after three years, completely traumatized the people of Tobago. And if you are giving an increase in financings and funds to Tobago "doh" give it for recurrent expenditure. Give it for the development programmes that will reach the people on the ground.

So, their priorities are also misguided, you know, Madam Speaker, our constituents will tell us, square pegs in round holes, you cannot put an engineer to run the Ministry of Finance at the end of the day. You see what we get after three years.

Dr. Francis: "And we can't get you to talk sense."

Madam Speaker: Member for Moruga/Tableland, Member for Moruga/ Tableland. That is not parliamentary. All right, so could you please just withdraw that comment that you made to your friends.

Dr. Francis: Madam Speaker, I withdraw.

Madam Speaker: Thank you. Member for Couva North.

Ms. R. Ramdial: Thank you. Madam Speaker, I also want to speak about some issues that over the past year that would touch and concern what is happening with respect to the budget debate on Tobago.

Madam Speaker, I have asked numerous times in this House and also via press releases about the missing $10 million from the THA that was meant for Virgin Atlantic Airways. Madam Speaker, up to this day I have not gotten an answer. We were given information via the press that an audit was being done and

that investigations were ongoing and therefore I want to ask the Minister of National Security here tonight if there has been some update on the ongoing investigations into the missing 10 million. I know that he loves to follow the money so this should be a pet project for him at the end of the day, in terms of finding the perpetrators and, you know, they may say 10 million, you know, no big set of money. But at the end of the day it is taxpayers' dollars that need to be accounted for. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker, another issue that I also want to flag again and I go back to the festivals. We had a JSC that was constituted to deal with Tobago affairs and one of the recommendations coming out of that JSC was, of course, the exorbitant amount of moneys, millions of dollars over the past 10 or 12 years, that have been expended behind Tobago Heritage, Tobago Jazz Festival that has not produced any or generated any sort of revenues for the Tobago people.

So again, it is waste, wastage of moneys and funds under these festivals that bring nothing back. We cannot even say that it helps in bringing an increase in the number of tourists coming to Tobago. Because, the facts show from airplane arrivals and otherwise that there has been a decrease of tourists to the island of Tobago. [*Desk thumping*]

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: Madam Speaker, Standing Order 113. [*Crosstalk*]

Madam Speaker: Just let me ask, this was an enquiry and what?

Ms. R. Ramdial: It was the Tobago House of Assembly and the report was laid in the last Session on it and this was one of the recommendations coming out of that report.

Madam Speaker: So, once the report has been laid the Member can speak of it.

Ms. R. Ramdial: [*Desk thumping*] Thank you, Madam Speaker. So, these are some of the things, you know, the Minister of Finance, waste, corruption and

mismanagement, they say it in and out of Parliament and therefore these festivals, it has been recommended by the JSC that— take the moneys and spend it otherwise or hire a proper company or private operator who can actually generate revenues and make it profitable. Two days ago, Madam Speaker, in the *Guardian* there was an article by the secretariat, Ms. Stewart, about the Tobago Jazz Festival held earlier on this year, ticket sales netted one point—

Madam Speaker: Hon. Member, you original speaking time is now spent. You are entitled to ten more minutes to complete you presentation.

Ms. R. Ramdial: Thank you, Madam Speaker. So, Madam Speaker, as I said before, the tickets sales for Tobago Jazz this year netted a measly, 1.5 or $1.7 million. The cost or the expenditure in hosting the Tobago Jazz Festival was about $12 million this year, Madam Speaker. And, therefore again, Madam Speaker, after three years and everybody talking about it, both in and out of Parliament you are telling me that the Minister of Finance cannot take some good advice for once. [*Desk thumping*]

It is not the Member of Parliament for Couva, it is the JSC, it is Tobago people, and the Tobago stakeholders, those persons within the tourism sector who have a stake and who want to see the Tobago people benefit with generated revenues from viable projects and viable festivals.

So, Madam Speaker, I really think at the end of the day this Government is not serious about people; they have never been people-centered. [*Desk thumping*] They have never been a caring government. [*Desk thumping*] Never, and I do not think they have any time to change or the "Turnaround" that the Minister of Finance spoke about, really Madam Speaker is nothing but a runaround. Nothing but a runaround. The same story year after year after year.

10.15 p.m.

Madam Speaker, and it is quite surprising. I mean, the Tobago stakeholders who speak out on behalf of the Tobago people, they continuously talk—they give ideas, they try to help and assist—and you hear nothing from the THA—from the Executive of the THA, nothing from the Chief Secretary of the THA. Nothing at all. They go silent for a period of time.

Madam Speaker, I also again want to go back to the agricultural access roads and again ask for clarity. The fast ferry issue is another scenario that has traumatized the Tobago people from day one. For three years, there has not been a reliable transportation system between the two islands, and we have spoken about that and that has been aired. [*Crosstalk*]

Madam Speaker: Members for Caroni East and Couva South, I am being disturbed.

Ms. R. Ramdial: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, I want to shift my attention a little bit to tourism. With respect to Trinidad's tourism product, I understand that the Minister of Tourism has a national plan for tourism that is about to be given to the population of Trinidad and Tobago. Madam Speaker, I saw in an article, not too long ago, the Minister of Tourism speaking about niche marketing and about the new tourism development company being given additional funding to do their work on behalf of Trinidad and, of course, the Tobago side of it to also be given additional funding to continue their marketing work.

But, Madam Speaker, I just want to say that the Sandals project—and I want to make it clear and I have said it before—we are not against the Sandals project. What we are against—[*Laughter*] We are not against the Sandals project; I will say it again. What we are against is the manner in which it is being rolled out to

the population of Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*] No transparency, no accountability, no clarification when you ask and, Madam Speaker, it is something that is very worrying to the population of Trinidad and Tobago.

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: Madam Speaker, Standing Order 55(1)(b). I invite you to look at that.

Madam Speaker: Okay. So Member, I will give you some leeway, but I will ask you just to remember that I believe Sandals has been dealt with by quite a number of Members. It was dealt with in a very different way by Barataria/San Juan, [*Laughter*] but before the hon. Member for Barataria/San Juan, the point about Sandals that you are making has been made. All right? So please, I am giving you a little leeway, but please do not dwell on it unless you are coming with a new spin on Sandals.

Ms. R. Ramdial: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Now, in the *Review of the Economy*, Madam Speaker, under the section with tourism, it has been stated, clearly, that there has been a decrease in the number of persons coming to Trinidad and Tobago. There has been a 5.5 per cent decline in airlines arrivals, cruise ship arrivals, yachting arrivals and, of course, the availability of hotels. Madam Speaker, I want to hear from the Minister of Tourism when he speaks, about his plans to increase visitors coming to Trinidad and Tobago. I know that they would have talked about a marketing strategy going out there, but we have not seen—three years after the fact, and after saying that year after year in budget debate—any sort of tangible benefits coming from their marketing strategies.

Madam Speaker, I also want to go back to Tobago to flag that the Tobago Hotels Association, they have been asking, for the past three years, for assistance with respect to their hotels. They have been asking for breaks from the banks, the commercial banks, for those who are on the verge of losing their property and their

hotels, and they have been asking for assistance, and we have asked on behalf of them also, on this side, Madam Speaker, to assist. But I do not think that anything has been done. I am not aware that anything has been done to really assist the hotel association with respect to saving their properties and their hotels.

Madam Speaker, in addition to that, I want to just touch a little bit on the increase in the super gas by $1. Madam Speaker, we all know that any increase in fuel leads to an increase in the cost of living eventually. We are seeing that the taxi associations in Trinidad are saying that they have to increase their taxi fares. Many of them are saying that.

Mr. Hinds: Is it justified?

Ms. R. Ramdial: Madam Speaker, I will ignore Laventille West at this time of the night. [*Crosstalk*] And therefore, Madam Speaker, this is something that—and you know, Madam Speaker, the Minister of Finance went on to his breakfast meetings after the budget debate saying, well, that is it. [*Crosstalk*] There is not going to be any increase—

Madam Speaker: Member for Laventille West, you were doing so remarkably well. [*Laughter*] Please, I want to hold you to the standard that I know you are capable of. Thank you. Member for Couva South.

Ms. R. Ramdial: Thank you, Madam Speaker. So as I wrap up, I want to say that the increase in fuel, the cost of fuel, especially, affects and, of course, impacts upon the cost of living. Everything is going to go up, Madam Speaker. For the past three years, we have been hearing the population speak about increases in food prices, increases in taxi fares. The cost of living is just unbearable, Madam Speaker, and the little bit of, you know, goodies that the Minister of Finance spoke about at the end of his budget debate will not help the lesser fortunate and the vulnerable. It just really will not help the small man. It is not going to happen.

So, therefore, Madam Speaker, as MPs again, we ask for some consideration. We ask for some equity in terms of resources so that we can help our constituents. Madam Speaker, I also want to say, at the end of the day, we do not trust this Government. The people are fed up. The unions are fed up. [*Desk thumping*] Things are now heating up—things are now starting to heat up outside—and even before 2020, the people would send a clear message to this Government that it is time for them to go. I thank you, Madam Speaker. [*Desk thumping*]

ADJOURNMENT

The Minister of Planning and Development (Hon. Camille Robinson-Regis): Madam Speaker, I beg to move that this House do now adjourn to Tuesday the 9th day of October, 2018, at 10.00 a.m. at which time we will continue the debate on the Appropriation Bill.

Question put and agreed to.

House adjourned accordingly.

Adjourned at 10.22 p.m.