

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES*Monday, October 14, 2019*

The House met at 10.00 a.m.

PRAYERS[MADAM SPEAKER *in the Chair*]**LEAVE OF ABSENCE**

Madam Speaker: Hon.Members, I have received communication from the hon. Faris Al-Rawi, MP, Member for San Fernando West, who has requested leave of absence for the period October 14 to 23, 2019. The leave which the Member seeks is granted.

APPROPRIATION (FINANCIAL YEAR 2020) BILL, 2019

[Third Day]

Order read for resuming adjourned debate on question [October 11, 2019]:

That the Bill be now read a second time.

Question again proposed.

The Minister of Health (Hon. Terrence Deyalsingh): [*Desk thumping*] Thank you very much, Madam Speaker, for recognizing me and allowing me the opportunity to join into this very important debate. Madam Speaker, before I get into matters of health I would like to recognize the absolutely tremendous efforts that the Prime Minister, the hon. Dr. Keith Rowley, the Minister of Finance, the hon. Colm Imbert and the Minister of Planning and Development, the hon. Camille Robinson-Regis for their four-year brilliant stewardship of the economy. [*Desk thumping*]

It has not been easy. As the hon. Prime Minister said on many occasions, it is better we take our own medicine than that of any external party. And our own medicine is working. [*Desk thumping*] We have turned the corner but we need to

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continue on a straight and narrow path to make sure that the gains we have made and the sacrifices we have made are not frittered away. We have avoided the IMF with the untold hardships that would come with that. We have avoided devaluation which disproportionately affects the most vulnerable. It has been no easy task meeting the needs of the vulnerable but this budget is absolutely spot on.
[Desk thumping]

This budget will stabilize and stimulate the economy. We have met the needs of the poor; we have met the needs of the daily paid after 30 years, after 30 years in the wilderness *[Desk thumping]* asking for a pensionable benefit. We are meeting the needs and will meet the needs in 2020 of pensioners as their pension will be indexed. That is to be lauded. We have met the needs or will meet the needs of the middle class and their major issue is housing. There is a plethora of housing initiatives which the Minister of Housing and Urban Development will speak to at length. And we have met the needs of the business community, especially small and medium enterprises tackling the thorny issue of VAT. The Minister of Finance, the Minister of Planning and Development and ultimately, the Prime Minister, the people of St. Joseph say thank you, thank you, thank you.
[Desk thumping]

Madam Speaker, before I get into the meat of my debate I want to address something that has been occupying the public's attention since about a week and a half ago, and that has to do with the eight patients whose eyesights have been affected. I "doh" want to say anything more because of the potential for litigation. What I will tell this honourable Chamber and the population through you, Madam Speaker, I found out subsequently that when this news broke to us in July of this year, the Permanent Secretary in the Ministry of Health, and he is to be lauded, already gave instructions for a file to be constructed and that file will be going to

the DPP in short order. And let the DPP take whatever action he has to take.

The other action we are taking at the Ministry of Health is reviewing the awards of tenders to this entity. And I have instructed, and did that in the past, that this entity will not be getting any awards under the new round of awards being awarded. So we have done two things: A file has gone to the DPP for him to look at possible action and the particular company will not be participating in any tenders. I say no more on that because of the potential for litigation.

Madam Speaker, I want to address an untruth told in this Parliament in the dying hours of Friday. We know, Madam Speaker, that there are two political parties in Trinidad and Tobago that are wholly owned subsidiaries of Cambridge Analytica. We know that. Wholly owned subsidiaries of Cambridge Analytica. And the playbook of Cambridge Analytica is to tell an untruth, confuse those without information so that they will believe it. I refer to the contribution where the Member for Cumuto/Manzanilla in her zeal said that, in order to extricate the UNC from the issue in Arouca where that entity got \$7 million from 2010 to 2015, the Member for Cumuto/Manzanilla said, and I quote, that facility was:

“...transferred to the Ministry of Health.”

Madam Speaker, I have checked at the Ministry of Social Development and Family Services, I have checked at the Ministry of Health, it is a patent untruth. [*Desk thumping*] That facility in Arouca is nowhere near any control under the Ministry of Health. What happened, a facility in San Fernando called New Horizons was transferred from the Ministry of Social Development and Family Services to the Ministry of Health. [*Desk thumping*] That is the facility that was transferred. And I will give way to the Member for Cumuto/Manzanilla now to apologize to this country. [*Crosstalk*] But that will not happen and that is the Cambridge Analytica playbook. It is New Horizons, an 80- bed facility that was

transferred to the Ministry of Health from the Ministry of Social Development and Family Services. The Member said she was told this by the Minister. So Minister, you have a job to do. Imagine that. I will leave that there.

Madam Speaker, I want to refer quickly to my friend, the Member for Fyzabad who spoke. He spoke about a backlog of results. Do you know Member for Fyzabad when we came into office we had a backlog of over 4,600 reports to be done under your stewardship? But you will never raise that here. You spoke about four CEOs, you spoke about no chemotherapy, absolute falsehoods, saying that chemotherapy is going to be stopped. I checked, absolute falsehood. But you know what he would not tell us, because I had no intention of going down this road today, but I have to respond to Cambridge Analytica techniques. Why you did not tell us that you employed a person with no relevant background for a senior position and he was charged for embezzlement in a bank, and he was acting CEO under your tenure. Why you do not tell the population that? But you will never tell us that.

Mr. Young: That is how they are. Could lie.

Hon. T. Deyalsingh: Imagine that, imagine that. Why you did not tell us that you as chairman could not find a container, a 40-foot container with a CT scanner lying down for three years that was damaged and you installed it and now I have to take the blame when that CT scanner goes down. He would not tell us that. This is what we inherited in health. So enough of that because I have more important things to talk about.

Madam Speaker, the hon.Member for Siparia spoke about hospital construction, how they built all these hospitals. I am going to, in detail this morning, tell this country, hopefully for the last time about the morass, the mess that we inherited for Arima Hospital, in order of degree of mess. Arima, the least

messy; Point Fortin, messier and Couva, the messiest. Let us start with Arima. Do you know that Arima Hospital was started with no long-term financing in place? It is this administration, this administration that saved the taxpayers millions of dollars by negotiating a loan with Ansa Merchant Bank and that loan was signed off on October 18, 2018, to get better terms and conditions. They were building a hospital out of the Consolidated Fund, taking away money to service this country to build a hospital, the same thing they did with the Point Fortin Highway.

Hon. Member: Correct. Yeah.

Hon. T. Deyalsingh: Seven billion dollars taken from the Consolidated Fund to service this country to build a highway. Every first year accounting business student knows, long-term capital expenditure projects you finance with long-term financing. We had to fix that to get better cash flow for this country. So that is the mess. Let us go to the messier one, Point Fortin.

They boast they build Point Fortin Hospital. Point Fortin Hospital should never, should never have started in this country the way it was started. What we inherited were capped wells, capped wells. The Member for Point Fortin will know that. Let me tell you the mess.

When we came into office there was a government to government arrangement with Austria, where the first project on the MOU was the San Fernando Teaching Hospital. It was on the MOU as a project, no problem. But to do with any other projects under that MOU you have to have the project listed and a framework agreement as a project. My friend started Point Fortin by capping wells, nothing. No financing in place, no agreement. It is this Government that saved that hospital from being financed again from where?—the Consolidated Fund. No loan financing in place. We had to engage in five supplement agreements, execute it to provide for revision of financing arrangements while

local financing arrangements were being put in place with UniCredit. Every time we had to negotiate with the Austrians we had to literally beg them, Prime Minister, to forego interest charges. That is what we had to do. But let me tell you the liability our friends opposite exposed us to. Because under the *FIDIC Yellow Book*, section 16, that contractor could have suspended, could have slowed down and could have terminated. You know that?

Do you know what the liability to the taxpayer would have been if we did not save that to start construction of Point Fortin? The UNC exposed this country to untold possible, untold hundreds of millions of damages to the Austrians. All they did was capped wells, so they never started Point Fortin, they never had it as a project on the MOU, they never had any loan financing. It is this Government in February 2018 got the amendment fixed. It is this Government on October 05, 2017, that UniCredit from Austria submitted the initial draft export facility agreement. It is this Government in June 2018 finally signed off after the Solicitor General looked at it, financing for EUR €81,395,922.40. It is this Government that fixed everything to do with Point Fortin. [*Desk thumping*] It is this Government. You exposed this country to a possible contract cancellation. You exposed this country to liability out of termination, losses and claims. I put that on the record. So I have dealt with the mess, I have dealt with the messier, I will now deal with the messiest one, Couva Hospital.

Madam Speaker, I have in my hands something called a Taking-Over Certificate, prepared by VIKAB Engineering Consultants Limited. But hear the date. The date is 25 July, 2016, after my friends opposite opened the hospital on August 14, 2015, two weeks before a general election and took 1,000 people down there and I will come to that soon. So on July 25, 2016, VIKAB wrote, the Taking-Over Certificate. I want to read the last paragraph of that taken over

certificate:

The works to the Couva Children's Hospital project was completed on 25 July, 2016.

It was a construction site when you took people there to open it. It was a construction site when we got it. And all these calls when we came into office, open the hospital, open the hospital. My friend, the Member for Barataria/San Juan even said open the "D" hospital at one time. I cannot say what the "D" is. You remember that? Open the "D" hospital. Protesting on the highway when we were going to cricket, open the hospital. I must open a construction site and let the State incur liabilities.

When you took people there on August 14, 2015, to win a general election, if that tent had collapsed on top of people and people were injured, do you know the liability this State would have faced for taking people into a construction site? The injuries that would have accrued from that would have exposed the State to millions of dollars in criminal liability. But it gets worse, it gets worse. Do you know what I discovered? That we could not open that facility because according to some structural codes called ASCE 41, we had to do seismic retrofitting. We had to do that. But I had to hear the Opposition when we won the election, open the hospital, open the "D" hospital. We do not do things like that. We do not expose Trinidadians and Tobagonians to criminal liability on a construction site. You cannot take health care workers into a construction site. And that is what this Government did to this country on August 14, 2015.

So, Madam Speaker, when they say they build things, they expose this country to legal liability in Austria and in Trinidad and Tobago courts because of recklessness and electioneering. Let the history and the records of this Parliament reflect that. Once and for all we could done this argument about who build what,

who expose who to what? Those are the facts and I put it on the *Hansard* here this morning.

Madam Speaker, those are my rebuttals to the Member for Siparia, the Member for Fyzabad, the Member for Cumuto/Manzanilla. I had no intention of going down this road this morning but I have to correct the record, have to. Madam Speaker, I now get in to what we have been doing in health and what we intend to do with health moving forward.

Madam Speaker, there was a radio programme many years ago by Dr. Godfrey Francine I believe—

Dr. Francis: On wellness.

Hon. T. Deyalsingh: Sorry.

Dr. Francis: On wellness.

Hon. T. Deyalsingh: On wellness.

Dr. Gopeesingh: Jeffrey Francine.

Hon. T. Deyalsingh: Jeffrey Francine, sorry. And you know if we had listened to him and successive Governments PNM, UNC, NAR, our society will be a healthier society today. What is wellness, Madam Speaker? Please permit me to read into the *Hansard* a definition:

“Wellness is an active process of becoming aware of...making choices toward a healthy and fulfilling life”—making choices. It—“is more than being free from illness, it is a dynamic process of change and growth.”

That is wellness. What we have in Trinidad and Tobago and what we have grown up to is a system where we react to illness but we do not prevent illness. And that is what we have been trying to change.

Madam Speaker, to contextualize and to tell the story of health, what is this health sector ecosystem? We have 10 major hospitals with 3,000 free beds, we

have 98 health centres and seven district health facilities; that is a total of 151 health facilities. Madam Speaker, in this ecosystem we employ: Administrative staff, 1,783; nurses, 5,611; managers, 149, laboratory and technicians, 1,320; support staff, 2,565; doctors, 1,783; pharmacists, 303; interns, 371, giving you a total of 13,884. Then you add to that, you add to that, vertical services head office, you come with 17,884 people, which is 2.8 per cent of the labour force. So you have 17,884 people multiply that by four with dependents, health brings food to the table for between 70,000 to 80,000 persons in Trinidad and Tobago and not one health care worker was laid off. Not one health care worker lost their job, not one. *[Desk thumping]* And today I want to thank each one for the sterling work that they do.

Madam Speaker, with new facilities coming on we will be adding more and more jobs. But what about the quality of health care services? I want to focus particularly on the advancements made in maternal mortality. And I read from a PAHO Report of 2019 which gives the statistics for 2017. We are the lowest in 21 countries in the non-Latin and Caribbean States for maternal mortality rates. And among 38 countries in the region of the Americas only six countries are doing better than us. And our 2018/2019 figures will be even better because this is based on 2017 figures. We are recognized around the world as a leader in how to reduce maternal mortality and infant mortality rates. But let us talk about the health care system as value to citizens.

Madam Speaker, I did a calculation. This free health care service which we like to bad talk, we do 92 per cent of deliveries in Trinidad and Tobago. That is, of the 16,849 we did in 2018, 15,000 were done in the public health sector, 27 per cent by cesarean and 73 per cent by normal delivery. Madam Speaker, do you know what is the cost if they had to go to the private sector to do that? Prime

Minister, you will be shocked when you hear this figure. If those patients had to go to the private sector based on a \$40,000 for cesarean and \$20,000 for a normal delivery, people would have spent \$383,438,400. That is what this free health care system does. That is what we do. This is free. You do not need insurance, you do not need to have your wages garnished like in other countries when you cannot pay, you do not get letters saying pay \$40,000. That is what we do.

But, Madam Speaker, let me tell you what this free health care system does and there is never any objective discussion. A preemie baby that goes into a NICU, Neonatal Intensive Care Unit, we started to do some costings. Do you know what it costs this country to put a premature baby in a NICU? The minimum stay, we worked it out, \$500,000. And if you have to stay there for months it goes up to \$1million per child. Which parent in this country without insurance can pay that? But we take this for granted, we take this for granted. And I have to listen in the public domain about, you do 99 things right, you do one thing wrong, that is the conversation. I am talking about 99 things done right.

For this year we have had one maternal death in the public sector. In years gone by under both PNM and UNC the count by now would have been eight. Prime Minister, under this Government, under your administration we have brought that down. [*Desk thumping*] Do you know what the success rate is for having only one?—99.9964 per cent success rate. So when the Prime Minister said this and I say this, you do 999 things right but let one thing go wrong, that is how the public health system is framed and that is a tragedy in this country. Absolute tragedy.

We did some checks, there is one person in the St. James Clinic, a cancer patient. Every month that person gets \$94,000 worth of free drugs, every month. Multiply that by 12, can she afford that? And she has no insurance. That is what

this free public health care system does. Let us have intelligent objective discussion about it, but do not let the discussion revolve around the one thing that go wrong. Let us be objective and take it as it happens.

Hon. Member: We are ungrateful to.

Hon. T. Deyalsingh: And you know we are ungrateful and I will say this. In Opposition debating the Children's Life Fund Bill, in Opposition in the Red House, that debate went until four o'clock in the morning. I stood up in Opposition and told the then hon. Therese Baptiste-Cornelis, I said Minister you will get no thanks for the 999 things that do right and the thousands of miracles that you perform every day, but let one thing go wrong, the press will crucify you. I said that in Opposition. Because I know, I know how good this public health system is. I was reading a book last night about another country that we are always compared to.

Hon. Member: Singapore.

Hon. T. Deyalsingh: No, not Singapore. I "doh" want to call the country. When you do not have insurance in that country, do you know what happens? You die. When you go and you incur cost, do you know what happens? They send a bailiff by your house, they garnish your wages but we here, it is free. Trinidad and Tobago, appreciate it.

Madam Speaker, NCDs is one of the most critical elements facing this country. And our health budget went up from 3.08 billion in 2008 to 6.0 billion in 2019. That is unsustainable. We have to tackle NCDs. I do not have enough time, I will just give you one piece of research because I had promised the Member for Princes Town when he was questioning—yeah, you ask if I will make public certain data in a question time. You do not remember. It does not matter. 2011 Global School-based Study Health Survey, Trinidad and Tobago 2011 Fact Sheet.

Percentage of students who usually drank carbonated soft drinks one or more times during a day in the past 30 days, 74.6 said they were drinking more than one.

So we have a crisis with childhood obesity, we have a crisis with NCDs. I do not have enough time to go into all, but let me give you the first piece of hard data we have. We repeated the survey in 2017, so this is two years old before the ban had a chance to take root in schools, we had just started the ban on soft drinks in schools. 2017 fact sheet, percentage of students who usually drank carbonated soft drinks one or more times per day during the 30 days before the survey. You know what the figure is now in 2017? It dropped from 74.6 per cent to 55.2 per cent. [*Desk thumping*] This is a wonderful statistic. It means school-aged children are taking in the message about NCDs and the ban of soft drinks will drop this figure even more when we repeat this survey in a year's time.

10.30 a.m.

But, Madam Speaker, as the country becomes sensitized to sugar, I am telling the country from now, once this debate is finished I am on the road again talking about the ill effects of sugar, but now we are going to add salt, and we are now going to add trans-fats to this because those are the three things we have to get the population to stop eating—sugar, salt, trans-fats. Trans-fats are those fats you use to make donuts, cakes; manmade fats that are solid; gets into your arteries, it clogs up your arteries. I could talk for 45 minutes on that. So the conversation is on sugar, salt, and trans-fats.

Madam Speaker, I now want to turn to how this Government intends to utilize the Couva facility, and I have a brief from the Faculty of Medical Sciences, a new mandate. The theme is Educating Global Health Professionals and Achieving Financial Sustainability: Repositioning medical education as part of health care delivery diversification strategy for Trinidad and Tobago.

Madam Speaker, I told this country in my mid-year review we will use Couva to change the way we do business. The opportunity: global medical education market is experiencing robust growth in size and value. Medical tourism: opportunity. New international training options: the University of the West Indies will be incorporating Couva as a corridor of medical training excellence starting from Mount Hope—where they have a presence—Couva, and incorporating the Penal/Debe Campus, via for the first time in Trinidad and Tobago, an offshore medical school. That is what we are going to be doing. Because if we not do it, there is a massive tectonic shift coming in 2023 due to the US based Education Commission for Foreign Medical Graduates (ECFMG) accreditation, and Trinidad and Tobago has to position itself.

So what is the vision? A medical education corridor, or artery for want of a better term, anchored by an offshore medical school to train foreigners, bringing foreign exchange, medical tourism. That is the vision for Couva, and it is an excellent vision to take care of changes taking place outside. So Couva is going to be repositioned, repurposed, and I tell the country that today.

How are we using Couva now? Glibly my friends opposite say Couva is a pharmacy no matter how many times I tell the country we are doing radiological services. So let me give the country the figures today. We have started utilizing Couva since June 15, 2015 to date—2019, sorry—June 15, 2019. Sorry. To date, we have done 1,564 diagnostic imaging tests [*Desk thumping*] and instead of paying the private sector this would have cost the taxpayer \$1.3 million. We have saved that because we said we would do a referral system, instead of paying the private sector we would utilize Couva. So 1,564 people have received a combination of MRIs, CTs, fluoroscopy , et cetera. That is Couva. It is being used. It is not a pharmacy. The equipment is being used.

Madam Speaker, in the time I have left, the big issue in health these days is mental health, and I am going to tell this country what we have been doing for the past two years so it does not seem like a knee-jerk reaction to what happened in Couva.

Hon. Member: Arouca.

Hon. T. Deyalsingh: Arouca, sorry. Wellness and mental health. Madam Speaker, let me put on the record that we have concretized a decentralization plan for mental health which has been talked about in this country, Prime Minister, since the 1960s. So 60 years of talking, we are doing it. Our first consultation was on March 06—10, 2017, with PAHO. When did the Cabinet get involved? February 28, 2019, the creation of the post of Director, Mental Health was approved—this is way back when—and that person starts in November 2019.

So we have been discussing a new decentralization plan for mental health two years now and we are ready to rock and roll. What does this mean? It means if we go back to the definition of “wellness”, what happens in Trinidad and Tobago with mental health is that we tend to catch people at the end of their issues, when their issues develop to chronicity. Same thing like NCDs, you want to catch them when? As early as humanly possible. This country, under this Government, under this Cabinet, for the first time has a mental health policy which I took to Cabinet, and which the Prime Minister had no hesitation, as Chairman of the Cabinet, approving.

Madam Speaker, I want to ask the population today: as we start this new journey, do we want to call it “mental health”, or I am throwing out a suggestion “behavioural health wellness services”? That will start with the de-stigmatization of mental health. So if there is an agreement—and I am seeing heads shaking, yes—I will take it to the population. No more psychiatric care. It will now be behavioural health wellness services, and we will now adopt a life course approach

to behavioural health. What are the historical facts? St. Ann's is 117 years old. That structure, it was built in 1902, and the present model is we seek treatment at the end of your psychosis, after the disease has progressed, stigma, all that.

We have already started the process of decentralization, New Horizons which I spoke about in San Fernando. But what will happen? Imagine if you will, Madam Speaker, a new centrally located, easily accessible major mental health facility, not tucked away in St. Ann's where people from Cedros "cyah" reach it, where people from Toco "cyah" reach it, but a centrally located new facility, supported by satellite facilities so people can be reintegrated with their families and communities. No one can argue with that approach, and it will lead eventually to the decommissioning of St. Ann's. It will lead—yes, and you all saying that for the last four years, but you all did not do it. You just talk. I have a Cabinet-approved plan to do it. You always say we were going to do it, there was a plan.

Dr. Francis: Or we thought about it.

Hon. T. Deyalsingh: We are doing it via Cabinet approved policy. What will be the outcomes? Increased accessibility across the life course especially adolescent mental health; increased integration and family with society and the job market; superior clinical outcomes; and a decrease in stigmatization.

Madam Speaker, we normally use suicide figures as a measure of the mental health of a country. That is open to debate, but I will give the suicide figures for Trinidad and Tobago here this morning and let the population and the experts judge for themselves. These numbers come from the Crime and Problem Analysis Branch of the Trinidad and Tobago Police Service. These are the numbers for completed successful suicides: 2013—[*Interruption*]

Hon. Member: Successful suicides?

Hon. T. Deyalsingh: Yes, where people actually die as opposed to attempted. Oh

my—we have to explain that to them?

Dr. Moonilal: No, but you should not say successful. Say suicide “nah”.

Hon. T. Deyalsingh: Because you have attempted also. Madam Speaker, 2013, there were 113; 2014, 104; 2015, 111; 2016, 104; and 2017, 103. So I stopped there for now so we could see there was a mean of fluctuation of around 100/105. 2018, 75, a drop by about 25 per cent; and 2019, up to September of the 2019, 69. But with decentralization of mental health services we could pay attention to three divisions, central, northern and southern which account for the majority of suicide cases. So when you have these satellite centres you can catch people earlier.

However, Madam Speaker, what this data does not show is adolescent attempted suicide and we have an issue there, and the experts would talk about that. So we have to be careful how we interpret this data, but I am giving the country the data, accurate data, about suicides in Trinidad and Tobago.

So with the decentralization of mental health where we will now convert into a wellness parameter—[*Interruption*]

Hon. Member: And philosophy.

Hon. T. Deyalsingh:—and philosophy, we can do that. But what has been the progress to date? September 2017: an adolescent specific mental health clinic opened targeting teenagers and young adults; May 2018: stress relief clinic based on a community-based psychiatry service. We have seen 700 people; mental health GAP action programme; prevention and management of an aggressive and violent behaviour; psychological first aid. That is what we have been doing in mental health.

So mental health is the next NCD, the same way we are tackling diabetes. You get a 20 per cent decrease in children using soft drinks is being successful. We would target salt, we would target trans-fats. We have gotten the IDB, through our NCD

programme, to have funding set aside for the treatment of dementia for the first time in Trinidad and Tobago, because the major health risk to the world as populations age is going to be dementia and the associated conditions with dementia. That is what this Government has done. But, Madam Speaker, the mental health landscape, there is going to be a role for qualified NGOs and faith-based organizations. The Government cannot do this alone. So the NGOs and faith-based organizations need to come to us and register under the Mental Health Act.

Madam Speaker, I just want to close with my report on the PSIP. The PSIP—
Madam Speaker, I have two minutes left?

Madam Speaker: Of original time.

Hon. T. Deyalsingh: Plus 15?

Madam Speaker: Plus 10.

Hon. T. Deyalsingh: Plus 10. Thank you very much. The PSIP performance under the Ministry of Health, my colleagues used to average around 30 to 40 per cent. That is why when we came into office hospitals were in a state of disrepair. You did not have equipment, because for five years, with 60-something billion dollars in budgets each year, the PSIP under the Ministry of Health was about 30 to 40 per cent. That is why hospital infrastructure was so bad. We had to do electrical work in San Fernando, spend \$30 million now. If that was done when oil prices were \$90 a barrel, I would not have the Member for Caroni East bringing Motions—because he is right. But we are spending \$30 million to shore up and repair the electrical system in San Fernando General Hospital under a two-year project. We have to do it. Roofing in St. Ann's, 1902, left to rot; electrical systems and leaks in the roof of Port of Spain General Hospital, left to rot. We are doing it.

Under this Government, the PSIP at the Ministry of Health for the last fiscal, is a performance level of 80 per cent—80 per cent. Phenomenal achievement, and I want to thank everybody in project management. But what are two positive areas of impact under this PSIP performance? Madam Speaker, on coming into office I said I found the 64-slice CT scanner at San Fernando was old, it was damaged, because the Member for Fyzabad could not find in a container for three years. When I came into office, the CT scanner at Sangre Grande was already down for six months. Under the PSIP, Sangre Grande has a brand spanking new, not only a machine, but a CT suite. If you see it. It is lovely. [*Desk thumping*] It is First-World. It is patient-centric. It adds to wellness, and we came in under budget, on time, no corruption. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker, I had to answer a question in this House about the lithotripter machine in San Fernando General Hospital, and I showed where under the chairmanship of Fyzabad in one year the lithotripter did eight procedures. The question I want to ask Fyzabad is: who moved the C-arm from the lithotripter? Who moved it? And I am looking in the direction of the bench lower down there. I call no names.

Dr. Moonilal: A C-arm?

Hon. T. Deyalsingh: Well, if Caroni East does not know what a C-arm is, heaven help this country.

Dr. Gopeesingh: I know what it is, but why you looking this way?

Hon. T. Deyalsingh: Not you. Not you.

Dr. Gopeesingh: Oh.

Hon. T. Deyalsingh: Somebody close to you.

Dr. Gopeesingh: To me?

Hon. T. Deyalsingh: Physically at this point in time, in the Chamber. Anyhow

we will leave that. Who moved the C-arm? But I will get no question on that. Who moved it? It is like who moved the piano. Remember when we came into office, “where the piano”? Piano was on a chadar in thing—I think Oropouche East, you asked about the piano. Anyhow, I will go—[*Interruption*]

Madam Speaker: Member for St. Joseph, your original time is now spent. You have 10 more minutes to wind up.

Hon. T. Deyalsingh: Thank you.

Madam Speaker: You may proceed.

Hon. T. Deyalsingh: Under this administration we replaced the lithotripter—replaced it—because my friends opposite did not realize that all MME have a lifespan, and when it is coming down to the end of their lifespan you need to replace it. It is this Government when oil crashed to \$27, \$30, \$40 a barrel, as opposed to my friends when they had it at \$90 a barrel, did not fix/replace the lithotripter. We have done it, and now instead of doing eight interventions, under my friend from Fyzabad, it is being done by the hundreds. That is where PSIP money went.

Madam Speaker, I want the country, again—the same way I gave the statistics on what it cost to treat a premie baby, \$500,000 to a million dollars, you know when you spent that money that is like giving somebody an HDC house. Imagine that. Parents who get \$500,000 worth of treatment up to a million dollars’ worth of treatment for their premature babies, that is like saying take a house free. When the 15,000-odd women who have to pay in the private sector \$40,000 for a caesarean, and \$20,000 for a regular vaginal delivery, and we save them \$308 million, that is what this free health system does on a daily basis, and I want to thank every doctor, every intern, every nurse, every midwife, every lab tech, every administrator, every orderly, for the sterling work they do coming in to work every

single day. [*Desk thumping*]

And, Madam Speaker, the dedication of health care workers was demonstrated to us recently during Tropical Storm Karen. When we went to the press conference with the hon. Minister of National Security I made the point because I asked all my CEOs: tell me what is your employee turn out this morning, Tropical Storm Karen? You know what they all reported? It was close to 100 per cent. If that is not dedication to duty, that you leave your home during a tropical storm to come out to deliver the best free public health care, I do not what is. [*Desk thumping*].

When we got the call half past two in the morning about the situation in Arouca, I made the call to the CEO of North Central that the Commissioner of Police wanted medical help, medical intervention, about 20 health care workers did not bat an eyelid. They went down there half past two in the morning [*Desk thumping*] and to each and every one of those health care workers, say, thank you. Thank you, thank you, thank you.

Madam Speaker, I do not want the population to think I am only defending. The reason I am taking this approach is that because the discussion in health in this country is that you are defined by the one thing that goes wrong, but the 99.9964 per cent things that go right get no public acclaim, that is why I am taking the line I am taking this morning. We have had one maternal death for this year. One! Our neonatal mortality rate has decreased by 40 per cent in three years. Do you know what that means? When we came into office the neonatal mortality rate and neonates are children now born up to 28 days old, and death within that period is the major cause of infant mortality rates.

We had missed our SDG goals—sustainable development goals—for both infant mortality and maternal mortality in 2015. We missed it. We were a pariah, we missed it. Remember I said by this time eight women would have died in

childbirth? Those days are gone, but you get no screaming headlines that 99.9964 success rate in deliveries. But let one thing go wrong, that is how health is characterized in Trinidad and Tobago, and I go back to my words in Opposition. I told Therese Baptiste-Cornelis, you will get no thanks for the hundreds of thousands of things that go right, but let one thing go wrong you will be crucified in the media.

Madam Speaker, surgeries in Trinidad and Tobago; free surgeries utilizing 3,000 free beds. Whether you are a CEPEP worker, a CEO, it is free regardless of your station in life. I had some calculations done. Do you know how much surgeries we performed in Trinidad and Tobago, free of charge, with a high success rate? In 2014, we performed 34,829 absolutely at no cost. People “doh” have to pay. It is not like in another country where you go into an A&E, you sign off all your financial information so your wages can be garnished. No cost to the patient, but it costs the taxpayer. In another country when you sign your form in the A&E, you know what you signed off there? All your financial information: where you “wukin”, your bank number, your bank routing number. So when you come out you know what faces you at home? A bill—[*Interruption*]

Hon. Member: A massive bill.

Hon. T. Deyalsingh:—a massive bill, and if you do not pay that bill your wages are garnished; if you do not pay that bill the hospital sues you; and if you have no insurance, you die. But we performed 34,829 surgeries free of charge to patients, and what is the 2018 figure? Thirty-six thousand, six hundred and eighty-two. So we are doing more with less.

Which other country in the world does this free of charge? Not free of charge to the patient. Three hundred and something odd million dollars in maternity services, and we cannot even begin to calculate the cost of these surgeries. Some

are complex, some are minor. But, Madam Speaker, that is what this free health care system does. I want to—because you see this again will never make the papers—read a quote from Mr. Ayoub Ali of Princes Town.

I went to get glasses and was told I had cataract. I took the referral letter to the hospital—meaning San Fernando—and got an appointment to do cataract surgery in one week. I was shocked because my mother-in-law just paid \$10,000 to the private sector, and I had a friend who paid \$8,000. The doctors and nurses were very nice.

This is Mr. Ayoub Ali of Princes Town talking.

Even before giving me an injection, they took the time to calm me. I wish that these partnerships can continue to help others in the same way that they helped me.

That is what this system does. So every cataract surgery we do—and we have done 40 per cent more from 2015 to 2018—a patient saves between \$8,000 to \$10,000. Could you imagine that?

So, Madam Speaker, what is the future for health moving forward? Some of the initiatives we are going to be driving, is for the first time in Trinidad and Tobago we are going to start to migrate to electronic medical records. You see that article in the papers this morning—Princes Town saying finally. Why did you not it? We will do it. We will do it. You see that article in the papers this morning, medical record lost, that has been going on for decades, but this Government recently approved a pilot project for Arima, Point Fortin, where iGov.tt is the procurement agency to start—[*Interruption*]

Madam Speaker: Member, your time is now spent.

Hon. T. Deyalsingh: Thank you, Madam Speaker. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker: Member for Caroni East.

Dr. Tim Gopeesingh (*Caroni East*): Thank you, colleagues. Madam Speaker, I rise here this morning to provide some information on this budget debate and to debunk some of the statements made by the Minister of Health and, of course, my immediate issue now is to deal with a response from the Minister of Finance over the weekend. This Minister of Finance issued a media release that all CEPEP workers to get increase wages, no reduction in working hours of workers, and *Sunday Guardian* gets it wrong with bogus analysis. Now he is accusing the media of bogus analysis and he is having difficulties with what an academic has said, and he is having difficulties with what the academic has said from the University of the West Indies.

So these guys have done their work, they have done their research, and they have found that the Minister of Finance has been wanting. So now he comes with a big release over the weekend to say that they are wrong, and he attacks the member from the university faculty and the economist, attacks him in a vicious manner and calls him bogus. Now these are guys who have worked their life and are continuing in their education process, and so on. But when a Government—when a Minister of Finance goes to the extent to attack the newspaper for their analysis, to attack the university lecturer, a professional, something is very, very wrong with that. [*Desk thumping*] It is a sign of authoritarianism, it is a sign of dictatorship that anybody who disagrees with you, you must attack them.

11.00a.m.

So this seems to be the modus operandi of this Government, when a trade union speaks against them, they attack them. When an academic speaks against them, they attack them. They want to hush everybody up in this country. [*Desk thumping*] And this is authoritarianism and this is dictatorship to the forefront, Madam Speaker. So we have to be very careful of this Government. They are in

their last year—and what you see, they even want to shut up people when they write things on social media and they want to charge them for sedition. [*Desk thumping*] If the Media Association did not come out and speak very strongly against this, they would have wanted to put this law into place. [*Crosstalk*]

Madam Speaker: All right. So let us have some order. Everybody will get their chance to respond. Member for Caroni East.

Dr. T. Gopeesingh: So this is what the Minister of Finance—this is his ninth presentation on finance to this Parliament in this 2015 to 2019. This is his fifth budget presentation and he had had four midterm review presentations. And these nine presentations as Finance Minister, the country is still weltering under the work of the Minister of Finance. [*Desk thumping*] This whole economy has stagnated. The working poor has become poorer. The poorer people have been increasing significantly over the years. The small business and the medium business enterprises are closing day by day and over 65,000 people have lost their jobs. The Minister of Finance has no moral authority to condemn everybody [*Desk thumping*] because he has been a poor Minister of Finance. He has been an OJT Minister of Finance and his Government [*Desk thumping*] has lost its credibility as far as the economy is concerned.

When seven out of 10 people tell you that they have major concerns with the economy, when you are not paying VAT to people, when you are not paying contractors for the money that they work for, something is radically wrong, Madam Speaker. And then he used motoring language from year after year: “turning the corner”. [*Laughter*] Auto expressions: “turning the corner”, “turnaround”. These are motoring expressions. I would have expected him to come and say last Monday that the economy has stalled; the economy is sputtering and the economy has shut down [*Desk thumping*] and the economy has been blowing

smoke. And he wanted to quote from Bob Marley. I want him to refer to a calypso by Chalkdust, the holder of the country's highest award: "The driver cannot drive." [*Desk thumping*] The PNM has not been able to drive. And he likes to speak about Frank Sinatra and he brought on the song about, "My Way." But the lines he should really refer to:

"And now the end is near." [*Desk thumping*] "...I face the final curtain."

So this is what this Government is facing at this moment: the end is near and they face the final curtain.

Madam Speaker, it is astonishing to hear the Minister of Health this morning, the Member for St. Joseph, not one time has he been able to say what they have done for the country on a macro health issue, [*Desk thumping*] and the promises that they have made over the number of years, Madam Speaker. And since assuming office in 2015 this Minister of Health has presided over a health sector where the nation's public hospitals and public health institutions have rapidly deteriorated into virtual killing fields, the insurmountable horror stories that we have heard emanating from these institutions. Madam Speaker, this PNM Government, 2015 to 2019, and in particular the Minister of Health, stand accused of serious dereliction of duty to the public that he has been entrusted to serve. [*Desk thumping*]

In the major hospitals, daily horror stories and scenes abound in emergency departments—which this country has been speaking about for years—overflowing with patients on wheelchairs and trolleys, waiting for days to obtain critical medical treatment, with many dying on the trolleys; patients bleeding; patients in pain; patients waiting to have a bed pan and have to defecate on themselves. And all three major hospitals: Port of Spain Hospital, Mount Hope Hospital and San Fernando Hospital, have been overflowing with patients in the emergency

department on trolleys, and I invite anyone to go—if you think that I am not speaking the truth, go into these emergency departments and you will see the real horror stories that are occurring.

Ninety-seven per cent of the patients interviewed in the Nigel Henry poll said that they have major concerns about the health sector. Are they wrong? They have major concerns. And when the Minister of Health comes today and says that they do X amount of surgeries, and X amount of caesarean sections, and so on, and they get it free, and their baby is in the neo-natal intensive care unit—they get it free—the people of Trinidad and Tobago have been paying taxes for these number of years, [*Desk thumping*] and health surcharge and they deserve to get the treatment that is supposed to be there under the constitutionally enshrined right. [*Desk thumping*] This is a right of every citizen to have adequate health care. So when he comes and says that they get it free and he is making it seem as though the PNM Government is giving them something, the people have been paying their taxes. And in addition to that, the PNM posed heavier taxes over the last four years— [*Desk thumping*] tax upon tax; tax upon tax. So are the people not entitled? So where is he going with that, Madam Speaker?

And we on this side have been asking for the removal of this Minister of Health for years and years—the last three years—but this administration is not doing anything about it and he will continue to decimate the health sector within the next year if he is left as Minister of Health. He should be removed immediately as the Minister of Health. And he has been the worst Minister of Health [*Desk thumping*] this country has ever seen over the last 20 years. You had Minister Eckstein from '94 to '97; Minister Imbert from 2000—2002, then you had Minister Jerry Narace at that time and Minister Rahael. He is worse than all of them put together [*Desk thumping*] and so he has no moral authority to talk about the health sector. All he could come

and do is to take one little point here and one little point there.

Madam Speaker, I want to go into the promises of the People's National Movement on the health sector from 2015, and I want to read to you the first one from the Minister of Finance, pages 42/43:

“We will review the existing hospital strategy through a scientific evidence-driven Hospital Construction and Refurbishment Plan and where necessary, we will refurbish and modernise our existing ageing plant and will construct new where they are required.”

This PNM Government has not constructed one new health facility. [*Desk thumping*] They are talking about constructing one in the Prime Minister's constituency now. So four years have gone, they have not constructed one new facility. They have inherited the Arima Hospital, start of construction; they have inherited the Point Fortin Hospital, start of construction. There is nothing that they have started on their own and have completed, so he has no moral authority. So they have failed in that promise of modernizing our existing ageing plant.

The second one:

"...we will address the shortage of medical personnel immediately.”

Madam Speaker, it is very unfortunate when they could make those statements. When they came into office there were over 1,300 nurses waiting for jobs and more than 200 doctors waiting for jobs. They opted four years later they have not employed any of those, and he has not taken the recommendations of the Joint Select Committee of Parliament in 2016/2017, the Third and Fourth Reports. He has just pushed it aside, where they said that there were 1,870 foreign nationals working in the institutions, but yet you are refusing to take in any of the local national doctors and nurses.

So why have they decided not to have these professionals on board? And so,

nobody has been able to explain. But it is because of political spite and vindictiveness, and viciousness that they have not employed these doctors. When we questioned him about, “Why you are not employing the doctors?” He says, they do not want to go and in the district health facilities far away. When we confronted him he was not able to give one doctor’s name who refused to go into the district health facility. [*Desk thumping*] So it was excuse upon excuse.

The Nurses Association had to call a meeting with the Prime Minister in June of this year and indicated to the Prime Minister that over 1,300 of them are waiting for jobs and wanting jobs and they have not been able to be employed. So when he says they have X amount of nurses, he has not given you how many vacancies there are in the health system—hundreds of vacancies. And if you have 1,300 nurses wanting jobs and you have so many doctors waiting to be employed, and you have five regional authorities—four in Trinidad and one in Tobago—a few hundred of those will be eaten up like nothing. Take them in. Have the improvement in the health care, so when you have more doctors and more nurses in the system—and it is not going to cost money because this Minister of Health has presided over the expenditure of almost \$26billion in four years and he has nothing to show for it.

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

Dr. T. Gopeesingh:—and he is going to be spending another \$6 billion this year. So he would have ended up spending almost \$32billion and nothing to show for it, Madam Speaker. [*Desk thumping*]

Another health promise of 2015:

“...we will expend substantial resource on training opportunities in all areas of health care, including support staff in professions allied to medicine, particularly in the field of nursing.”

The Member for Chaguanas East will tell you that at the nursing training centre they have reduced the amount of training for the nurses there at El Dorado. We should be training hundreds and hundreds of nurses. If you cannot employ them here, you export them, because other countries—the United Kingdom, Canada and United States—want our nurses. They are some of the best trained. So why are you stopping the nurses? So it goes in direct contrast with what you say:

“...we will expend substantial resources on training opportunities—”

They have not trained any other para-professionals. Nowhere in the system have they been doing any training of the para-professionals. So this is another failed promise that they made in 2015/2016.

Another promise:

“...we will continue to strengthen and build programmes to meet the diverse medical needs of the national community. We will expedite surgeries and expand and improve the Chronic Disease Assistance Programme...”

Let us talk about surgeries. When we were in Government, the Minister of Health, Dr. Fuad Khan, made sure that any patient waiting for a surgical procedure greater than three months, he was able to facilitate letting them have the surgery in a private institution and the State will pay for it. It is unpardonable and unthinkable that you will have patients waiting for surgery for almost two years, which is happening; elective surgery, patients with cancer waiting for surgery; patients with major problems waiting for surgery, and even the elective small cases like hernias, and so on, patients waiting for surgery; patients with breast lumps waiting to have a diagnosis made; patients with abnormal cervical Pap smears waiting for—they cannot have the procedure done and this Minister comes this morning and has not been able to explain to the population why all this mess is taking place in the health centre, and he is presiding over it. He is presiding over it.

And then he comes to speak today in Parliament about a Chronic Disease Assistance Programme. So the surgeries—the amount of surgeries at Port of Spain Hospital, which is in a mess; the elective surgeries are not being done. Almost 400,000 population in north and the west of Trinidad are in serious trouble when they have a problem. They cannot go to Port of Spain Hospital because they will not be seen immediately. They are being transferred to Mount Hope, where Mount Hope is overflowing.

So if you go to the emergency department at Port of Spain Hospital, you will find it is almost probably just as bad as the centre in Arouca. The people are on trolleys close by. I invite anybody to go to Port of Spain Hospital emergency department any day and you will see what is happening. Nothing is wrong with closing down the Port of Spain central block. That is fine, because you are frightened about earthquakes, but you must make preparation before you close it down. [*Desk thumping*] You cannot take five floors of Port of Spain Hospital with four wards each—that is 20 wards with 25 patients, which is 500 patients—and want to fit them into the ENT and eye wards, en bloc on the other side. And they want to create four wards to hold 100 patients when 500 patients were held in a main block.

That is their thinking. They wanted to take the nurses' hostel to put some beds there. So on one side you have ENT with beds there; next side the nurses' hostel, then in St. James you are having patients down there. What is the mess that is going on? So when you operate on a patient at Port of Spain Hospital, you have to know where you want to try to put this patient. And so the patients die, Madam Speaker. Then you have two fires at the X-ray department and the whole maternity department had to be evacuated, all as a result of not proper thinking and not proper planning by the PNM, which they are incapable of doing [*Desk thumping*]

and this is what the Minister of Health is incapable of doing. And if he had planned it properly, these things would not have happened.

He spoke about the CDAP Programme, Madam Speaker. There are 50 pharmaceuticals on the CDAP listing. But what is the most important disease process that we are dealing with in Trinidad and Tobago? We have about 11,000 to 12,000 deaths. We have a birth rate of about 17,000 annually. So we have a natural increase in the population of 5,000 or 6,000. We have an equal amount of men almost, and equal of women dying. The commonest cause of death in men is heart disease and hypertension, strokes, et cetera, and the commonest cause of death in women is cancer and next, heart disease. So we have about 2,000 patients dying with heart attacks, heart disease, another 1,000 dying from complications of diabetes, and about 1,500 to 2,000 dying from cancer, and about 3,000 cases annually. So where should our focus be? Not on the non-communicable diseases of diabetes and hypertension and cancer, because they are the causes of the most deaths in Trinidad and Tobago?

In men, the cancer of the prostate and colonic cancer; in women gynaecologic cancers account for 45 per cent, excluding breast, that is, uterus, ovaries, vagina, vulva, et cetera. So the significance of giving the right medication for the diabetic and hypertensive patients is critically important. So the drugs for diabetes and hypertension have found to be useless, and patients' medical illnesses have become worse, and there is a five-cents drug coming from somewhere. You are giving people metformin, five-cents drug, not controlling their diabetes, becoming worse. You are giving the patients the other hypertensive drug and they are becoming worse—

Hon. Member: Enalapril.

Dr. T. Gopeesingh: Enalapril. So they are developing strokes. They are

developing cardiac attacks and heart attacks, and death. So your job, when we asked him: “Minister, are you going to take care of the changing of these two basic drugs?” He said, yes. Up to today he has not come to tell the Parliament, nor the country, that he has changed the drugs to what they were, to the new ones, because he has not done so. [*Desk thumping*] And the patients who are receiving the treatment are not receiving the proper treatment. And I advise the patients with diabetes and hypertension to monitor their blood sugar levels and monitor their blood pressures very carefully, because if they do not do that they will end up with problems.

After age 40, about 40 per cent of East Indians in this country develop diabetes, and after age 40, almost 40 per cent of the Afro-Trinidadian population develop hypertension. And there are a lot of strong guys from the Afro-Trinidadian population who, obviously looking strong, but they do not know that they have hypertension and they end up with renal failure in the end because they have not been able to control their hypertension.

So a very proper, well thought-out, coordinated primary health care system of massive education to the wider community—you tell them about their diet; you tell them about obesity; you tell them about getting their smears and the mammograms. But the Minister wants to come to Parliament and talk not about that. What about his programme. He has no programme to deal with this at a national level. [*Desk thumping*] And that is where we differed from them, because they talk and we work and deliver. [*Desk thumping*] PNM talks, UNC delivers. UNC works.

So if you do not have a proper primary health care system—Madam Speaker, I think I spoke about this. Only 6 per cent of the population go on to have their Pap smears annually. Cervical cancer causes death of about 150 patients annually. It is a preventable death. Nobody is supposed to die from cervical cancer. And if you

are screening for that, only 6 per cent come for screening. All the health centres—96 or whatever—should have screening apparatus. All the hospitals should have, and the district health facilities, so on a daily basis when these people come into your hospitals you screen them. You do your Pap smears, and it must have cytologists reading the Pap smears and pathologists doing the work and you must have follow-up for colonoscopies, and so on. That is just one area of cancer.

You must go through the country and ask the population, all the men above 40, to do the PSA, the Prostatic Specific Antigen. You must tell the women above 40—they have a ticker tape on television which is going around every day to, “do your mammogram every three years after age 50” or something. That is wrong. After that age you should have your mammogram every year because when you pick up a breast lump on—when you pick up something on a mammogram, it is about two millimetres. By the time you pick it up, as a clinician, it is about two centimetres. By that time it has spread to your lymph nodes; it has spread to other parts of the body. [*Desk thumping*] So your mammograms must be done routinely. Your Pap smears must be done.

And colonic cancer is the leading cause of cancer, after prostate, for men. The Afro-Trinidadian population is very susceptible and they die in a quicker timeframe when they develop the disease, so they should be screened. We should go around the country and in all the health centres and in all the hospitals and screen these patients for their PSAs on a yearly basis, and they must have systems in place to deal with them. As soon as you have an abnormal PSA you should be sent to a situation where—or some doctors who can deal with it. But that is not happening. This is the vision of the UNC [*Desk thumping*] and this is what the Minister of Health has been doing to some extent in the past, and we will—when we are elected into office these are some of the things that we will do, Madam

Speaker. [*Desk thumping*]

So the CDAP Programme is not working. Some of the drugs, the top-line drugs, are not in the 250 pharmacies across Trinidad and Tobago. Some of the hospitals do not have the pharmaceuticals to give the patients when the doctors write the prescription. And so, this whole system of the CDAP and the primary health care system is not working. After two years, our Prime Minister at that time, Mrs. Persad-Bissessar, had indicated to Cabinet: “Guys, health has taken over to be a problem now. I want some ideas how we improve the health care.” That is the type of work that the Prime Minister was doing. That is the philosophy of the Prime Minister. [*Desk thumping*] She is at the forefront. And the Prime Minister at that time decided that we will form a little committee on health and give some assistance to the hon. Minister of Health, who was doing a phenomenal job. [*Desk thumping*] But what we found, that the boards of the regional health authorities and the CEOs were not doing their work as they are supposed to do, and the Member for Tabaquite and one or two of our colleagues who are here would tell you that they have never been on the wards. The CEO does not make ward rounds. So most of the problems occurring in the health sector and in the hospitals are as a result of putting square pegs in round holes and putting political people [*Desk thumping*] in situations where they ought not to be. The health sector needs people of competence and ability, not political people in these boards and as CEOs.

We had asked the CEO when we were there—of Mount Hope—“When last you went on a ward?” The Member for Couva South will remember. He could not tell us when last he went on a ward and he was the CEO. Well, he was fired. And they put the pressure on the poor Minister of Health, Dr. Khan, Member for Barataria/St. Joseph, when they were not doing the work.

Hon. Members: San Juan.

Dr. T. Gopeesingh: San Juan/Barataria. I told the Minister of Health, very quietly, I said, “Minister Deyalsingh, your work becomes more difficult because you have incompetent boards and CEOs. That is where you should start.” And I advise the entire Government, this is what you should be looking at. You cannot put political people to run situations where you need competent people.

Another one:

“...we will continue with our medical aid programme for patients in need and we will review and audit the Children’s Life Fund so as to restore its mandate [*Desk thumping*] of saving the lives of children...”

The Children’s Life Fund, which our political leader and then Prime Minister, started from day one in our term of office [*Desk thumping*] between 2010 and 2015, and the Prime Minister committed 10 per cent of her salary to the Children’s Life Fund, and each one of us, [*Desk thumping*] as Ministers, put in 5 per cent of our salaries to the Children’s Life Fund. That was the vision and that is what we wanted for our children.

So there were children who needed treatment at an international level, not at the local level because some of these things cannot be done here, they were able to get their surgeries done. Today we have a reversal of that, Madam Speaker. It is very sad that some of the children in this country who needed to have interventional surgery and other things done for them to save their lives, they have passed away because of the negligence of this Government not putting the Children’s Life Fund in the proper perspective. And they speak about legislation for it, and they have not done so as yet.

I want the general population—the national population—to hear this. The Minister of Health is speaking about finance and how much money is being paid to the health sector, and how patients are receiving free treatment as though it is not their

constitutionally enshrined right, which is theirs. But they said in the 2015/2016. The Minister of Finance together with the Minister of Health said on page 247:

“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 all our citizens.”

But we are still waiting on it. [*Desk thumping*] They said it in their Manifesto in 2015. They repeated it in 2015/2016; they repeated it in 2016/2017. Today in 2019 we “eh” seeing any evidence of a National Health Insurance. But this is something that we, the UNC, will go out to the national population and discuss with them, [*Desk thumping*] the pros and cons of such a National Health Insurance.

Prof. Karl Theodore has been working since in 1990s—I take my hat off to him. He produced about three voluminous documents on national health insurance system, and Minister Khan was going to introduce it on a phased basis, but when we examined it a little more, we found it was difficult. So what we had to do was to have biometric cards for the entire population so that the health information will be on there, and then we will have introduced it. So this is something that we will have to discuss with the national population. [*Desk thumping*]

2016/2017, there is another promise, pages 51/63 of the budget document:

“Our health and health care policy is appropriately focused on three areas.”

Where are you improving health care? Have you seen any improvement to the health care? Absolutely none.

“We are improving health care service delivery and management with the roll-out of our hospitals and health clinics—”

They have not rolled out anything. [*Desk thumping*] They got the Arima Hospital going for them; they got the Point Fortin—and as I am on that, let me speak. In 1963, Prime Minister Dr. Eric Williams promised a Point Fortin Hospital—since

1963. In 2002, Prime Minister Patrick Manning promised a Point Fortin Hospital. [*Desk thumping*] It took a UNC/People's Partnership Government in 2010 to start the Point Fortin in 2015. And I want to congratulate the then Minister who is now Oropouche East, for his work under UDeCOTT to start the Arima Hospital and the Point Fortin Hospital. And Point Fortin Hospital had a relationship with VAMED and VAMED was securing the finances for the construction of the Point Fortin Hospital. So “doh” let the Minister of Health come today and try to fool the population [*Desk thumping*] that we did not have any finances. “Doh” let him try to fool us about Arima Hospital. The Arima Hospital, we had signed the agreement with the Chinese company which is doing the construction now. [*Desk thumping*] That Chinese company was the one. So the financing was being done with the Chinese company. So what he said today is totally untrue and furthest from the truth, Madam Speaker. [*Desk thumping*] And then they come here to say—if we were in Government, that Point Fortin Hospital would have been delivered in 2017 [*Desk thumping*] and the Arima Hospital would have been delivered by 2018. But now we are in 2019, we “doh” know when it is going to be finished and they will do it just like the Couva Hospital, when it is completed they will not open it. You could trust this Government to do anything?

11.30 a.m.

They have not built one health centre. During our time, the Minister of Health, Dr. Khan and his team made sure that we refurbished and reconstructed 67 health centres in this country [*Desk thumping*] out of 95 and these health centres were opened up to nine o'clock in the night and on weekends and public holidays up to 4.00 p.m. [*Desk thumping*] As soon as they come into office, they close down everything. Nothing opening beyond four o'clock. That is what they want to talk about primary health care, eh and they closed down these areas where

people coming from work, they would be able to pass in and get their blood pressure checked and get their diabetes controlled. That is what you need for this country [*Desk thumping*] and we staffed them with doctors, pharmacists, technicians, security officers and nurses. And the cost was not too much, Madam Speaker, but that is the vision that the People's Partnership had and that was the vision of the hon. Prime Minister [*Desk thumping*] and work by the Minister of Health at that time.

So we are improving our health care and this is how they have failed. Health care deliveries at its worse as it has ever been. I spoke about the overcrowding in emergency department. Long waiting time in every department to be medically managed sometimes greater than three days. Long waiting times for minor, major and cancer surgery. Increased morbidity experienced by patients leading to increased mortality. Patients dying while waiting for urgent cardiac surgery. No reagents for basic lab test. Patients have to have lab tests done. They do not have the reagents to do the lab tests, they give it to the families to take it outside of the hospital to have it analysed, "the poor people doh have no money", but by the time they come back with the results, the patient dead because no diagnosis is made. That is the system that is occurring now.

He speaks about the CT machine hiding someway and something— [*Interruption*] Some arm, the C-arm. "Well I know what ah C-arm." A C-arm is the arm that when you are doing orthopaedic surgery and you have to look at the knee joint and wherever you are doing orthopaedic surgery, you take an X-ray and you see where you are putting your nail and your screws and so on; an X-ray right there. Now a CT machine, we found ourselves in Trinidad and Tobago with not one CT machine working for all the hospitals of Trinidad and Tobago [*Desk thumping*] and the Minister has today to come and speak about a CT machine

hiding somewhere. Why he did not find it and why he did not have it working? The CT machine is basic for every health institution. We should have a CT machine for Port of Spain hospital, San Fernando hospital, Mount Hope hospital and the district health facilities at all, if it is possible.

I remember in 1997 when I was Chairman of the regional health authority, the North-West and I ensured that a CT machine was bought and purchased for the emergency department at General Hospital, Port of Spain, so that when patients came in with accidents and so on, you could have done the investigation with a CT machine. That is 1997 I am talking about. That is 1997, I was Chairman of two of the regional health authorities working with Minister Khan and Minister Hamza Rafeeq and that was the work during then, 1997 to 2000.

CDAP drug shortages. I want to speak about this chemotherapy drug. The Member for Fyzabad asked whether the chemotherapy area is being closed in San Fernando. I will deal with the whole issue of oncology in a short while. Lack of surgical and medical supplies. When doctors are operating, they need the “K” nail for the hip fracture, they need equipment for neurosurgery, they need a number of supplies for gauze and dressings and so on and fluoroscopic type of work, and in the X-ray department they have not been paying the providers of these so the providers have not been providing the things that they need to have in the hospitals and the patients have been collapsing and waiting for days and days and weeks for surgical intervention. And that is one of the reasons why the hospitals are overcrowded because they are not doing what is required of them. “And doh ask for customer service relations.”

So, in 2016/2017, “they come and they say” contracts were previously awarded for the construction of the Arima and Point Fortin Hospitals and we are now in the process of finalizing the long-term financing arrangements. That is all

they could come and say, they cannot say what they are going to do. They speak about what the People's Partnership has done, contracts that were previously awarded, nothing new. [*Desk thumping*] The Couva Hospital and Training Facility, 249:

The Cabinet has decided to invite proposals for a public/private partnership arrangement whereby a private operator would manage, operate and maintain the hospital or specific elements of it.

Madam Speaker, it is a disgraceful decision by this shameless Government on the Couva children's hospital. [*Desk thumping*] Spite, vicious, divisiveness and vindictiveness. That is why they have not opened it. That is why they have not opened the Debe Campus. That is why they have not continued the work on the airport at Camden and that is why they have not done any work on the 62 schools we left for them to finish. [*Desk thumping*] Is it not telling the population there is political vindictiveness in this? [*Desk thumping*] They have not paid any of the contractors.

So you leave Couva hospital. The stark reality of this Dr. Keith Rowley administration, the adamant, disgraceful and hypocritical refusal to open the very modern, advanced, technologically equipped, state-of-the-art Couva children's hospital has brought nationwide, Caribbean and international condemnation of their malicious, politically malicious, vindictive and vicious decision. [*Desk thumping*] This decision to have a hospital of First World standard to now be used for dispensation of CDAP drugs as its major operationalization of the facility can be seen as emanating from a Government team devoid of any intellectual capacity and capability.

There are already 250 pharmacies and their pharmacists nationwide dispensing CDAP pharmaceuticals while educating the patients of their age. This

Government and Minister of Health, Member for St. Joseph, positioning the CDAP drug dispensation at Couva hospital as a game changer—that is what he said, “is ah game changer”—is a grave insult to the intelligence and gross disrespect to our citizens requiring secondary and tertiary health care and also to the highly trained medical fraternity. And the Minister came here in Parliament speaking about secondary health care, tertiary health care, quaternary health care for Couva hospital. “Yuh cyah even do the primary health care properly, yuh not looking after the secondary health care patients, you talking about quaternary health care? He living in ah dream world.” He is in a time of his own. [*Crosstalk*] Yeah, suffering death at Sando hospital. This is just one.

Madam Speaker, it is frightening and scandalous when thousands of patients in serious need of proper hospitalization and urgent surgical procedures are left suffering and dying when an institution much desired by even First World countries. You know how many First World countries would love to have a hospital like the Couva children’s hospital; it remains closed. It is simply appalling. And this regime came into Government confused and ignorant of the requirements of the health sector, promising a plan. They did not even have a plan about the health sector, they promised a plan and their plan came two years later. My good friend, Dr. Winston Welch. Everybody knows he is my colleague for many years. He produced a plan working with others but the only major recommendation from that was a public sector/private sector partnership. The other recommendations were really almost the same thing as the Gafoor Commission of Enquiry and the recommendations there in 2008. So all he had to do was to take some of the recommendations, many of which had been fulfilled by our Minister of Health between 2010 and 2015 and Dr. Welch report came after two years with one major recommendation, the public sector/private sector

partnership.

At first, gross and serious untruths were told to this population when Minister Deyalsingh said they do not have enough doctors and nurses to run the hospital when in fact there were hundreds of doctors and nurses begging for jobs. [*Desk thumping*] Their next statement, the Welch recommendation which is public sector/private sector partnership for the hospital, it has failed four years later. Nobody wants to partner with this Government to have the public sector/private sector partnership.

Next came the Government owes UWI \$200 million. The Prime Minister took—because you owe UWI \$200 million, “yuh take ah two billion institution and yuh say, here UWI, take this and run it for me”. And now I understand, UWI has 51 per cent shares. So they have \$1 billion in shares. UWI belongs to the Caribbean countries, [*Desk thumping*] it does not belong to UWI in Trinidad. So you take the taxpayers’ money of \$2 billion and you gave it to a private UWI to run the institution. This has to be challenged. The University of the West Indies cannot have that as 51 per cent share. That has to belong to the people of Trinidad and Tobago, not the Caribbean countries. [*Desk thumping*] UWI belongs to the Caribbean countries. And before you could get any plan or any implementation of anything from the University of the West Indies, you have to go through the four different campuses, particularly in medicine. You have to get it approved in Trinidad, then Barbados, then Jamaica, then Bahamas.

So you want to start an offshore medical school, sure, it is good but Trinidad and Tobago has 250 medical students at an annual basis and in any particular time, we have 750 medical students under clinical training scattered in the three hospitals which are over-brimming now. You cannot teach medical students when there are too many around a bedside. You think as a patient, you would want to have more

than five doctors or medical students or interns around you? So you are not even making use of the proper training of the medical students here in the hospitals in Trinidad but you want to bring in an offshore medical school. We, from the University of the West Indies, never wanted to recognize St. George's University when they were an offshore medical school in the 1980s because they were of a lower standard than us. We could not go there as an external examiner to St. George's University, we could not go there and lecture. But what has happened? There are a whole number of offshore medical schools in Dominica and Montserrat and Antigua and so on. They do their premedical training there but they go to the United States and countries abroad to do their clinical training. If we start an offshore medical school here, where are they going to get their training? This is pie in the sky discussion. [*Desk thumping*]

And what an amazing and startling and dumbfounded and stupefying state of affairs with our widespread confused state of mind by this Government in the midst of vicious defiance of bringing to proper use the Couva general hospital. And now all sorts of names are going for it. You go there, "yuh see" UWI logo on it and on the other side, another name. They do not want to recognize that it was named the Couva children's hospital [*Desk thumping*] and when we get back into power, we will name it the Couva children's hospital and we know that there are other areas that you can put to use at this Couva children's hospital and the Member for Fyzabad who was with the Minister of Health had—

Madam Speaker: Member for Caroni East, your original speaking time is now spent. You have 10 more minutes to wind up your contribution. Do you wish to avail yourself of it?

Dr. T. Gopeesingh: Yes, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker: Please proceed.

Dr. T. Gopeesingh: [*Desk thumping*] So, Madam Speaker, the same thing being repeated in the promises of 2017/2018: construction of the Arima hospital is ongoing, construction of a new Point Fortin hospital is ongoing, Couva Medical and Multi-Training Facility and we expect that the facility will be commissioned in 2018. So they are giving CDAP drugs, they are trying to start something at the Couva hospital, they started the MRI facility. They did some MRIs. The MRI has broken down so no more MRIs being done [*Desk thumping*] because they left the equipment for four years too long unattended to so it is not surprising that the MRI has broken down.

Madam Speaker, I just want to raise one or two other points before I close. The Minister spoke about attempted suicide. There is nothing like attempted suicide. [*Interruption*] Successful or unsuccessful suicide. From the definition, suicide is the act of intentionally causing one's own death. You either commit suicide or attempt suicide. "It eh ha no successful or unsuccessful." The Minister needs to be educated. [*Desk thumping*] I was wondering whether he was talking about Kevorkian [*Crosstalk and laughter*] and you know Kevorkian is an individual who practices euthanasia and he did over 120,000 cases in the euthanasia.

The Minister came today and spoke about the patients, the seven patients who had enucleation of their eyes and they had the enucleation of their eyes because the drugs that came in with triamcinolone acetonide, which is the base substance in the intraocular injection for patients with macular edema and retinal displacement, they had these injections given by their doctors, by the ophthalmologist and these were tainted heavily with bacteria. So when one doctor found that this patient was having pus running from "dey eye" within a day or two, he found it very strange so he reported it, but meanwhile other doctors had already started giving it. What did

the Minister of Health do when that came to his attention? He said absolutely nothing. When the media approached him on this, he tried to vacillate and did not give a response and today, well, he said that he will make sure that that company is investigated and so on and making the claim that it is before the courts and so on. But the same company has and today's newspaper on *Guardian* Monday, October 14th:

“After importation of tainted eye injections...Company gets \$15m in tender awards from ministry”

The same company brought in the tainted injections, the intraocular injections, they get a 15 million tender and he said that they are going to make sure that they look after their tender. And when he was being asked, he hide from it and up to today, when he is asked questions about it, he does not want to answer.

I want to go to this area of the Zika babies. I want to say there was a time when we had the swine flu epidemic and this Government was long in coming to the defence of people in Trinidad and Tobago and the swine flu attacked somebody and the person died from it. I think it was—Member for Tabaquite, you would remember, you raised that issue. And they vacillated and within a three-month period, another three patients died, so there was lack of decision-making and implementation of programmes and policies to deal with that swine flu [*Desk thumping*] and the same thing happened with the Zika virus, Madam Speaker, same thing happened.

And when the rest of the world and United States was saying that there were three to four million people in the Americas who could be infected by the Zika virus, there is no cure or vaccine. Apart from Brazil where the World Health Organization said that up to 1.5 million people had been infected and such nearby countries as Barbados, Venezuela and Suriname were reporting confirmed or likely cases, the virus had exploded in Colombia. We drew to the attention of this

Government that they must take pre-emptive action [*Desk thumping*] in trying to eradicate the *Aedes aegypti* mosquito and make sure that you have programmes and policies for dealing with pregnant patients who might have been infected with the Zika virus already and whose fetuses and babies in utero would have probably been affected and having the microcephaly as a result which was a well-known complication.

Today, somewhere—yesterday I read on the newspaper:

“Support for Zika babies and their families”

And over 100 baby mothers whose babies have been affected as a result of that, Madam Speaker. You know what is a burden on the parents of a child infected with the Zika virus with microcephaly? The child cannot walk, they cannot move their hands. They are worse than a cerebral palsy patient and I feel the pain and the empathy for those patients who have to care for their babies who have been infected with the Zika virus. This is unpardonable and this is unacceptable [*Desk thumping*] when the Government of Trinidad and Tobago did not put into place the programmes and policies and only filibustering on the issues and did absolutely nothing. Today, the care and concern of these 100 babies should be on the hands of the State and the State must be made to ensure that these babies are protected and taken care of.

So, Madam Speaker, in my last four minutes, I want to talk just a little bit on the oncology centre. The Member for Oropouche East under UDeCOTT made sure that this oncology centre was beginning to work again and this oncology centre is a necessity for Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*] When there are 3,000 patients being affected with cancer on a yearly basis and you have almost 2,000 deaths, you cannot afford to stop the construction of the oncology centre because you say that there is a problem with the contractor B. Batiment. Sit down and

negotiate with them [*Desk thumping*] but there is no will and decision to start back that oncology centre. They want it to go astray. So they decided to—all the machines that were supposed to be there—the MRI, the CT scanner, the machines for chemotherapy administration, the chemotherapy fume chamber—all these machines are now being sent and the linear accelerators are now being sent across the country. But oncology care is an integrated thing, it must be in one centre and so therefore they have mashed it up but when we come back into power, this is something [*Desk thumping*] that we have to discuss with the national population and see how we can bring this oncology centre back so that we can save the lives of thousands of patients.

And when you can say that you saved \$300 million from your CDAP programme, you did not purchase some of your drugs but the chemotherapeutic agents were not purchased and patients who were supposed to receive their chemotherapy did not receive it, and once you stop one cycle of chemotherapy, that cancer flourishes and the patients die. And so there were many deaths as a result of the Minister of Education not taking the right and proper decision to ensure that the chemotherapeutic agents are in the country. When we come into Government, [*Desk thumping*] our Prime Minister could probably work with the Caribbean Prime Ministers to ensure that the chemotherapy drugs brought from abroad is at a cost-effective manner so that the chemotherapeutic agents could be for the entire Caribbean. That is the type of vision we have.

So, Madam Speaker, there is a lot more that I can speak on the health sector. I intended to speak a little bit on the education but I think I had to deal with the health matters. So I want to—I am looking for it here. I want to quote for him a Bob Marley; a Bob Marley song says: the sun will rise again. The sun will rise again, we will be in Government and we will bring an end to the suffering and pain

of the thousands of people in this country.

Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. [*Desk thumping and crosstalk*]

The Minister of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries (Sen. The Hon. Clarence Rambharat): Madam Speaker, thank you very much for the opportunity to contribute to this debate. I thank my colleagues on both sides for listening and allowing me the opportunity to assist you in your plans for 2020 which I heard on Friday.

Madam Speaker, in relation to the contribution of the Member for Siparia, I thank her very much as I thank the Minister of Finance for giving agriculture significant space in both the budget and the response from the Member for Siparia. One was absolutely spot on and one contained many deficiencies. In relation to the contribution of the Member for Siparia, Madam Speaker, I wish to point out four issues in the overview. The first is I stood in this exact spot a couple years ago very early on and I shared with this House this issue of the food import bill. Almost every Minister of Agriculture before me fell into the trap of promising to reduce the food import bill. In my first year as Minister, I could have laid claim to reducing the food import bill by a billion dollars. I was asked a question in Parliament about the food import bill and I disclosed that in our first year, it had reduced by a billion dollars. I was very clear, Madam Speaker, that I had very little to do with it.

The fact is that the forex situation was tight. That was one. The fact is that the weather conditions in the US led to reduced grain prices and grain is one of the most important contributors to the food import bill. But in some cases, Madam Speaker, I have seen with the proliferation now of the farmers' market and the greater understanding of the citizens of this country on the need not only to support local farmers but also support their own health, and I am happy to be preceded by

two speakers who spent almost 90 minutes on this issue of health because if there is any case for farmers and local food production in this country is a case that will be made by the health practitioners. So the food import bill, Madam Speaker, will always be with us. I started off as Minister by talking about the controllables and the uncontrollables.

We have been obsessed with local rice and I will talk a bit more about that. We have been obsessed local rice and coming out of the communist era, we have allowed this thing called food security to be stuck in our language. But this is the reality of the modern trading environment, Madam Speaker, that we have signed on to. My predecessor, who like me, comes from Rio Claro, Dr. Brinsley Samaroo, was the last person to ban the import of apples and grapes because he had the power to do that. But in a free trading arrangement, there are very limited circumstances in which we can exclude imports into this country. What we can do is hope that our consumers in this country recognize on the one hand, the need to support local farmers and on the other hand, the need to support their own health.

[Desk thumping]

Madam Speaker, I was quite surprised to hear the rationale for reintroduction of the sugar industry as being the need to stop the importation of sugar and my colleague from Chaguanas East and my colleague from Couva South knows well. Between 1993 and 2003, the last 10 years of Caroni (1975) Limited sugar production, the company existed only to fill the EU quota for sugar. None of the sugar produced locally was used locally. In fact, importation of sugar outstripped our local production. Yes, Madam Speaker.

In the glory days of Tate & Lyle, the sugar production in this country was 200,000 tonnes a year and the reality is that the rest of the world did not just stand alone and watch us. The rest of the world developed the capacity. And when you are

Brazil and you pay US six cents a day in labour per person, you understand the ability of Brazil. And when Brazil and Australia, Thailand got into the game of sugar, they got into it with dual factories, factories that would produce sugar when the price was high and factories that would produce ethanol when the price of sugar was low. We never did that and up until its closure, Caroni ran on a 100-year-old factory and a 100-year-old game plan. And unfortunately, my colleague from Couva South, not unfortunately, actually received a national award for his contribution to the work on rationalizing the sugar industry. Madam Speaker, I have said on many occasions, I was approached to receive a national award for my work on the sugar industry and declined saying that all I did was my job. [*Desk thumping*]

So I want to make it very clear that agriculture production in this country and food is not keeping the imports out. If we had to produce rice in this country to dispel the imports, we have to level every building in Trinidad, Tobago and Down the Islands, every building and turn them into lagoons and plant rice, but there is no economic rationale for planting rice and for producing rice. What there is a rationale for is we have had good rice farmers in this country and we should keep them in production. They occupy significant acreages, we should keep that green and keep that in production.

But the truth is, Madam Speaker, the price of local rice delivered as paddy to National Flour Mills is three times the price of processed parboiled rice first grade landed in the premises of National Flour Mills on Wrightson Road. That is the reality. And if we were to continue to produce local rice with the intention of displacing imported parboiled, then we will be putting a heavy burden on somebody to subsidize local rice production and in a time and an environment where there are no guaranteed prices and there is a reduction in support by the

State to agriculture around the world, local rice production is one of the most supported activities supported by the taxpayers. And that is because we provide rice seeds where we could, the land is cheap, \$500 an acre and we have at least 3,000 acres in cultivation now. Every year, there is a noise for water and the water is provided—because water costs and water especially in the dry season costs and the State ensures that the rice farmers receive their water to fuel their production. In many cases, the Ministry has to provide pumps and other support. Rice is the only commodity now that receives a guaranteed price when it is delivered to National Flour Mills, in addition to which the taxpayers of this country pay a hefty fee to National Flour Mills to turn the paddy into processed white rice.

12.00 noon

Madam Speaker, it is because of this old talk in rice that has persisted for more than 25 years, that in February this year, February 2019, I went before the Joint Select Committee that was enquiring into the operations of National Flour Mills; I went. It is very rare for a Minister to go before a joint select committee. But I thought in the interest of the farmers on the whole, and rice farmers, that they should understand where I stand as a Minister and where we stand as a Government. And I spent three hours before that joint select committee.

And I started, I opened by saying my history has, in a sense, been in rice. I grew up not far from Plum Mitan. But in my private practice, from 1995, I represented the National Flour Mills. And thereafter when I went into Caroni, I was in the company that was producing the most amount of rice in the country. But I understood from very early, Madam Speaker, that this industry needs to be configured in a particular way for it to be successful.

So when my friend from Siparia talked about rice on Friday, it was in the context of the Carlsen Field mill and the need to establish a new rice mill and parboil plant.

Well, that is history, and clearly if my friend from Siparia was not listening to me in February 2019, this is what I told the farmers of this country. I said first, I was involved in the first and many attempts by National Flour Mills—and my colleague from Arouca is there, she worked there, she knows—and every attempt to divest the Carlsen Field mill was met with opposition, blocking the gate, dropping rice paddy by the gate, all sorts of things. There was always some buyer who never put themselves forward. And fast forward to the most recent attempt to divest the feed mill, and my friend from Siparia should have been paying attention. It was her Minister of Agriculture, and I told the Parliament that, my predecessor who in the strangest way placed an ad in the newspaper for the divestment of the Carlsen Field mill, even though the asset is owned by National Flour Mills, and I placed on record my concern in the Parliament. I asked: How could NFM, with private shareholders as well as the State, look on as a government Ministry attempted to divest its asset?

And I allowed the process to go on, Madam Speaker, because I did not want to interfere in the business of a company that is listed on the stock exchange. But when I saw that the attempt to divest was falling apart, as Minister I then intervened. And I went to the Cabinet and I told the Cabinet that converting an old rice mill into a rice facility makes no sense. The rent alone that NFM was extracting for the asset, it made no sense. The technology has gone far. My colleagues who have gone to Guyana know that. It is very cheap to establish a rice parboiling plant. And we opened the opportunity to the person who was identified as the preferred bidder for the Carlsen Field mill, to talk to the Government on the establishment of a rice parboiling plant.

Madam Speaker, I am very happy to say, after several months of working on it, the Cabinet last week—and this morning I delivered the letter to Trinidad Parboil

Limited for the establishment of a rice parboil plant in my friend's constituency, Couva South. At the same time, Madam Speaker, I wrote to every rice farmer in this country. I wrote to every rice farmer, following my appearance, based on an undertaking I had given. Because I said to the Joint Select Committee, I believe that the Government could support a local rice industry that is based on 5,000 acres. It means an additional 1,200 acres.

But, Madam Speaker, I also said when I was in Caroni we were doing 1.1 tonnes per acre, we were yielding 1.1 tonnes per acre. In Guyana they are yielding 1.8 tonnes per acre and in Trinidad now, we are yielding point .46 tonnes per acre. So to even come close to the Guyanese level, we have to up our game by three times. We have to do better. We have to do better as farmers. But I said at 5,000 acres, I am prepared as a Minister to continue to support the rice industry.

And, Madam Speaker, I listened to the Member for Siparia throughout, and just a small reference on land tenure. But I will tell you this, everyone on that side and everyone on this side, every Member in this House has interacted with me on this issue of land tenure. I have been to all your constituencies, explaining and trying to get leases for your farmers, your residential tenants, your religious groups, your industrial and commercial people, because I understand it. That has been my life. That has been my life as a lawyer, and I understand the importance of land tenure. And I wrote to these farmers.

I listened to the Member for Siparia making a bold announcement of 200 acres of land in El Carmen, for rice. But as I said we need at least 1,200 acres. But that 200 acres of land in El Carmen, if she had been minding her business, already exists and the person is squatting there. It is Richard Singh, and I will tell you about Richard Singh if I get the chance, a farmer who was led by the administration led by the Member for Siparia, to borrow over \$3million from

ADB, with a promise that that administration will put 4,000 extra acres into rice.

And I have said in the other place, Madam Speaker, I have placed it on the record, that I have been in the state sector for a long time, but I have never seen a Permanent Secretary writing in the way this Permanent Secretary did, May 22, 2012, writing to the ADB, Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Food Production, telling ADB that the Ministry will be granting a contract to this farmer to prepare 2,500 acres of land. And it is on the strength of this letter that that farmer was caused to enter into that borrowing with ADB and could not meet a single loan payment. And it is under this administration, Madam Speaker, it is under this administration that we were able to have payments made through the sales of rice but also to have the restructuring of the loan.

And I have said many, many occasions, there are farmers in this country would not tell the truth because of the politics. But when I work, Madam Speaker, everybody knows I represent the citizens of this country, particularly the farmer [*Desk thumping*] without regard of who they vote for and I could not allow that to go untouched. But I will not allow it also to go unnoticed. And I wrote to those farmers in March and I asked them four questions: Are you currently occupying state land? What is the acreage occupied? What is your authority for using the land? And provide me with your production records. And you know, I did that. I did that first, if they are squatting, to ensure that they get land tenure.

If their production records demonstrate that they are under-producing, that we give them the technical support to lift their production, and if there is need for additional land, that we would make that available for them. That is what we have to do, Madam Speaker. This is not about sounding—making fanciful statements, you know, this is getting into the nuts and bolts, and I have used up so much of my time just talking about rice.

Madam Speaker, the second point made by the Member for Siparia is that there was reduced production. But how would we know that? Madam Speaker, I was embarrassed to read the July publication from the Central Bank. There are two publications, two bulletins for the year. And I was embarrassed that agriculture was not even mentioned there. And it builds on a story I have been saying and I have been trying to fix, about this issue of data collection of agricultural production figures. But, Madam Speaker, it also confirms something I know, and I have known all my life, farmers are so fearful of the taxman in this country that they will continue to underrepresent their production data and they will always be bawling on the television that they are suffering.

And that is why, Madam Speaker, when I went back to section 14 of the Income Tax Act I wondered, as a Minister, I have only received one application. The section 14 allows somebody who is in an approved agricultural activity to get an exemption for 10 years from their gains and profits from agriculture. And I always wondered why I got one application in my four years so far. And I just believe that when that was introduced in the Income Tax Act, it was not introduced as a genuine effort to help farmers, you know. It was introduced as a genuine effort to help other professionals like doctors and lawyers and accountants, and so on, to offset their profits against losses in the agriculture sector. [*Desk thumping*] So, they were not farming. They were just writing off losses.

And I believe that this thing called tax-free, is a genuine, a genuine effort by the Government to assure those in food production that we understand the circumstances that they operate under and we are prepared to leave them with their profits and gains to redeploy into the enterprise. But more importantly, if we have the correct data, then we can plan and resource for the industry better. It is difficult to do so once they keep underreporting or not reporting at all.

The third thing, Madam Speaker, in the overview is this thing about land. And I was shocked. I was shocked to hear the Member for Siparia made this bold and manifestly incorrect promise of 25,000 acres of Caroni land for an agri-park and 25,000 acres for a mega farm. Not only is it fundamentally wrong as a policy decision, it is mathematically impossible. Caroni (1975) Limited, Madam Speaker, had 77,000 acres of land divided among cane farming by the company Caroni, cane farming by private farmers, residential tenancies, squatters, roads, bridges, drains, public buildings, all sorts of things, and as we manage we have dealt with 14,000 acres. So when we started this VSEP, we might have had about 30,000 or 25,000 available, 14,000 of which has been given to this two-acre policy, another 6,000 for the housing, which leaves us at best with about 15,000 acres of former Caroni lands, at best.

So this 25,000 for an agri-park and 25,000 for a mega farm is mathematically impossible, but from a policy point of view, foolishness. And if any administration should have learnt about the problems with these mega promises, it is my friend's administration, the Member for Siparia. This Caroni Green was a fiasco.

Another promise to enter into tenancy agreements. So a farmer has a two-acre parcel of Caroni land, this Caroni Green would rent the land from the farmer and plant it up, and the objective and the promise was to do 4,000 acres, and all it landed us in was a 25—at least—million hole in our pocket and multiple lawsuits from farmers that I as Minister am still trying to deal with; farmers who—they held out hope.

Caroni Green was a massive failure. And I do not understand how anybody could live the lie. You know I asked Caroni Green, Madam Speaker, one question: Show me a document which tells me that you sold pepper on the export market? And I also said to them, if you are making so much money in US dollars, show me where

you are banking it because you do not have a US account. And up to today, more than two years since we closed it down, nobody, even those involved in the liquidation, there is a provision in this year's fiscal for dealing with another \$450,000 in debts of Caroni Green. We have already dealt with over \$25 million in debts of Caroni Green and nobody can produce this thing, this piece of paper to tell me they exported a single pepper.

[MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

But I will tell you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, what Caroni Green used was the resources of the State to pay close to 100 people to sit down in the office, to pay about 60 to plant pepper and to offload that pepper onto the local market and kill the farming families in this country who depend on hot pepper for their survival.

And that is a business the State should never be in. The State should never be minding animals, milking cows, minding goats, growing pawpaw. [*Desk thumping*] I was shocked to go in Rio Claro, Ecclesville, Rio Claro, my colleague, the Member for Mayaro will know that. I was shocked to go up there on our station and see “a pick-up full ah plantain” purchased at the old scheduled price, \$.08 a pound, driving off the compound to go out and kill some farming family in this country. The State should never be doing that.

Honey: I am almost to the point of putting it to an end. So many sections of the Ministry are producing honey and selling it for \$15 a bottle, and I know, having spent an enormous amount of time with the great beekeepers in this country, you cannot produce quality honey in this country and sell at less than \$150 for a 75 cl bottle. That is the reality. So this thing about 25 acres, mega—

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I have said our administration, our party was involved in this mega farm policy. And I have said and placed on the record many times, we do not need mega farms in this country. We need mega farmers. In the constituency

for Caroni East, I was embarrassed one night late in the Senate that Sen. Mark, the Leader of Government Business in the Senate, raised the name Ricky Ramcharan, and made an allegation in relation to Ricky Ramcharan. And Mr. Deputy Speaker, I did not speak that night. And at the first opportunity to speak, I placed on the record an explanation of Ricky Ramcharan. And my colleague for Couva North is there, and I said to the country, on Monday 03 February, 2014, Ricky Ramcharan was given an award by my colleagues on the other side, as being an outstanding farmer in this country, and I attempted to clear his name because Ricky Ramcharan is one of those farmers in this country—I was with him on Friday, he, his wife and his two daughters. His father-in-law was also a farmer, died when his tractor hit a building and he was attacked and killed by bees. This is a farming family. And Ricky said to me, “I could easily handle 150 acres, Mr. Minister”. That is what he said, and so many young men and young family and farming families in this country could easily handle 150. All they ask of us is to give them the lease. That is all they ask of us.

The fourth point I want to make, Mr. Deputy Speaker, is this: I am not surprised that the Member for Siparia, in making 40 promises to the farmers in this country, never mentioned the word poultry; never mentioned. She talked about creating jobs. The Member talked about creating jobs. Well, I will tell you this, Mr. Deputy Speaker, poultry is the biggest contributor to the small agriculture GDP in this country. Whatever we have as a contribution to GDP, poultry is more than half of that. It employs more than 12,000 women, many of them single mothers. And my friends on the other side will not know.

[MADAM SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

But in November, November 28, 2015, very early in my term, I took my colleague, the Minister of Trade and Industry to Arawak. And let me tell you why. I was

being asked as a Minister to rubber stamp the importation of chicken breast in this country, on the basis that the three brands, the three marks like you know Adidas? The chicken breast for a sandwich needed to have three black marks on it. And they were saying to me that my farmers and my poultry processors in this country cannot produce that. And I refused, and I took my colleague and we spent six hours in Arawak, and she came out a believer, and in there she met many single mothers from the East-West Corridor.

And in my community and in the community of Rushton Paray, Member of Parliament for Mayaro, we know. Because our communities have the most contract suppliers to the poultry industry than any other community in this country. And the men and women who work there have no malls and factories and Government offices to go and work. We must find opportunities on the sea and on the land and poultry required a defence by my friends, and they failed to do that. And in failing to do that, the Tyson chicken came in here and gobbled up 20 per cent of our market. And you know why? We were not paying attention as successive governments have failed to pay attention to food safety and have failed to stand up to the United States. So we have dealt with it, from a policy point of view, in saying amongst other things, chicken imported in this country must have. There is a requirement that it must not be 180 days older than the slaughter date.

Because you could bring—I have been on record many times—chicken that are slaughtered and frozen 10 years ago into this country. And you know, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I would not advocate for fast food in this country, not coming after two speakers on this issue of health. But I will tell you this, if I have to eat a piece of chicken in this country, I am going to KFC and Royal Castle, because the chicken there is chicken slaughtered on the same day and delivered on the same day and is locally processed chicken. [*Desk thumping*] I would not subject myself or anybody

to imported chicken that is stale and close to rotten; the same way I would not subject you to rotten wild meat. So the defence of poultry is what I wanted to hear on Friday, not pie in the sky about organic sugar. I wanted to hear about the backbone of agriculture in this country, poultry, and I did not hear that and I was not surprised. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker, I listened to so many things. I listened to 40 promises. I listened to ADB, streamlining ADB. Madam Speaker, I will tell you this, ADB streamlined. Because under me as Minister, the very first thing I did with all the enterprises, all the enterprises in the Ministry, is to write to them giving them a mandate document and setting down for them in detail what my expectations would be. And meeting with them regularly. And most importantly, Madam Speaker, the boards that report to me as Minister in this country will tell you they get letters from me all the time, asking them of things that appear in their minutes. And if I do not get minutes, I write to them saying I have not been getting minutes. And what I met and I reported in my very first contribution on the budget 2015, was ADB and this sports bar that they lent to and this Jacuzzi that they lent to. And the former advisor to my predecessor getting a \$3million loan with \$100,000 in collateral. That is what ADB was doing. ADB communicated to its employees a salary increase of 14 per cent without consulting the Cabinet-appointed committee charged to advise on increases and without consulting to the CPO.

And Madam Speaker, the most grievous act and the most hurtful act as a Minister is having to see \$18million of ADB money go down the drain, because of the failed attempt to rent a building in Chaguanas. We lost that case. We lost that case because we did not care if somebody had the statutory approval, if the building has been approved. We did not care, and ADB, the farmers and the taxpayers of this country had to bear that \$18million loss. I do not want the Member for Siparia to

streamline ADB for me. I could handle that myself. [*Desk thumping*]

NAMDEVCO: streamlining NAMDEVCO. That was included in the list. Well, let me tell you what streamlining means. The packing houses, one in Brechin Castle and the one in Tabaquite. I have had to deal with litigation in that. Litigation starts with the fella who they put to design the one in Brechin Castle and a dispute of whether he had the academic qualifications to design a packing house. That matter is still on, million-dollar claim, and every contractor involved in those packing houses had a claim. And I was shocked, and I have answered questions in this House and in the other place. You tell me you commissioned—the Member for Tabaquite is not here. In fact, Madam Speaker, I may point out, none of my predecessors are in this House or in the other place. None of them are anywhere where they could be held accountable.

Imagine Brickfield, a plaque was unveiled for the opening of the Brickfield packing house. It “doh” even have electricity connected to it to this day. And in building the Tabaquite packing house, Brickfield, not a piece of equipment was catered for. The massive Brechin Castle packing house, Madam Speaker, anybody involved in agriculture as I have been and my family for generations, will know a packing house is as big as the table in the centre there. It is just a place where they grade and sort and they handle the thing. Nobody is competing with Dole pineapple in this country, you know. The farmers just need a space. And down the road it could be HACCP approved and certified for US export, and so on. And a massive building that—I do not know what to do with it.

So we have put out an expression of interest inviting the private sector, inviting the farmers, anybody with an interest in operating Brechin Castle, Brickfield or the existing packing house in Piarco, and we will see. We will see what interest there is, because ultimately I want those things to operate in the interest of the farmers,

but I cannot, after spending almost \$75 million to get those, go back and ask the taxpayers to find \$50 million to outfit them.

Madam Speaker, “I doh even want tuh tell yuh about the billboards”. Billboards erected, billboards advertising, not a cent collected for the billboards. The Debe Wholesale Market; I “doh” think I ever got a chance to ask my friend from Oropouche East, how come NAMDEVCO was never asked to spend a cent on the wholesale market; the best known thing in Debe, after the doubles? I was appalled. I was appalled when I went as Minister, having taken decision to expand Debe, to create 8,400 additional square feet space for parking. I was appalled to see the unhygienic condition poultry and fish were being offered for sale, and I told those working there that day, I said, “We have to do this and we have to invest some money to fix this and make this thing better for you”. We did the same in Norris Deonarine, expanding it and expanding it. And on Friday, Madam Speaker, I commissioned, I did not open. I went and told the farmers thanks that they have started to use the facility, Woodford Lodge Farmers Wholesale Market. [*Desk thumping*] And I have said in relation to that market, that is not going to be for wholesale alone. My intention is, if the farmers who sell are willing to move the massive farmers market that is outside the Ministry headquarters in Chaguanas, to the Woodford Lodge Farmers Market.

And not only that, after seeing how well the food court in Cross Crossing has done and the one at the Savannah has done, I would like also, on Saturday and Sunday, to make it available for those vendors who are, not coming to live there, you know. I want them to come and sell and move, and sell and move. But the idea is something so important in Chaguanas, something that does not currently exist in the heart of Chaguanas, anywhere, that it should be made available for trading of all sorts and it should be operating not just for limited hours every day.

I heard mention of fisheries, I believe, fishing. And the Member for Siparia says two things: protect piracy and reduce vandalism. Well, you know what, Madam Speaker? I cannot explain it enough. The Member for Couva North had a golden opportunity representing a fishery community to go and do something about this thing called vessel tracking or vessel monitoring. It is simple. Parents tracking their children, people tracking their car parts, and we have fishing vessels operating around this country. Do you know this country has 68 official fish landing sites? And you could be on the seas and operating in and out, without the ability to track your vessel to know where you are, to have an idea of what you are doing. But the law does not allow us to do that mandatorily. That is the reality. The legislation is 103 years old. It is nine clauses. And nothing you can do or need to do in fisheries could be mandatory. It is voluntary. My predecessor, the Prime Minister, I always say I am lucky and sometimes unlucky that my boss is a former Minister of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries. It is in Dr. Rowley's administration, in his time, that he commissioned what I think is the longest running FAO consultancy in the world. It has been 27 years the FAO has been working with us on fisheries legislation.

In 2015, when I came in, what I met was a report from the EU telling us that even this Bill, my friends on the other side did produce a Bill and the EU said, this Bill does not meet international requirement, particularly in relation to illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing. You know, you have fish laundering. You have people who use other people's quota to get fish into the European Union and in the US, and not long after we got yellow-carded for not having the legislation, the US signalled that by 2020, we have a series of compliance measures to reach.

12.30 p.m.

And if EU could be ignored and they cannot be ignored, if you feel that the

market is low to nil, well, we put US \$44 million in fish into the American market, and this legislation is vital, because we have to be able to monitor vessels, we have to be able to know what is happening, we must have a mechanism for data to be reported.

When I came in I met a fisheries inspectorate, a legal unit, and I wondered what this fisheries inspectorate could do, when the law does not give them any power, you cannot do—so most likely they were walking up and down the beach watching fish. It could not happen, we need the law. In fact, we have drafted a Cabinet Note since 2015 to create a fisheries inspectorate in anticipation of this legislation, and when this Bill is laid, I look forward to the assistance of my friends on the other side in having it passed.

I listened to the statements about livestock and the livestock statement was very, very small. Revive the industry, expand Mon Jaloux and La Gloria. Well, you cannot expand what does not exist. La Gloria has been out of livestock since 2003. And yes, the expectation is always that the State would put animals there, but we have demonstrated in Aripo, you know, you can complain about the Aripo PPP, how much you want, but you know it is a very good thing for the livestock sector in this country. Everybody, anywhere situated had the opportunity to put in a proposal for the 1,146 acres in Aripo. I consider that we were fortunate, that a reputable livestock farmer, somebody who has invested.

What was said in relation to dairy? Computerized milking and feeding systems, that is what the Member for Siparia said she wants. Pasteurization, well, Marilissa Farms have been doing that and doing that successfully for a number of years. And they are investing, not my money or your money, their money. Starting with 30 to \$40 million. Not a job has been lost in there. We had vacancies for everybody, and Madam Speaker, if I have to do anything with La Gloria, it would be to invite the

private sector wherever they exist, to make proposals for La Gloria.

In Mon Jaloux, I credit my friends on the other side with doing two things that to this day I am very happy with: Establishing the grass bank in Mon Jaloux, and reopening the Marper Farm, the two things. And Mon Jaloux has gone well, but I would tell you this, something was wrong, somebody was not paying attention. You spent about \$10 million in buildings, the finest, I have said it before, the washrooms like the Hyatt, and you know what? You did not even bother to connect electricity to the facility, so that, the manager—the only electrical outlet was in the guard booth, and the manager would go by the guard booth and plug in whatever device and share space with—

What we have done, in addition to the Grass Bank where we had AP&H, the animal and health people in the Ministry, we had them up by Piarco, we had them in different parts of the country, we brought all of them and we put them into those lovely buildings that you left for me, 10 million in it and everybody is happy, fully utilized. The Grass Bank continues to operate. Lovely farmers including your Ricky Ramcharan right around the block, we cleared, there must have been 40 years of grass in a pond there. We were able to clean and clean the pond, an excellent water supply. Member for Caroni East, you have nothing to complain about, you have told me that, and your farmers in Elliot Trace, they have been getting their leases, they have been getting their approvals and they are happy.

Madam Speaker, I listened to cocoa, I listened to cocoa with some worry. The decision in a finance Bill under my friends, in one line in that Bill, hidden, you had the words “repeal the Cocoa and Coffee Industry board Act”. I grew up on that. Everybody in my community, everybody knew Sarabjit in my family. My mother where she was born and grew up in Nohar Trace, Tableland, everybody knew the cocoa and coffee dealer, the person you took your beans to.

Our farmers in this country, our cocoa farmers never had to sort and grade and find global markets, you know. The Cocoa and Coffee Industry Board did that. There was a guaranteed price system based on the grade of the bean. And for 60 years generations grew accustomed to that method. So, when you repealed the Cocoa and Coffee Industry board without even transitions, farmers had cheques to collect, and when they collected their cheques, they could not get it cashed. And I could not do anything about it. You did not do a transition to say, this will disappear in two years or three years' time. You did not discuss it with the industry. You appointed thereafter a Cocoa Development Company board that I will tell you, for 18 months sat and did nothing.

And it was an emerging—Madam Speaker, I have said last week Friday, I spoke at the opening of the World Chocolate and Cocoa Expo at the Hyatt, and I thanked the Cocoa Research Centre, the Cocoa Development Company, the people in the Ministry, and everybody who got involved in first defending our status as a Fine Flavour cocoa. You know, I always liken it to West Indies team, “You could beat your chest and say you are the best but unless you have things to show for it you will lose eventually”. And we had to go this year and defend that status and we did it very successfully, our cocoa beans continue to attract good price, but it is not automatic. You go into the European market, they tell you you used diesel to power the drier for the beans and there is diesel content in the beans, they do not want that. They tell you that there is cadmium in the cocoa because in certain parts of the country, north-east in particular, high cadmium contents in the soil.

Madam Speaker: Minister, your original speaking time is now spent. You are entitled to 10 more minutes to wrap up.

Sen. The Hon. C. Rambharat: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker: You may proceed.

Sen. The Hon. C. Rambharat: And that is what we have had to deal with, but Madam Speaker, the potential exists, the farmers continue to be interested, the potential exists, they have been supported by the Cocoa Development Company of Trinidad and Tobago. The beans and the chocolates have been winning international awards. I am particularly—as a critic sometimes of the Ministry and the public servants and so on. I was very happy to see the Ecclesville station of the Ministry—Nariva/Mayaro has been an integral part of agriculture in this country, particularly in cocoa. And last year our station in Ecclesville was selected among the 50 top beans in the world [*Desk thumping*] and that is a good thing. And the farmers are interested and they continue, but we cannot, Madam Speaker, it is about nuts and bolts, it is not about fancy language and one-line statements. If you have to run this Ministry you really have to get down into the ground and get down with the farmers and understand what needs to be done in order to support them.

And this thing about establishing a genetic bank. I am embarrassed, the hon. Member for Siparia said she googled Trinitario and did not find anything, the word does not exist. We cannot here—we cannot in the world of agriculture, Madam Speaker, cocoa ranks number one for Trinidad. That is what we are known for, and Trinitario—[*Desk thumping*]—Trinitario belongs to us. And it is on the Internet, it is easy to Google. Not to be confused with a gang in the United States with the same name. [*Laughter*]

And this talk about a genetic bank, Madam Speaker, we do not have one, we have two world class gene banks in the country for cocoa, including the number one gene bank in the country. [*Desk thumping*] And recently, last week Friday, recognizing that agriculture and planting is not a blind sport, it is science involved. And what we have found, notwithstanding the fact that we have done this for decades and we are good at it, the plants are not predictable because of cross

breeding.

So I went to the university, and I went to the CRC, the Cocoa Research Centre, and they engage Mondelēz which is the world's number one in the business of chocolates, the owner of Cadbury and a series of brands. And Mondelēz was looking to invest technology to develop its own variety of trees. And we are talking about two different groups. We are Fine Flavour, they are Bulk cocoa, but as the cocoa people always say "doh put down the Bulk cocoa yuh know, is still good cocoa, yuh know, but it is not as good as the Fine Flavour".

And what we have done is through UWI, CRC and Mondelēz entered into this agreement to develop a technology-driven cocoa breeding program in Trinidad. Our Government has simply had to make 20 acres of land available so we could start the process. This is not simple, but it will use technology to determine the quality of the tree that will ultimately result from the plant that is produced. And you know where it is going? The same St. Augustine nurseries that they said I wanted to destroy. They did not understand, the nurseries were 200 acres, 64 houses built on it; Ministry of Works and Transport; Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries; a three-acre section occupied by derelict works vehicles; a six-acre section occupied by six cattle, some marijuana planting down in corner; and much of it is bush. And having identified that site for the cocoa breeding project, Madam Speaker, I intend to put some more farmers on that site. [*Desk thumping*]

And I will close, Madam Speaker, on coconut and dairy. But my friend on the other side needs to be reminded that my predecessor commissioned a milk pasteurization plant, a sugarcane feed centre, and one up at Aripo, and never dealt with the regulatory requirement for the sale of milk, never dealt with price, never dealt with supply. I dealt with it. I dealt with it by leaving it right there. [*Desk thumping*] I left it right there, and I invited all the dairy producers on many

occasions in this country to send me a proposal for the operation of that facility.

And I will keep in mind, Madam Speaker, when I met with Nestlé Trinidad Limited, an important part of the food supply chain in this part of the world, they told me they had not seen a Minister of Agriculture in this country since 2010. So, when my friends ask what I did, I went to the people who rear cattle who are producing milk, and I asked them to submit a proposal for the operation of those facilities. Because, Madam Speaker, I am not prepared to saddle the taxpayers of this country with that. I am not prepared to do that. If the producers, the people who have invested in primary production have an interest in moving to the next step which is value added, then we are prepared to give them the facilities that exist to do that. But we cannot, we cannot put government employees to milk cows, full milk a bottle, label it, go out there and try to sell it, we will end up, Madam Speaker, “with a set ah stale milk on our hands” by the Central Marketing Agency.

And the last thing is to say this, Madam Speaker, I listened to this thing about a million coconut plants from CARDI. Well, I meet and interact with CARDI on many occasions and yes, they have written some lovely papers on coconuts. But I am sure that none of them have gone to Icacos and spoken to the farmers. I am sure none of them have gone in my community and Rushton Paray’s community on the south-east coast to talk to them. And CARDI is not in a position to produce a single coconut, “dey not in dat business”. And we have spent three years working with Brazil and Mexico, and the Minister of Finance in his presentation announced that finally, finally we have made a breakthrough with Mexico and we have just placed our first order for coconut tissue in this country.

Because, Madam Speaker, when we talk about CEPEP workers in agriculture, I have gone past—I went past that 20 years ago. I have gone past that. URP, CEPEP,

I passed CEPEP workers this morning and I looked at them and wondered, who is going to climb a coconut tree and pick coconuts on a farmer's estate? People are not doing that. We have gone and we have sought the tissue for the dwarf variety that is doing very well, high yields, easy to pick.

We know that some consumers, some farmers want the tall plants, we have sought the tissue to do that. It will not happen overnight. If you are going to build this industry, Madam Speaker, if you are going to build this, if you are going to outfit it in the way that it must be competitive, you cannot just stand up in Parliament on a Friday morning and say we have a comparative advantage in that, we have a—that is not how it works. You have to get into the nuts and bolts and the mechanics of the industry. You have to invest your time in building it and you cannot build it alone, you have to go out there and talk to the people, and talk to the farmers and all my friends on that side know I have been traipsing through their constituencies, as the ones on this side, and the country knows I have been communicating with everybody, not, Madam Speaker, to be able to come here and make 20 promises or 40 promises, but to be able to come and tell you what I am doing, firstly; secondly, what my friends are not doing and should not be given another opportunity to do.

I thank you very much, Madam Speaker. I know that my presence here is an indulgence. It is well known, and come 2020, I hope to bring the Chaguanas East card on this side, [*Laughter and desk thumping*] so that my presence here would not be by invitation, but by right. I thank you very much. [*Desk thumping*]

12.45 p.m.

Mrs. Vidia Gayadeen-Gopeesingh (*Oropouche West*): Thank you, Madam Speaker, for allowing me to join in this debate. Madam Speaker, before I proceed to analyze this budget debate, I would like congratulate the Leader of the Opposition [*Desk thumping*] for presenting a real budget to this Parliament, one

that maps out the way forward to bring hope and prosperity to the people of Trinidad and Tobago. The *National Economic Transformation Master Plan*, it was indeed a masterpiece. [*Desk thumping*] I would also like to congratulate all my colleagues on this side for being sheer brilliant, Madam Speaker. [*Desk thumping*]

But, Madam Speaker, when I listened to the Members opposite, the Member for St. Joseph, and the hon. Member for Agriculture, their contributions, Madam Speaker, I must say today, were devoid and bereft for substance. Madam Speaker, listening to them was so traumatic that the endorphins in my body could not be secreted quickly enough to dull this pain. [*Desk thumping*] Madam Speaker, every mitochondrion in my body had to squeeze its extra energy to sustain me here, but I survived and I survived to listen to all the broken promises. I survived and I listened to all their failed game changers. [*Desk thumping*] Madam Speaker, when I listened to the Minister of Finance, three and a half hours, and he concluded his budget presentation by saying “some feel the rain, others get wet”. And who really can really get wet and know than in this Parliament, that Laventille West knows how to get wet. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Garcia: Unkind.

Mrs. V. Gayadeen-Gopeesingh: Madam Speaker, the PNM has continuously talked, yet we have seen no actual change, no achievement. PNM talks and UNC works. [*Desk thumping*] This Government has been in this office for over four years, spent \$200 billion, and has nothing to show for it. This Government that talks of value for money has literally wasted millions of dollars on useless vanity projects. And you know, this is a Government always speaking about doing more for less. You know there is no mathematical theory that could give you more from less, Madam Speaker. I do not know if they are better than abracadabra in this Parliament. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Indarsingh: They are magician Government.

Mrs. V. Gayadeen-Gopeesingh: Madam Speaker, this country is in a brink of collapse. This PNM has not implemented one strategy, one mechanism or one policy to treat with the economic crisis they have foisted upon us. [*Desk thumping*] Institutions are failing under them and what this year the Minister comes with?—“Stability | Strength | Growth”. And I want to let the population know and this Government know that the only thing that is growing under this Government is crime and murders. That is the only thing growing. [*Desk thumping*] While I listened to the hon. Minister of Agriculture, Madam Speaker, it seems as if he was speaking on behalf of someone, because he did not know, he was not aware about what is happening in the agriculture sector.

Mr. Indarsingh: The advisor probably wrote that speech.

Mrs. V. Gayadeen-Gopeesingh: Because their only achievement is that there is an advisor to the Prime Minister in agriculture. That is their achievement. That is their achievement. [*Desk thumping*] Poor fella he may get sidelined and he does not know.

Mr. Indarsingh: Oh yes.

Mrs. V. Gayadeen-Gopeesingh: The Minister of Agriculture, Madam Speaker—

Mr. Indarsingh: What is his achievement?

Mrs. V. Gayadeen-Gopeesingh:—his only achievement is laying Bill here in Parliament, changing the national emblem from a single Chaconia to a Double Chaconia. That is his achievement. [*Desk thumping*] In four years he has brought one Bill here and then also complain, you know, that we cannot propagate that plant, because he does not know about the meristematic regions of the plant, but I will leave that, I will leave that.

Madam Speaker, the hon. Minister spoke a lot about the different things the

Leader of the Opposition had proposed but he has not come with one solution as what he has done or is going to do for the Ministry of Agriculture, nothing. [*Desk thumping*] He said the Leader of the Opposition did not talk about poultry. But I have to remind him, does livestock not include poultry? Poultry falls, it is a sector of livestock, it is a subsector, so poultry forms part of livestock industry and this is what have here. We are saying that the— Our People's Partnership or our UNC Government, we come into power, we are going to revitalize the livestock industry. We have said it here. We are going to rehabilitate the Carlsen Field dairy farms. We are going to develop the dairy goat industry. So maybe the hon. Minister did not even hear what the honourable leader was saying.

But, the hon. Leader of the Opposition had said, we are going to get the country moving forward. We had done so much when we were in Government in 2010—2015, and we always saw lots of promises by this PNM Government, Madam Speaker, lots of promises and lots of failed promises. And if we were to look at the PNM budget 2015—2016, the first promise, they are going to reverse the decline in agriculture production and create a strong modern, prosperous and competitive agricultural sector. What is the status of that, Madam Speaker? It has failed. They are going to do security of land tenure, is now being accorded high priority and lands will now be delivered with access roads, drainage and irrigation system. Madam Speaker, to date this has not been addressed, it has failed. Four years and still people are waiting for access roads.

Consistent with our 2015 election manifesto, we are in pursuit of the objective of achieving food security. What food security they talking about? The food import bill is close to \$6 billion in this country, \$6 billion. When we go on to their 2016—2017 budget they promised again and have not achieved anything. They are going to restructure the School Feeding Programme and the expected

expansion of the tourism sector will offer enhanced market opportunities. Which expansion of the tourism sector? It goes hand in hand. The tourism sector has contracted. So this is also a failed promise.

They going to do access roads, rehabilitate access roads with projects at Los Iros. Madam Speaker it is a total failure. The Los Iros farmers are still seeking assistance for road access and irrigation ponds to date. They are going to modernize land records: investors and farmers will now have access to standard agricultural leases. Total failure. Madam Speaker, which land records? I heard the Minister was saying 80,000 land records are going to be filed, put in database for farmers who are occupying state lands. The first thing you have to do if you are going to set up database, how is it that you are going to send 80,000 files to set up in a digitized system if the lands that farmers are occupying they do not know the size and acreage?

So the first thing you have to do is you have to engage the Director of Surveys, the surveying department so they now could go out and survey the lands. There are thousands of acres of lands that are in occupation by farmers, thousands of acres. We have very few land surveyors in the country. The Director of Surveys is not the—that department is not resourced. When is it you are going to do this and set up a GIS system, when? This again will be total failure. But this is what the—they have this since 2016—2017, you know, and now in 2019—2020 it has appeared again. Nothing to show.

Dr. Gopeesingh: Promises never materialized.

Mrs. V. Gayadeen-Gopeesingh: Then they have what?—the same thing with the modernization of the records. Then they come here, Madam Speaker, coconut. We are in the fourth year and they have not done anything with the coconut industry. In 2018 budget they said that they were going to rehabilitate and re-plan the

programme. Coconut growers are being trained in new technologies, agronomic practices, establish superior nuts. Nothing. When you look at the 2019 budget at page 68, three lines on coconut rehabilitation. So what was done for the last four years? Hundreds of thousands of dollars was spent to give out what?—2,000 coconut seedlings. That is what they said. I went to Mayaro, I went with the Member for Mayaro, Madam Speaker. We went to look for those nurseries, we went to look for the farmers and we went to look for the coconut trees. We “cah” find any. We cannot find any.

Mr. Indarsingh: That is why he run from Mayaro.

Mrs. V. Gayadeen-Gopeesingh: This year’s budget the hon. Minister just said they are going to do 600 plantlets to do tissue culture. Madam Speaker, they going to import tissue culture from Mexico. What we have in Trinidad is a disease called red ring disease. The red ring disease is present in Central America, and in South America and in most Caribbean islands have the red ring disease. So you going to import tissue material from Mexico which also has the red ring disease. So is it this is an advice the advisor to Prime Minister has given? If this is an advice it means that this advisor should be fired via WhatsApp. [*Desk thumping*] That is how he should be fired. Because, Madam Speaker, you have to import tissue culture from a country that does not have the red ring. You import it from Hawaii or Puerto Rico. Because present in Trinidad we have the nematode here, the *bursaphelenchus cocophilus* nematode here. [*Desk thumping*] It is present in here. [*Crosstalk*] So, you see, your Prime Minister is right, he says you all do not read. [*Desk thumping*] So if you want to know, you are the Minister of Education.

So, Madam Speaker, they also said they are going to have what you call technical expertise. Of what use in the technical expertise to propagate this coconut plant, when the plant is not resistant or tolerant to the red ring? So it is not

resistant. So you see, Madam Speaker, they really do not know what they are doing. It is either they speaking from different sides of the buccal cavity because they do not know what are saying. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker, if they do this thing correct, there is great potential for coconut, because coconut is now deemed a super food. It is a super food and you could look and see how you could derive value added products from the coconut industry. You could do creams and lotions and sugar and coconut flour. You have coconut oil. The cold pressed oil, Madam Speaker, you have Hollywood and Bollywood stars using it, to get beautiful skin, to use it in their teeth so they get pearl white teeth. It is a whole industry. And even here, if your hair, if your hair is dropping the people put coconut oil in their hair. And the coconut industry, Madam Speaker, the demand for it is growing at 10 per cent per year. And recently I believe the Member for Mayaro took it upon himself to go and plant a hundred trees, and I want to congratulate him. [*Desk thumping*]

1 00 p.m.

Madam Speaker, the hon. Minister of Agriculture also spoke about rice. Madam Speaker, when we were in power, when we were in Government, we handed over combined rice harvesters to the rice farmers. We increased lands under production from 500 acres to close to 5,000, ten times, [*Desk thumping*] and we facilitated the importation of commercial certified seeds from Guyana. What they have done, Madam Speaker, is that we had a plant, a nursery set up at El Carmen, where we were bringing certified seeds. I will get it for you. We were getting certified seeds from FLAR, which is called the Latin American Fund for Irrigated Rice. Madam Speaker, we had already signed a three-year contract with FLAR, a three-year contract. The rice seeds which was resistant and tolerant to our environment and grow under our climatic conditions, they were coming in in October of 2015.

This Government came in, this PNM vindictive Government and shut it down because the seeds were coming in 2015. They came in power in 2015 and shut it down after we have expended the money. So what the farmers have to do now, is that they had come together and they are trying to see if they could get seeds from Guyana. They are trying to pool their resources. What we have, Madam Speaker, imagine we had everything in place to propagate these disease resistant variety in Trinidad and you would have assisted the rice farmers. If we were given the support, if you had given the support to the rice farmers, we would have saved \$135 million a year from importing rice, and it is the fourth year. Caroni East, that is about \$500 million?

Dr. Gopeesingh: \$540 million.

Mrs. V. Gayadeen-Gopeesingh: \$540 million this Government would have saved. But you see, Madam Speaker, they have more dollars than sense. You see, Madam Speaker—[*Interruption*]

Dr. Gopeesingh: They have no sense at all.

Mrs. V. Gayadeen-Gopeesingh: You see, Madam Speaker, the Minister also spoke about we are so addicted to local rice. The thing is, why is it that you give a man name Forgenie \$.375 million to do Moruga Hill rice? If you think the Government not supposed to be doing anything, why is it that this man has been given \$375,000 and up to now we do not know how much rice he has planted? What is the size of the acreage? What he is producing? Who he is selling it to? I went through all through Moruga/Tableland looking in the parlour for a pack of rice, you cannot find none, the Moruga Hill rice.

Mr. Mitchell: He exporting it.

Mrs. V. Gayadeen-Gopeesingh: You exporting to who? And to whom? San Fernando East, after a whole year your chakra “eh” align. You still come back

here and harassing people. [*Desk thumping and crosstalk*]

Madam Speaker:—the crosstalk. Member for Oropouche West, please direct it here. And I am not sure if that statement that you just made there you know is a parliamentary one. Okay, so please be careful.

Mrs. V. Gayadeen-Gopeesingh: Okay. Thank you. So Madam Speaker, you see the Minister of Agriculture is speaking about lots of things and nothing is really happening under his watch. He also spoke about Caroni Green, and he said it was wasting and losing how much money. Caroni Green, Madam Speaker, celebrated under the People's Partnership one million pound production, one million pounds, [*Desk thumping*] and the Minister was talking about the Government not supposed to help them. The Government was not helping Caroni Green. There was a European Union loan for €22 million. [*Desk thumping*] So there was no help from this State.

Mr. Indarsingh: Set the record straight.

Mrs. V. Gayadeen-Gopeesingh: In fact, Madam Speaker, Caroni Green was employing single mothers. Many of them had now—right now they have nowhere to go because they have lost their jobs, because this Government shut it down. Impoverished families, many of them use that daily paid money to send their children to school and they have shut it down. What we have had, Madam Speaker, is that we had the hottest pepper in the world, and of course, it has been relegated to the Carolina Reaper now, because they have not done what they supposed to do under this administration. We had the hottest pepper, the Moruga Scorpion. We had peppers and the ready-made market for them in London, in New York, in Miami, and Canada, and we had those markets. When there was the storm in Puerto Rico and that market collapsed, we could have picked it up and take that market share, but again they shut it down because PNM talks and UNC works.

[*Desk thumping*] They shut it down.

Madam Speaker, when we look at the rice production I believe I had dealt fully with rice, but I have to really go back to this thing, but the farmers are not being paid. They are sending their paddy to NFM, and the last time these rice farmers were paid is January of this year. So NFM is sending their invoices to the Ministry of Agriculture and the Ministry of Agriculture refused to pay these farmers for the paddy. So farmers have, Madam Speaker, loans to pay. They have to pay ADB. They are in arrears for hundreds of thousands of dollars, and no one is coming to their assistance, Madam Speaker, no one is coming to their assistance. And if they cannot pay, of course now there will be forfeiture on their assets because they cannot pay their monthly loans.

When we look, Madam Speaker, I could recall—maybe I will do this one first, is that a vesting Bill was brought to this Parliament, if anyone could recall a vesting Bill. That vesting Bill, PSAEL lands would have been transferred and vested to Heritage Petroleum. Over 3,000 acres of agricultural lands were to be vested in Heritage Petroleum. And what was the role for Heritage Petroleum?—exploration and production.

Madam Speaker, the last time a well was ever dug on those lands, the lands taken from Coora, from Quarry, and Palo Seco, was in the 1960s. That was the only time a well was dug on those lands, and when it was drilled it stand up, water came up, so there is nowhere in any part of those lands you are going to even get a drop of oil to grease a donkey cart wheel. [*Desk thumping*] This Government took prime agricultural lands and they vest it, Madam Speaker, they vest it in Heritage Petroleum and you cannot get no oil there.

Hon. Member: Why?

Mrs. V. Gayadeen-Gopeesingh: What we had done under the People's

Partnership is that we had RFPs, request for proposal, and we had done expression of interest, 12 persons had come forward, 12 persons. PSAEL had already done the contracts only for signature. They were going to do 100-acre parcel, 200-acre parcel, and 500-acre parcel, in cocoa, coffee, and hot peppers, and they were going to set up an agro-processing plant, and PSAEL would have benefited from the royalties. What this Government did? They came in, they shut it down. In Chatham, Madam Speaker, in Chatham, we had a pasteurization plant. When I was the assistant director in ECIAF I would have sent students to Chatham, the only pasteurization plant in the world where there is no human intervention. What does that mean? It means that the cows were brought into the pasteurization plant. Their teats were hooked up, their milk sent to collecting channel flask. Then it was sent to the pasteurization plant, they were bottled and then shipped. Not an intervention by man. It took a PNM incarnation to shut it down. [*Desk thumping*]

Dr. Gopeesingh: And they talking about pasteurization.

Mrs. V. Gayadeen-Gopeesingh: Yeah.

Mr. Indarsingh: Their track record.

Mrs. V. Gayadeen-Gopeesingh: Then, Madam Speaker, when we had looked at the PSAEL lands, we already had a business arrangement with the Chinese Government with the PSAEL lands to do vertical farming. We talking about since 2012/2013, and vertical farming is another form like you do aquaponics, you do hydroponics, but it is control environment. This Government still going into traditional agriculture, so when the farmer floods out he has no compensation to get and that is a perennial problem. Vertical farming, you would have gotten green leafy vegetable 365 days for the year. So you would have gotten lettuce and patchoi. You would have gotten celery, dill, all these—pimentos, these are crops you would have gotten 365 days of the year. [*Desk thumping*] You could have

altered and varied the PH, varied the water content, because when you use vertical farming the water intake is 85 per cent less. So all this thing, you going digitised, you are going digitised and you are improving the efficiency of doing agriculture and you increasing production. So if you do that the number of goods locally, you would have increased the production locally so you would not have to use foreign exchange to import these things. Because you are importing sweet pepper, sweet potato, you are importing up to dasheen from St. Vincent. This is why our bill is what?—\$6 billion.

Madam Speaker, those lands what Heritage Petroleum inherited or they were vested to them they cannot get around to do the exploration because there are many issues with those lands. Because when I worked in the bid rounds in 2012/2013 in Petrotrin and we were revalidating the legal titles for the owners of Palo Seco, Madam Speaker, we revalidated their titles. You would see now those lands from 2012 to now, you have 5,000 squatters on those land. So you are talking seven years, you have 5,000 and they have gone and taken prime lands, these squatters. And you cannot start to do exploration because you have to know the title owners. They have to know who going to get pay, if some of them have split royalty to get. They have not decided that yet. They do not know about who have surface rights, subsurface rights, who have the oil rights. And Madam Speaker, if they do deviated drilling is that one person may have the surface right and the other person may have the subsurface rights all these things have to iron out. So I will ask this Government if they could reconsider and reinvest those lands or divest those lands back to PSAEL and let it go to agriculture.

Then you have the whole issue of the Mungal Grants. I do not know if the Attorney General was here if he was aware of the Mungal Grants where the lands were taken by the State. Mungal brought an action against the State and because the State

retained the oil rights, the court had to say no you cannot retain the oil rights of this person Mungal, and because of this court matter you have everybody else benefiting from the Mungal Grants. So those 3,000 acres of lands vested in Heritage Petroleum will remain unused, Madam Speaker, it will be unused. Madam Speaker, when we look at Aripo farm the hon. Minister saying that, there is what?—a pasteurization plant. Under the People's Partnership we opened a brand new dairy processing unit there. The People's Partnership launched their own brand of fresh pasteurized milk. I had met with farmers from Aripo and what is being done up there is that the assets and everything are being apparently sold out.

Dr. Gopeesingh: Eleven hundred acres.

Mrs. V. Gayadeen-Gopeesingh: We have 1,146 acres of prime agricultural lands.

Dr. Gopeesingh: Who they give it to? Who they give it to?

Mr. Indarsingh: Under what term and condition?

1.15p.m.

Mrs. V. Gayadeen-Gopeesingh: The issue is, Madam Speaker, who is this person benefiting? In fact, a lease was done for this 1,146 acres of land. The hon. Minister is saying people cannot get leases, the farmers cannot get leases. How you did it with such alacrity and speed for this person? [*Desk thumping*] For this 1,146 areas.

Dr. Gopeesingh: Financier of the Government.

Mrs. V. Gayadeen-Gopeesingh: Who is this person? In fact, Madam Speaker, if you have vested the lands you get the lease, what happens to the asset? Are you being gifted the asset also? Is it that this person would be rearing livestock and also moving earth? We do not know, because I have a profiling of that estate down there and it is rich in blue metal, it is rich in andesite.

Hon. Member: Ohhh.

Mrs. V. Gayadeen-Gopeesingh: So we do not know what is the real reason, what is the objective in using this Aripo farm.

Dr. Gopeesingh: To give them a quarry as well then.

Mr. Indarsingh: This is an electioneering strategy.

Mrs. V. Gayadeen-Gopeesingh: So you see, Madam Speaker, the Minister also said in his budget, at page 49, that over 100 employees who were at the station were redeployed to the Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries. But what about the other employees, Madam Speaker? Who have been sent home, where are they? As a matter of fact, what they are saying some of the animals are dying from Aripo Farm because they are not getting sufficient feed. The vet station refuses to take these carcasses because you have—veterinary students use them to do anatomy. So they cannot use them because all the freezers are filled.

So you see, Madam Speaker, the least they can do is actually buy the feed for their animals so they will not die. Because the great Mahatma Gandhi said:

“The greatness of a nation and its moral progress can be judged by the way its animals are treated.”

Madam Speaker. So we do not know how this person got this 1,146 acres, Madam Speaker, because there is no transparency because under this Government it seems there is only secrecy. So the Aripo farm is the farm—we do not know if it is Marilissa Farm, we do not know if it is Earth Movers. The contractor, Earth Movers, we do not know, “we asking” if they will be moving earth too. So we are not sure.

Then we look at the Moruga Agro-Processing Plant. Madam Speaker, the Moruga Agro-Processing Plant. On page 67 of their 2019 Budget Statement, the Government driven Moruga Agro-Processing and Light Industrial Park is now in

construction phase and represents high quality products capable of competing with international brands. Madam Speaker, we are talking about 2016. Since 2016 they promised this. We are in 2019. 2020 it appear again in the budget. They are going to do canning, bottling and freezing of finished products, \$77million expended. When you look this year, Madam Speaker, they have missed the date of opening which was March2019 and the revised completion date was September 2019; they have also missed it. The new date is sometime in January or sometime next year 2020, “the normal thing, coming soon, will be opening, it is like an intro you go in a movie and you get an intro coming soon”. Everything they have missed.

Seventy-seven millions dollars expended and you have four cow sheds, Madam Speaker, four cow sheds, \$77 million. And I am asking today, Madam Speaker, what it is they are going to can there? Do we plant red bean in Trinidad? Do we plant pinto beans, black eye, what you canning? Do we have excess corn to do the corn kernels? Who have you contacted? Which farmer planting all these excess produce for it to be canned? We cannot even satisfy our local domestic consumption. But you want to go and can. What is this? You are going to what?—bottle. What are you bottling? What are we producing here in excess to bottle?

And then they gone on to freeze finished products.

Madam Speaker, are we doing tilapia rearing still in Trinidad? Because under our People’s Partnership Government, Madam Speaker, we had tilapia rearing. We had done it at Sugarcane Feeds Centre. What we had done with aquaculture is that we had fingerlings, fingerlings, five fingerlings unit set up at the hatcheries for aquaculture at SFC. We had a floating raft cage culture project in 2015. There was no follow through by this Government because they have shut it down. We

had people training to do commercial tilapia production and hatchery management. We had over 1,000 persons trained to date and we had established the Tilapia Commodity Task Force. We had done all these things so at least if you had follow through with the programme, you would have tilapia now to process if you are saying you want process and freeze in the agro-processing plant.

But you have—everything that the UNC had done you shut it down. Madam Speaker, and if you—things that are good for the nation you shut down. This is not—when you shut down things that you could follow through with and help the country—this is not a UNC problem or PNM problem, you know, you are affecting the people of Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*]

When we look at, Madam Speaker, the Praedial Larceny Squad, many farmers in this country, Madam Speaker, they have to either abandon their estates or, in fact, I saw some put up CCTV cameras, they put cameras. I have a client here in Plum Mitan she has cameras in her avocado estate, Madam Speaker, and the rambutan. She is so scared she is seeing the thieves coming in, picking all the avocados, picking the rambutan and she is so afraid to go out because her husband is a cancer patient and she is old. You cannot—the Praedial Larceny Squad was implemented under the People's Partnership. We had done so much to help the people of the country, the farmers, Madam Speaker. [*Interruption*]

Yes, because what we had done under the People's Partnership administration, we had this squad, and we had developed that in less than six months from November '13 to May 2014. We had over 1600 patrols. We had visited 2,000 farmers, visited 223 markets and they had recorded 128 reports of praedial larceny, executed 51 arrests of which five persons were imprisoned. So, so much was being done, Madam Speaker, 25 offences of which 28 were praedial larceny offences. And what they have done under this Government? The only thing,

Madam Speaker, is that we did not only establish the squad, but we resourced them, we provided funds for them. [*Desk thumping*]

What we have now, Madam Speaker, I believe the persons in the Praedial Larceny Unit are saying that there are cockroaches and so in the office, there are rats, they have no vehicles that are functional so they cannot even go out there to assist the farmers, poor state of affairs, Madam Speaker, poor state of affairs.

Madam Speaker, when we look at the agricultural financing and we look at land tenure. Land tenure has always been an issue under this Government; land tenure has always been an issue. What we have found is that for the last, I believe, four years or five years, I think the Ministry has issued, I think, 1,000 or less land leases. You have about 7,000 farmers, so you have 6,000 leases still to be issued to farmers in Trinidad and Tobago. So four years later they have it in their budget that land tenure is an issue, four years later they still come back and say it is a priority, four years later.

Hon. Member: My God.

Mrs. V. Gayadeen-Gopeesingh: What we have happening with the Commissioner of State Lands? Is there a sitting Commissioner of State Lands? So the Commissioner of State Lands is the one who is supposed to issue leases and to do renewal of leases, to do renewal of curtilage and so. It is my understanding that at the Commissioner of State Lands you have thousands of applications sitting there, thousands of applications. And they would not issue these leases to the farmers and if you do not have leases the farmers would not have security of tenure. You cannot use your land as collateral to procure a loan from ADB. So the farmers are fumbling around, because they do not have security of tenure and they cannot get the loan, they cannot expand their farms.

We have many Caroni workers, this year will be the sixteenth year since Caroni

has been shut down and they are many persons there who did not even get their leases under what you call the VSEP programmes. You have children who are their applicants now because so many of them have died. So you have the children applying for letters of administration or probate to get these leases 16 years after.

And when you go to the probate court, Madam Speaker, that is a disaster in the probate court in Trinidad, you have to wait five and six years before you can get a grant. And you could only go and get your lease if you could present your grant to the Commissioner of State Lands. So five and six years you have queries on the system in probate court that you answer the queries. Six months after they do not delete from the system, it comes back again as a query and it is an ongoing process. So sometime one query, three and four years they would not remove it from the system. So that is how bad it is but you have the Commissioner of State Lands, whoever is acting, could have speed to issue a lease for Aripo farms and to issue a lease for Orange Grove, because in Orange Grove some other thing is going to happen there, you are going to have some packing houses.

Under our People's Partnership, we had packing houses at Brechin Castle and Tabaquite. The two remain shut today, but you are giving a man a lease to go and do a packing house when you already have two that are outfitted, that have remained shut under this Government.

Mr. Indarsingh: Four years he "cah" get electricity for one and five years.

Mrs. V. Gayadeen-Gopeesingh: We opened the Central Farmers Wholesale Market at Woodford Lodge, Chaguanas. It remains closed to today. So what is the use? Why are you duplicating funds or why are you doing things when something already exists? Why do you not take that money and help the farmers. [*Desk thumping*].

Madam Speaker, when we look at financing and the state of agricultural

financing in this country, we see that under the 2019/2020 budget, the Minister said that the interest rate would be 3 to 5 per cent for farmers in Trinidad and 2 to 4 per cent for farmers in Tobago. I have absolutely no qualms with farmers getting 2 to 4 per cent in Tobago, but why is it, it cannot be the same for farmers in Trinidad? Why it is you are discriminating against the farmers of Paramin, of Palo Seco, of Point Fortin, of Diego Martin, Aripo? Why are you doing that? Plum Mitan. If you are doing 3 to 5 per cent or 2 to 4 per cent, do the 2 to 4 per across the board. You cannot divide, you cannot divide because you cannot have one set of farmers that could benefit more than the other set of farmers. And if you are giving farmers in Tobago 2 to 4 per cent, Madam Speaker, they have to be planting something.

In Tobago—if you go to Tobago, in fact, the Prime Minister himself, with some discussions he had with the Tobago people, he said when he was in Tobago it used to have pigeon peas, where the pigeon peas?—I recall hearing that. Nothing that you have in Tobago is planted in Tobago, it comes from Trinidad. So of what use you giving the farmers 2 to 4 per cent interest rate when they are not planting anything.

Mr. Indarsingh: “A fella name Singh looking after ah farm in Tobago”.

Mrs. V. Gayadeen-Gopeesingh: In fact, Madam Speaker, a former Minister in NAR days told me that if you want to make a “callaloo” in Tobago you have to bring the dasheen bush from Trinidad. So that is where we have reached, but you giving them 2 to 4 per cent. Absolutely nothing wrong with it, but make it be—let it be equal and equitable. That is all that I am saying. [*Desk thumping*]

Then we have millions of dollar, I believe it is \$240 million used to allocate to do access roads, Madam Speaker, in Tobago. The only time an access road was done in Trinidad was in 2015 for the farmers under the People’s Partnership; in

2015. [*Desk thumping*]

Dr. Gopeesingh: The last time.

Mrs. V. Gayadeen-Gopeesingh: That was the only time and the last time in 2015 access road. I recall the President of the Agricultural Society—

Madam Speaker: Member for Oropouche West, your original speaking time is now spent. You have ten more minutes to wind up. And I will just ask other Members who are listening to please comply with the Standing Orders, Standing Order 53. Member for Oropouche West, you may continue.

Mrs. V. Gayadeen-Gopeesingh: Thank you very much. [*Desk thumping*] So, Madam Speaker, with the few minutes again I just want to talk about the Agricultural Incentive Programme where farmers have themselves really caught in a tailspin, because many of them have been waiting for years, because this has appeared again for the fourth time in their budget, the fourth time. So if something keeps appearing it means that the implementation process is wrong, or you are not doing it correct. They are in a tailspin because farmers still waiting to collect rebates, Madam Speaker. Many of them languish because they have expired leases, and, of course, I spoke about land tenure where farmers, when their estates or their farms are flooded out, they are not being compensated quickly enough, or not at all. In fact, Madam Speaker, Oropouche West we have hundreds of farmers through Rahamut Trace, through Suchit Trace. They have lost hundreds of thousands of dollars—

Mr. Indarsingh: Millions probably.

Mrs. V. Gayadeen-Gopeesingh: Up to today they are waiting for compensation, up to today. And then what is even more inequitable is that the Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries is telling livestock farmers, “We do not compensate livestock farmers”. That again is discriminatory. [*Desk thumping*]

You cannot say that you are giving vegetable farmers money and not livestock farmers. Many of the livestock farmers that is their sole source of income to put food on the table for their children and family. So we have many of them not being compensated to date.

We also have as I spoke about, Madam Speaker, determining when we look here at the 80,000 files we have to see if this is really going to happen. We have to check the ease of doing business and we will also have to monitor this over the years to see really if this GIS system will work and if at all it will come to fruition.

Madam Speaker, I have something here also from the Sugar Manufacturing Company Limited where again it seems that somehow the patrimony of this country is being sold out, because the Ste. Madeleine Refinery we have many Caroni workers, about 22 occupying those bungalows, about 22. They had to go to court to get Caroni (1975) Limited and to take an undertaking where they would not interfere with the use, quiet enjoyment of their property, neither would Caroni (1975) Limited sell or dispose of their property nor to take eviction proceedings. And there is a civil appeal matter, No. 15 of 2008, Caroni (1975) Limited against ATAS. ATAS was a senior staff association of the people who were left in Caroni. What we have now happening is that notices are being sent to them telling them that something is going to happen and it is my understanding that they are going to sell those lands or lease the lands, we do not know, we are asking questions, to someone to build a mall. So that is what I am asking here today, who is that person? How much land you going to lease? And to whom? Because you end at Ste. Madeleine compound. Madam Speaker, you already have access road built around it, you have all the infrastructural work done. So all you have to do is to demolish the Ste. Madeleine factory and start putting up your mall. So we do not know. We are asking questions. Who is going to build the mall?

Madam Speaker, in the last few minutes, I would like to speak a little about Oropouche West and, of course, we know that Oropouche West is a constituency that is flood prone. We have had Brett in 2017 and then in 2018 we had flooding three times. And to date, Madam Speaker, we still have many people who have to be compensated. They have lost everything, fridge, stove, washing machine. You name it, they have lost it and we are still waiting for many of them to be compensated.

So we have drainage issues, blocked drains, poor maintenance, Madam Speaker, but what is really of profound significance is crime. Oropouche West used to be a very quiet constituency—

Dr. Gopeesingh: A paradise.

Mrs. V. Gayadeen-Gopeesingh: People used to live and sleep with their doors and windows open. Now at six o'clock everybody shut their windows and the thing is, Madam Speaker, that still does not ensure their safety because they are cutting our roof and coming through. That is how bad it is. We have daily, we have robberies. We have in San Francique, we have in Doorbassa Trace, and we have in Syne Village, every day we are getting robberies.

When we had the flood, Madam Speaker, about three weeks ago in Aranguez, Grand Bazaar flood out, I recall the hon. Prime Minister said he was getting everything via—what he said?—visually, textually. But when we got flood in Oropouche West, he was on—the hon. Prime Minister for the flood last three weeks was abroad, so he was getting everything via text. So he was getting it visually and textually. But when Oropouche West flooded out he was here and he did not bring himself bodily to Oropouche West to check the people “dem”, Madam Speaker. [*Desk thumping*]

So we have all sorts of issues. We have housing issues, Madam Speaker. Many

people have housing issues and, of course, we have Sumintra. Since 2015 I asking for a house for Sumintra and Tara. Every Minister that comes into for the Ministry of Housing and Urban Development, I have asked. In fact now, Madam Speaker, they are calling me, the Members opposite are calling me “Sumintra”. [*Laughter*] That is what my name now because the number of times I have asked them. I am begging—

Dr. Gopeesingh: Look he is right there, San Fernando.

Mrs. V. Gayadeen-Gopeesingh: San Fernando East, Point Fortin, Port of Spain South—[*Interruption*] I did not ask you? Or, you did not remain long enough? [*Laughter*]

Hon. Member: You did not stay long enough. [*Crosstalk*]

Madam Speaker: Direct your contribution this way please.

Mrs. V. Gayadeen-Gopeesingh: So, Madam Speaker, we have lots of what we call unemployment now, unemployment because of the closure of Petrotrin. We have lots of people who are unemployed. Where many of them have lost their jobs from the Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries right in Ramjattan Trace where that falls in the constituency of Oropouche West. We have multiple agencies, Madam Speaker, and small businesses closing down, so people are losing their jobs. We have shut down of businesses, you have pharmacies closing down, poultry business, imagine poultry, people cannot afford to even buy a chicken now under this PNM Government. It is closing down. You have food place, people trying to buy their own bread and make their cheese paste home, they cannot go out to buy food under this PNM, because you see, Madam Speaker, PNM talks and UNC works. [*Desk thumping*]

So, Madam Speaker, with these few words, I thank you. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker: All right. So I believe there is agreement by both sides that we

take the break for lunch now. We will resume at 2.30.

1.39p.m.: *Sitting suspended.*

2.30 p.m.: *Sitting resumed.*

The Minister of State in the Ministry of Education (Hon. Dr. Lovell Francis):

Good afternoon, Madam Speaker. Good afternoon to Members on both sides of the House. It is my pleasure to stand a little early, before I expected, before I predicted, to contribute to this debate on the budget, and it will be remiss of me not to thank, on one hand, the Leader of Government Business and then my very good friend and colleague from Point Fortin, for allowing me to jump the queue, so to speak. The reason why I have opted to do that is just to give a—and it is something I never thought I would do in my parliamentary career, to respond a little bit to the contribution of the Member for Oropouche West.

Madam Speaker, I really want to commend the Parliament for opting to go without these plastic bottles, and for putting these dispensers outside the Chamber, and then for your generosity in suggesting to us that, you know, if we feel a little distressed or a little frustration that we take a walk, get some water and come back. So when I saw the Member for Oropouche West stand to, you know contribute, I was motivated to get some water. So I took my glass and went outside. I am not sure if it was me or if it was the dispenser malfunctioning, the water flowed so slowly that I could not get back in until she had finished. So by the time I came back in she was sitting down. Bad timing on my part, only to be informed by my colleagues that the Member had taken a trip to Mourga, hunting for hill rice. So apparently the Member is a hill rice hunter. I did not know such a thing existed, and that she had worse than that made some particular aspersions against one of

my very productive constituents—the Member for Oropouche West. And, Madam Speaker, you do not test Mourga people, and if you do that then it is my job to respond on their behalf. Madam Speaker, the Member suggested that she went to Moruga and she could not find rice anywhere. I mean, the Member is a colleague of mine. We might not be on the same side. We might agree on absolutely nothing, but she could have called and I would have given her instructions, look up, because it is literally called hill rice for a reason. It is grown on hills. So if you go around looking at base level for the rice you are not going to find it.

And furthermore, Madam Speaker, I am aggrieved by the fact that a Member of Parliament stands here and brings the name of a good citizen with a very, very witless pun, trying to bring it into disrepute. I have a severe problem with that. If the Member wants to cast aspersions on anybody anywhere in this country, she has a whole bench with which she can start.

Madam Speaker, the constituent in question is a very, very hard-working individual. He is a farmer. More than that, he is somebody who has come back to the community after living in urban Trinidad for a long time, and has through his great efforts help to revive, help to strengthen, help to grow literally and figuratively, a part of our agricultural display that has been, if not dead, then sort of dormant for a long time. Madam Speaker, this person is not only growing Mourga hill rice, he is processing the hill rice. He is selling this hill rice locally. He is also exporting the rice overseas. Madam Speaker, he has a very viable market for this rice, and this is something I know not just by conjecture, I know intimately, because I visited the farm. And whereas one could suggest that there are parts of it that require improvement, it is a very interesting set up that he has.

Madam Speaker, this gentleman, right now, is packaging Mourga hill rice and he is

selling it both locally and internationally. A little pack of rice, a one pound bag about this size, selling it for \$50. Madam Speaker, this is an industry that was in abeyance for a very a long time. And by his hustling and bustling and hard work and entrepreneurship and willingness to take risks, he has helped to revive this. So that what was a sort of a hidden or niche production area is now widely popular, not just locally but internationally. For the Member to come here and talk about his name and suggest that there is some sort of untoward behaviour because he has been granted assistance by the Government is sad and distasteful, and I take offence at that.

Madam Speaker, if anything should be done by any Member of this Chamber, if there is anything that we should be doing, we should be encouraging our citizens, our constituents to work hard, to be productive, to be innovative, to do things that earn us foreign exchange. We talk about diversification and we talk all around it and all through it, but here we have a Member of Parliament who is castigating somebody who is actively right now earning foreign exchange for this country, and I take great offence at that, great offence.

And I could go on and on about Oropouche West but, Madam Speaker, that would be a colossal waste of time. This Member who talks like if every night before she presents she just suddenly found a dictionary, learn 10 words and wants to use all of them at the same time in the same sentence, and I could go down that rabbit hole, but I do not really have time for that. So I would just suggest that the Member stay in her lane wherever that lane is and leave Moruga people alone. Thank you very much [*Desk thumping*] because we do not bite easy, and I move on.

Madam Speaker, this is the fifth budget contribution that I would be making in this session and the last. [*Crosstalk*]

Hon. Members: In this session?

Hon. Dr. L. Francis: They did not hear the “in this session” part. In this session. [*Crosstalk*] I am coming back again in the next session but, in this session, this is the last budget speech. And, Madam Speaker, just like every Member on this side who has gone before me, it would be remiss of me if I do not give kudos where they are well deserved. So I want to congratulate, on one hand, the Minister of Finance; on the other hand, the hon. Prime Minister, and if I could borrow my colleague’s hand here right next to me, the Minister of Planning and Development, for putting together what must be hailed as an excellent budget package [*Desk thumping*] and that is very trite and very easy to say.

But, Madam Speaker, it is really a minor chord on a major theme. You see, it is one thing to talk about a budget as a discreet thing and, to some extent they are, but they are not really, you know. It is really the fifth in a succession of budgets that we have presented since we have been in Government. And, Madam Speaker, it might not be a big deal now, because we are a country that is motivated and captured by what we considered to be tangible things. We like to see tangible things being done and we sometimes in the midst of doing that do not give enough credit to the things that we might discern as being intangible, but are in fact tremendously important.

Madam Speaker, in the five years of governance that this PNM regime has had, we faced the most difficult time in the lived history of this country. There are people who are living now who are full adults who have never been through a hard time in this country. I am pseudo-old. So I was a child in the 80s when we went through this last time, and it was far more difficult than we are facing now, not because the circumstances are different, but because of the astute way in which this crisis has been managed by this Government. [*Desk thumping*]

And, Madam Speaker, there will be naysayers all over the place who will say all sorts of things about it, but if there is one thing that I have learned from my historical training, it is that years down the road the old talk from the so-called academics, people forget that you know. The old talk from the political naysayers would be forgotten too. What will stand is the record of what was done by whom and when, and the meaning of it and the significance after. And I am very happy and proud to say that this tenure, this management of this economy by this Government will stand the test of time and it will be something that everybody in this country—whether you are PNM or not—will be proud of. [*Desk thumping*] I am absolutely assured of that.

I could go down off on a tangent a bit, Madam Speaker, and talk a little bit—I mean, literally a little bit—about the response of the Opposition Leader to the budget. Madam Speaker, I have been for five years sitting here for the excruciating three-plus hours of that response. [*Crosstalk*] Excuse me? Excruciating. All of it in caps lock, “EXCRUCIATING” three-plus hours of that habitual response, hoping for one thing, that in one of these five years I would hear a response that was different from the first one I heard in 2015.

This year it started off a lil different. I was saying, okay, maybe a new speed. We tried it and maybe something different, maybe we will hear at least a few sentences that deviate from the one we heard before that and before that like a bad Benjai calypso. Instead, what I heard was the same thing—this Government is doing nothing, my Government did everything, we were an excellent government, we solved every problem and Trinidad is perfect underneath us and since we have been voted out, everything has gone to hell. Madam Speaker, that is very fine as a narrative, but there is one fundamental problem with that.

Now, unless I am confused or mistaken, we have not had a population exchange in

this country. Some people have died, some people have been born. We had some Venezuelans migrants coming in. Some people might have migrated but, in majority, the 1.3 or 1.4 million people who were living here now, post-2015, were the same people who were living here before 2015. So, I am not sure who that narrative is supposed to sell to, Madam Speaker, because I, who am now a Member of Parliament for a very proud constituency, was a citizen here during the period 2010 to 2015, meaning that I lived in this country under that UNC Government, and all of that hard work and all of that production and all of that productivity was perhaps happening on the “and”. It was not happening in Trinidad or Tobago.

Madam Speaker, one of the Members across there referred to them as “the box-drain government”. That was an aspersion thrown at them, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, referring to the PP Government as a box-train government is aspirational. That suggests that they either built or finished a box train which I am not certain about at all, having lived in this country during that same period. Madam Speaker, and I would add one more thing to that and I would move on and it is this.

Every government in this country in the history of this nation that has lost an election, at some point, either tacitly or indirectly understood that the nation rejected them for some reason—might have been something that they were displeased about, something they expected, something they wanted that the Government did not receive. So it is rejection. If you lose an election, it is to some extent a rejection, and that rejection must be based on something. And every other party—either PNM, the old UNC, because I heard about something called a new UNC. I am not sure what that is. Maybe that is an incarnation to come, so the comedy will continue—but every other Government, either PNM or old, old UNC or NAR, understood that the nation had rejected them for a reason and accepted

that there was some error or some fault or some failing or some inadequacy, and then made the transformations required and came again. Either the nation would accept you or they would not, but you accepted that your tenure was not perfect—there was some dissatisfaction or some displeasure within or throughout the society—and you went and you come again. When the PNM lost in 2010, that is what happened. The party accepted that. The population was displeased with it for specific reasons that some of those reasons were actionable and the party made some transformations and we came back like a storm in 2015, Madam Speaker.

This UNC Government—either old UNC or new UNC, whichever one they think they are—is the only party in the history of this nation to lose an election to not have that soul searching, to not have that introspection, to not have that basic decency as a political organization to say, you know what? Maybe we made some errors. Maybe we went wrong. Maybe our philosophy was off. Maybe some of our personnel, we could really, you know, recycle and come again with new people. Maybe there were errors in our tenure that we should address and we should admit to and then we come again and we ask for a mandate.

This is the only party in the history of this country that has so much cocoa in the sun, the sun is almost frightened to shine [*Laughter*] and has never, ever, admitted error; never, ever apologized, not made any kind of fundamental transformation; not made any effort to show the country a different face, but coming back and trying to convince us that wrong is right and right is wrong, and all the things we saw and experienced was our imagination and they were perfect, and we should give them a chance again.

Madam Speaker, that is the height of political disingenuous behaviour, and I am fairly certain that the public that they feel they fooling with that rhetoric, is not asleep, that that public is noting and that public will give them the response they

deserve one year from now and I will live to see it, Madam Speaker. [*Desk thumping*] “And ah done with that”, because you know what, Madam Speaker? I am not here on my time. If I were here on my time, I could spend the whole day knocking those opposite, but I am here on the people’s time. I did not elect me and put me here. The constituents of Mourga/Tableland put me here, so I am on the clock for them, so I have to give an account of what I have been doing on their behalf for the last year, because that is the priority for me.

I have a partner in the Ministry who will talk about the Ministry business. That is “he wuk”. If I have enough time this afternoon, I would talk a lil thing about what, from my perspective, we have been doing, but my primary function is to account for my service to the people for the last year. And if I could be so bold, Madam Speaker, let me lend another suggestion to them. They could do that. You are not only an MP when you are in Government, you know. I am sure they have constituents. It is not zombies vote for them, and instead of coming here and talking nonsense for 55 minutes, just rambling on, foolishness, you could stand and say, “even though I am in Opposition, I have been working for my people and what ah do.” [*Desk thumping*] In five years I never hear that.

So they have no constituents, they have no constituency. You are only an MP when you are in Government. But as far as I know when people vote for you, regardless of where you sit, they expect that you represent them and you serve them and you could serve people in Opposition too. Maybe the lesson has been lost on those opposite, but I will account for what I have been doing for my people in my constituency, and all of them. Whether they vote for me or not, they are my people, all 28,000 of them and their families too. I will account for what I have been doing to make their lives better for the last year, and not me alone, because I am not an actor by myself, what the Government that I am a part of has been doing

for them for the last year.

And, Madam Speaker, normally I would talk the big ticket issues, because in my constituency when you are talking big ticket, it is still roads and water, but I would go off script this year, because I do not want to sound the same every year, that is one, and then two, I have been motivated by the Member for Siparia. So instead of talking roads or talking water, I would start by talking about housing, because just like I was shocked, Madam Speaker, to hear that the Member for Oropouche West was in Moruga hunting for rice, I was surprised to hear that the Member for Siparia was in my constituency and she did not even call and say hello. If I was in Siparia, I would have called and say hello. We do not have to be enemies if we are on different sides. We do not have to be enemies, Madam Speaker, she did not even say hello. And that is interesting, because there have been seven Prime Ministers of this country. Dr. Rowley is the seventh Prime Minister of this country, and the Member for Siparia is the only Prime Minister in the history of this country that never came to Mourga.

So while she was in the position of Prime Minister, she never came to Moruga. Opposition Leader, she shows up in Moruga. Why? Why, you would ask. Is she coming to do something useful, something purposeful? Of course not. The ethos of that party is bacchanalia and largesse. So they on that side so it has no largesse, so it has to be bacchanalia. Of course, it was bacchanal. And then you will hear her, Madam Speaker, in her contribution talked about a community in my constituency, Gomez Trace and some HDC houses, and that she is heroically going to come to the rescue of my constituents. Well thanks. It has one MP there. I am more than adept at doing my job and it is my job to help my constituents. We do not need or want your help. Thank you very much, Member for Siparia [*Desk thumping*] for, as usual, serving no useful purpose, but I move on.

Madam Speaker, the HDC in its infinite wisdom decided to build a second scheme of a housing scheme in my constituency at a place called Gomez Trace in St. Mary's. Madam Speaker, it is a lovely development. I have my own peculiar concerns about living in one of these HDC complexes—how you make out? The houses look the same and I could go on. But when I tell you, Madam Speaker, the place is beautiful, very beautiful. In fact, the Prime Minister, when he came to distribute the houses, commented on how picturesque that community is.

The same Member would have said in this House that the Government has not built one house since it came into office. Well, I was very happy that the HDC did not build not one, they built 71. [*Desk thumping*] So we had 71 houses to distribute. And, Madam Speaker, we gave those houses or we tried to give those houses via the HDC to those people who were most in need, and the process went very well.

Madam Speaker, like in any construction, if you are mass producing something, you build 71 houses, you are going to have some annoying issues, you are going to have some niggling issues. I met with the residents of Gomez Trace, second phase, had a discussion. There are some concerns. I took the concerns to HDC. HDC sent people to check. They are going to fix the concerns. They were not fixed overnight. These things happen. Everything takes time. There is always a process. The issue with the price, which I also took to the Minister, which he took to the board and there was an investigation being done. In the midst of that, prompted by one or two persons in the community, the Leader of the Opposition decided to get involved as a champion for nothing or no one just to make bacchanal.

Madam Speaker, I was amused and bemused, because constituents were nonplus, and the whole thing just became a bacchanal. I am happy to report today that with

my colleague, the Member for Point Fortin, we have already started to address the substantive structural issues that will be beginning soon. We have already had a decision from the board that the pricing issue is going to be adjusted, already. So the Member for Siparia, Madam Speaker, threatening that a pre-action protocol letter is going to be sent to the HDC is to scare, whom? I really do not know. We are already solving the problem on one hand. That is one. And, two, “we eh afraid no letter from the learned senior counsel.” Madam Speaker, the Attorney General eats that kind of thing for lunch, or if he is bored, for breakfast. That is one. And if I might be so bold I could even go a little further.

Madam Speaker, I have always said that if by some fate, twist of fate, I end up in court in some kind of case, “I go represent myself” because I could think logically and speak coherently. And I am sure, Madam Speaker, if the Government wants to try it out, they could send me, because if the senior counsel is on the other side, I am going to win. [*Laughter*]

Madam Speaker, the problem never existed in a fundamental way, because when you have problems, Madam Speaker, you work with people to solve them. Not everything always has to be a bacchanal. You work with people to solve them and we were working with the HDC and the residents to solve them, and we solved the problem. So, Madam Speaker, the Member for Siparia is free to send her letter, you know, but “nobody eh taking she on”. We are done dealing with the issues and we will make the residents comfortable and happy and life will progress as it always does [*Desk thumping*] and that is how this thing goes. So that is one part of the housing issue I want to discuss, Madam Speaker.

The other part is something of which I am tremendously proud—the Ministry of Housing and Urban Development is tremendously proud, the Ministers of housing who have been part and parcel of this are tremendously proud and that is

something called the HVIP Programme. Madam Speaker, I started explaining this thing last year, and it did not really go as I wanted to, because of expedience. So I would give a proper explanation this year.

Madam Speaker, while we were campaigning in 2015, the Prime Minister walked with me and other Members through a particular community called Samuel Cooper and, Madam Speaker, when the Prime Minister saw the quality of housing in that community, he was startled, he was shocked and he was moved to act. In fact, he gave me an instruction which was that when he came back there in 2020, he did not expect to see any of the houses of that nature that he saw on that day. And, Madam Speaker, I was new to politics. I did not know. I mean, politicians say things. I am not sure how much they remember in the plethora of things that they will see, because he walked the entire country.

Madam Speaker, within the first year or two years of our tenure, the Prime Minister gave then housing Minister, Randall Mitchell and myself, an instruction, that he had not forgotten about those houses and that he was adamant that something should be done, and that between the both of us, we should put heads together and come up with a solution. And I really want to give credit to my colleague and friend, Randall Mitchell, because he did the brainwork which is to conjure up this thing literally out of nothing. You have poor housing in a community and other ancillary problems and maybe you could solve a number of problems at the same time. So we did not know what to do—give people a grant, we are not sure how they are going to spend it. Should we hire contractors? We are not sure how the costing will be, and after going back and forth between the both of us, we came up with a scheme that we would literally have people who had access to land on which there were no encumbrances, and we would basically hire local contractors to build what we might called starter units, but what were really

much better than starter units, and we will do it in a way that kept the cost literally minimal and we will see how it will work.

So between Randall sorry, my colleague, the Member for San Fernando East—you see friendship is a funny thing—who sort of came up with the framework, and then he gave it to me to run with and to implement. And, Madam Speaker, we had a very small sum, \$5 million and we had a grandiose plan which was to build 30 houses, a community centre and a number of drains to sort of ensure that the houses would not be threatened by the always slipping land in the constituency. And, Madam Speaker, honestly, I really had no idea how this thing will go. Literally, I had no idea how it will go.

So that when the project started, I was on the ground in that community myself, if not every day almost every other day, because the expectations were so high. The funding was so small that if you literally made a mistake on a house, it meant that a family will not have a house. It took some time because when you are doing something for the first time, it is sometimes walking in the dark.

Madam Speaker, at the end of that, at a cost of less than \$5 million, we literally built 30 homes for 30 families, Madam Speaker. Families who because of the poverty—and there is no shame in that—that they faced would not be able to qualify for a HDC house on one hand and would not be able to provide for themselves the kind of housing that we believe in the Government that every citizen in this country should be privy to. We provided for them 30 houses in one community. [*Desk thumping*] And, Madam Speaker, by doing that, we have sort of changed the historical trajectory of that community. And I am even happier to suggest that this thing has not stopped there. Madam Speaker, that was the first phase of that project. We distributed those houses earlier this year. Subsequent to that, with the assistance of my good friend and colleague, the Member for Point

Fortin, Minister of Housing and Urban Development, we had a second phase of that project where we built, throughout the entire constituency, 20 houses. [*Desk thumping*] Even better than that, we are actually on the third phase, where we are attempting to build right now, as I speak here, as I blow air here, people are at work in the constituency building 20 houses.

3.00p.m.

Madam Speaker, that means that by the end of this year this Government, not me, this Government would have provided 70 houses, [*Desk thumping*] 70 houses to families that had little hope of providing proper housing to themselves. Madam Speaker, this project has been so successful for the last year that it has infected other constituencies out of Moruga. I have colleagues here who are also benefiting from this. So that a Moruga experiment is, in a very interesting way, becoming a national experiment, and Madam Speaker, we are providing homes to families that are in need, [*Desk thumping*] that cannot afford, of a quality that they could move in literally the next day and live. And, Madam Speaker, your standard of living and by that your life, changes literally overnight at a reasonable cost with local contracting, with local labour. Madam Speaker, if nothing else is accomplished by this Government, if nothing else is accomplished by any government, providing this kind of avenue to our citizens is a tremendously good and rewarding thing. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker, there is a community that I visited in 2015 where the people live on state land but it is surrounded by private land. Madam Speaker, there are people in this country who are still living in the 19th Century; they have no running water, they have no electricity. Madam Speaker, I told myself when I campaigned there and I saw those families, that if I did not do something to help them, I should not be even entertaining going back as a Member of Parliament. Madam Speaker, the

private landowners have refused the State to run water or lights through their land to get to these people, so they are literally on an island. They are still using the lagoon water to cook, to bathe, to wash, and whereas I might have to get the Attorney General's help to actually get the lights, get the water to them, Madam Speaker, these people live in homes, many of them have no floors.

If you know anything about country living, there is a traditional kind of floor we call "leepay", where the floor is prepared and it is almost like cement; it is not even that, they are literally living on the dirt of the ground. And if I cannot do anything in the immediate to help them in terms of getting that water, getting those lights, the least we could do is to get them some proper housing and we will work on the rest after. And I have already spoken to my colleague, and we have already agreed and we will be taking that project down there to help those families in the next year. Madam Speaker, I will be very frank, they are not supporters of this party; we might not get a vote out of it, but you know what, that "doh" matter, these are human beings. [*Desk thumping*] And if I meet them in that condition and I leave them in that condition, as an MP who is from the constituency and lives in the constituency, then I am worse than anybody who would have come before and come after. I cannot do that. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker, we always talk in this country about government and governance not helping the small man, not changing lives, not affecting the lives of the "common people"—that is a term I really hate to hear—but this Government, not just through those programmes, but this is one that shines very bright, this Government has been changing the lives of families [*Desk thumping*] in ways that are irrevocable. Madam Speaker, you really have to see what it means to these families. Your heart could be as hard as stone, it will touch you, and that process is not ongoing only in my constituency—sorry—the constituency I represent, it is

ongoing in a number of constituencies, and I could see it spreading nationwide and changing the lives of our citizens everywhere and that is a fantastic thing.

So, enough talk on housing, so I will move on to my favourite topic, which is the Moruga Road. Madam Speaker, when the survey of the road started, because it is part of the PNM's Manifesto that we would do what has not been done before, which is to have a proper road that goes from Princes Town to Moruga. Madam Speaker, when the first survey of that road was done and they checked the number of major landslips—I do not mean minor hindrances, I mean major landslips—the number was 29; 29 major landslips. Madam Speaker, when that project started the two years subsequent, given, on one hand, the amount of rainfall we had in the constituency, and then on the other hand, the type of soil which does not aggregate all that well and which needs no excuse to slip, Madam Speaker, I feel sometimes if you walk and you sneeze too hard you would cause a landslip. The soil is that fragile. The number raised from 29 to 45, so it is a significant jump in the amount of work that had to be done. Madam Speaker, if you do not fix those landslips, doing any kind of roadwork is really a cosmetic thing. This Government decided that they were going to do something fundamental and unprecedented to have a decent road that traverses this constituency.

Madam Speaker, I am very, very happy and very pleased to report that of those 45 landslips, 39 have already been completed. [*Desk thumping*] Madam Speaker, this has been a Herculean task. There are constituents who are thankful for this work but themselves do not believe that this road can be fixed in totality, given the fact that they have lived with it all of their lives and given the fact that they understand because they live there, the magnitude of the job at hand. Madam Speaker, there are major landslips in Fifth Company, close to the Fifth Company Baptist school, there is one at Perry Young, there are two as you enter Basse Terre; there is

probably one other in Bois Jean Jean, and we intend to fix those. The Ministry of Works and Transport intends to fix those this year, and doing that they would have done something that has never been done before, which is to fix every landslip along the Moruga Road, and when that is finished they will complete the road surface. Significant parts of it have already been done; that part that covers St. Mary's has already been paved, much of Moruga has already been paved. Much of Indian Walk is still a disaster zone, but even that, there is remedial work being done.

So, Madam Speaker, the constituents of Moruga/Tableland, many of whom live along that road or traverse that road every day have suffered for a very long time because of the quality of that road but they are seeing the light of day. And, Madam Speaker, I really want to commend the Prime Minister. [*Desk thumping*] This is not mamaguy, this is not mamaguy or a pappyshow, or any of that, Madam Speaker, I was very, very comfortable in UWI having a ball, talking nonsense but calling it lecturing—

Hon. Member: You are still having a ball.

Hon. Dr. L. Francis: Yes, I am still having a ball—[*Laughter*]—talking nonsense but calling it lecturing, and I would not have left what was a very comfortable life and job to come into something that I knew little about that I had great scepticism about, if I had not heard then Opposition Leader and Prime Minister to be, talk about rural development in a way that I had never heard [*Desk thumping*] a politician address it before. The way he explained it, the way he dissected it, the fact that he understood the meaning of these things, because that road, Madam Speaker, is not a road. It has a tremendous symbolic meaning for the people of that constituency. Its significance is outsized, it is not just infrastructure, it is a cultural phenomenon. Having a bad road is as Moruga as the rice that grows on

the hill. For the first time, because we have a Prime Minister who understands what these things mean, we are approaching a time where we will have a proper road that the entire constituency could be proud of and that is a tremendous thing, and take it from somebody who lives there and traverses that road every day.

Madam Speaker, that is a tremendous project. It is sizeable, it is very expensive, but far more than that, in the midst of that tremendous project, the Ministry of Works and Transport is also doing a similar job on the Naparima Mayaro Road. It might not be as in-depth, and the Member for Mayaro could attest to that, that they are doing also an upgrade on the Naparima Mayaro Road.

Mr. Imbert: Not in Diego Martin, boy?

Hon. Dr. L. Francis: Country people are important, Member for Diego Martin North/East.

Mr. Imbert: Not in Diego Martin, boy?

Hon. Dr. L. Francis: It will come. So, while the Ministry of Works and Transport is doing that tremendous job in Moruga, they are also improving, Madam Speaker, the road infrastructure along the other main artery through the constituency, which is the Naparima Mayaro Road. Added to that, Madam Speaker, because I am faced with a wonderful organization called the Princes Town Regional Corporation, which has a very peculiar way of allocating its funding where areas “deemed PNM”, get very, very little assistance, I have had the good fortune to have other colleagues in this Government who stepped in to help me in other areas. So, for example, you cannot get a councillor to pave a road in an area depending on the perceived political allegiance. I have been very good at getting the help of the Minister of Rural Development and Local Government, and he steps in to help with road repair, sometimes road paving in other areas where the Ministry of Works and Transport is not allowed to extend its reach.

So, whereas, Madam Speaker, I will be very frank and very truthful and say that many of the roads in the constituency remain bad. There is a tremendous amount of work still to be done but the improvements in the constituency in terms of road infrastructure have reached a point that people in that constituency have never seen in their entire lives. [*Desk thumping*] And I would be so bold to suggest that regardless of their political allegiances, they will be very thankful for the work that is being done by this Government, because government serves everybody, not just the people who vote for them. And I, as a constituent, I am also thankful for this Government for doing the kind of work that they have been doing in that constituency in terms of roads.

Madam Speaker, the other big issue in terms of the constituency and the need for infrastructure is of course water, and water is a hot-button issue throughout the entire country. Madam Speaker, the problem is and the problem has been that there are a number of communities that simply have no access to pipe-borne water because there are no lines in the ground. What we have been doing since 2015 is trying to address that situation by running the lines. So I am happy to report that a number of communities—I talked about Marac last year, we have gone to Sixth Company this last year, we have gone to Hindustan, we are also starting to make incursions into Tableland, because, Madam Speaker, despite all of the spin of a former era, there are a number of areas in that constituency that literally do not have pipes in the ground. They either have to live on the water from heaven or hope for a truck borne supply. This Government, under the astute leadership of the Minister of Public Utilities, has been doing the hard work of laying those pipes. So that we have two large projects, one in Tableland, in Corosan, one in Williamsville and Mantacool that are upcoming, and we will really try our best to make sure, Madam Speaker, that every single constituent will have access to pipe-borne water

in the really, really, really not too distant future. That project is well underway. We have already collected much of the material for that major project in Tableland and we are just waiting for this process to end there, get the funding, and the beat goes on. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker, I will be very frank, as a person who has lived in the country, I was born in the city; my mother came to her senses after three months and carried me back to the bush and I grew up there, and for people in the country, water and roads are our central concerns. We might care about everything else but you give us water and roads, we are relatively comfortable. This Government is doing what has not been done for 50 years, which is giving the people water and roads, [*Desk thumping*] and whereas they may have other concerns peculiar to them and they might not be happy about everything, they are relatively comfortable. Take it from their MP, I talk to them every day. The project goes on.

Madam Speaker, we also have one or two very interesting projects that auger well for the future of not just the constituency but the nation. There is a youth complex being built at Fifth Company in Moruga that is, in my mind, very important. Madam Speaker, in my former life before I was lecturing in UWI, I used to be a youth coach. I coached football, cricket, netball, believe it or not, athletics at the junior level. I have trained a few national champions in my time and I was actually good at it, and then, well, something went wrong and I ended up here, but that is not the point. What I can say, Madam Speaker, is that not just in Moruga, not just in Tableland, not just in Barrackpore, not just in my constituency, but all through this country, as someone who was very good at assessing talent, because that is a skill, assessing talent, particularly at the youth level is a skill; you either could do it or you cannot. I mean, you could be taught it but is it a specific skill? That is why there are people who are paid to do that. Madam Speaker, you could come to my

constituency, you could visit Barrackpore, you could visit Tableland, you could come to Moruga, go to Sixth Company, go to Marac, wherever you want to go. Madam Speaker—*[Interruption]* I think that is a sign.

Madam Speaker: Member, your original speaking time is now spent. You are entitled to 10 more minutes.

Hon. Dr. L. Francis: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker: You may proceed. *[Desk thumping]*

Hon. Dr. L. Francis: Madam Speaker, you could come and drive around through the community, not looking for rice but, you know, observing people, and you will see young people with tremendous physical attributes, tremendous ability just gaping around, walking up and down.

Madam Speaker, you will see people with the proper coaching could be a world-class high jumper, world-class long jumper, world-class shot put—putter of the shot, world-class discus. You go to Barrackpore, endless cricketers. You come to Moruga or to Sixth Company, you go to Tableland, football; world-class talent just wasting time. Part of that is a lack of infrastructure in the soft sense in terms of club structures, grassroots coaches, or people just interested enough to try to guide them, and there are people who do that. I have a friend at Mandingo Road, has a very good youth programme going on in football. I support him every year. He has a lot of youth involved in football. He is now involved in cricket and it is working very well, but there are a number of communities that do not have that soft infrastructure, do not have that organization, and then you have all these young people just, what might be, I mean, literally world-class talent just going nowhere. The other side of the problem is a lack of facilities. If you drive from Marac to Princes Town, when you reach at St. Mary's there is an underdeveloped field there and when you leave St. Mary's, which is like half the road, all the way to Princes

Town, Madam Speaker, there is not a ground anywhere. And when I say a “ground”, not a savannah, nothing, nothing, no infrastructure. Now, part of that is geography because the land a very undulating, so getting a piece of flat land large enough is, I mean, like a bridge too far, but it is still a lack, and you have people who need to be served. Madam Speaker, this Government is building what I will deem a world-class—it is called a multipurpose complex but it is really a sporting complex in Moruga that will provide the facility that is missing to start to shape and hone all of this natural talent. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker, my constituency has been producing national cricketers out of Barrackpore, footballers out of Moruga, out of Sixth Company, out of the Companies, with almost no infrastructure in place, and by that I mean soft or literally physical infrastructure. Imagine what is possible if you provide the infrastructure to the talent and then we find some way to get that coaching, and I will be working with the Minister of Sport and Youth Affairs in terms of doing this to get that coaching at the grassroots level. And if you know anything about sport, Madam Speaker, we always think it is the big-name coach, the celebrated coach who does the work, but any fundamental research on sport development says that it is the grassroots coaches who do the work. Right now the area around France, around Paris and France is producing the world’s best footballers. Think about any famous name in terms of world football here who is French, and most of the best footballers right now are French not Brazilian anymore. Most of the best footballers in the world are French. They come from one area around Paris, and that is happening, not because of the big clubs or because of famous coaches, because they have a very effective grassroots coaching programme. That is where Pogba and all these guys come from. They sort of have a nucleus of coaching ability at the grassroots level. So they find them very young, six, seven, eight, and

they start coaching them, and they are churning out world-class footballers like it is bread.

Madam Speaker, we have areas of this country where that kind of thing is turning out; not churning out, churning is for ice cream. [*Laughter*] Madam Speaker, there are areas of this country where that sort of thing is possible, and Moruga/Tableland is one of those. So do not be surprised. I am not sure what the cost is, the Minister of Sport and Youth Affairs is not here to help me. Whatever the cost is, it is reasonable. If we build one sporting complex which, in a very concrete way but also symbolically, helps us to take this talent that is just walking around and start shaping it into what it can be, that is very good for the community, it is very good for the young people themselves, but it is also very good for the nation. We have to stop in this country thinking of sport as though it is a hobby, a fun thing. Sport is a business. It is a multi-trillion dollar business worldwide, [*Desk thumping*] and we have the kind of talent to tap into it, but we treat it as an also-ran to some extent. We do not see it as a fundamental thing, even though we say it, culturally it is not, but sport here could be a major part of our economy. So part of that is re-conceptualizing how we see it, and complexes like these will not accomplish it as of themselves but they will play a fundamental part in doing that kind of thing.

The last thing I want to talk about very quickly is this agro-processing plant. Madam Speaker, the Minister of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries already gave the screed on the importance of agriculture, I will not re-tread the wheel. What I will say is that for this economy to really fundamentally diversify, we have to start to open up dormant areas of our nation. I mean, those would have been dormant geographically, those that have been forgotten, under-tapped, underutilized. We have to start waking these sleeping giants. Madam Speaker, we have survived very

long and reasonably well by focusing on a few areas but our economy has always been a very cul-de-sac economy. It is a dead end. It is just a matter of when you reach the end of the road but we know there is an end there. Unless we get more areas of our country actively involved in economic production, we are really going to have a very difficult future. So if it is the Government or the State invests some money in an agro-processing plant in Moruga and because of that we spur a kind of agricultural renaissance in the community, that does not just benefit the constituency. It does not just benefit the pineapple farmers at Tableland or the rice producers of Moruga or the fishermen of Moruga, it benefits the entire country, because the more productive areas we have in the country benefits the country. The more economic activity we have in the country benefits the country.

So that Moruga agro-processing plant is not a conceit, it is really meant to be a part of our diversification thrust, or, as someone said, transformation thrust, it is just semantics. You want to change the thing to make it more diverse, more profitable and better, and you do not do that unless you get more areas in the country productive. We have acres of land just lying there doing nothing that would have been plantations or small holdings, productive years ago, they are just doing nothing now, unless we get them productive again, and not just Moruga/Tableland, all over. Unless we as a nation become far more productive, and I mean productive in terms of output but also in terms of productivity, we will just keep talking about diversification and wasting time, Madam Speaker, and at this juncture in our history time is of the essence. We “ain’t” got the time to waste.

So now for the grand finale. Madam Speaker, I spent four-plus years as the MP of what I consider to be the best constituency in the country; they could vex, that is not their business. [*Desk thumping and crosstalk*] “Dais not dey business.” It has been an interesting and vivid experience. I have learnt a lot. I have tried my best

to do what the people expect which is 50 years of work in five years, which is impossible given difficult times but we have tried. We have a leader who understands the importance of rural development and who is supportive and that has helped. At the end of the day, Madam Speaker, as a Government we have succeeded in a number of things. [*Desk thumping*] It is easy to build stuff, Madam Speaker, you fix a highway, you build this, you build that, that is easy to do. Some do it, some do not, but it is relatively easy to do. Taking a country that was in many ways shattered, holding things together, trying to get institutions to operate again, trying to stabilize the economy, taking expenditure that was too high to down where our hat could reach, trying to raise revenue to almost mirror expenditure, these are things that will not win you prizes or popularity but they are fundamentally important. If you do not do them you do not have a country.

Madam Speaker, it has been our pleasure as a Government to serve this country and to make sure that we have a country. And whether or not we get “thank you” or kudos, or people wave flags, whether those on the other side beat up their mouth and say we “eh do nothing”, that is their business, Madam Speaker. We came here to serve a nation, we have done that. We have one more year, we will do it again and then we will come back for five years and do it again. 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, for recognizing me. Madam Speaker, I want to say, after the Leader of the Opposition’s budget reply on Friday to the reply of the budget by the Diego Martin North/East, Minister of Finance—you see, I was in my medical office on Saturday morning after the Leader of the Opposition did her speech, and out of 15 people that came, nine of them indicated to me that the Leader of the Opposition’s budget

contribution was the true budget for Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*] Madam Speaker, and I want to congratulate the Leader of the Opposition for bringing an emblem of a speech. You see, Madam Speaker, it is a speech that showed a futuristic representation of where our country is supposed to go. [*Desk thumping*] It dealt with every single aspect of a country's economy moving it holistically forward. And, Madam Speaker, I may have to say that the people who came to the office were not just UNC diehard supporters, because they would support no matter what, but some of the patients were the middle-of-the-road people, and believe it or not, some PNM people, and they all said that was the true budget. [*Desk thumping*]

You see, Madam Speaker, when you hear something like that you feel a sense of pride, you know, you feel as though you belong to an organization that is going somewhere. And the Minister of Finance had three hours, Madam Speaker, to convince the population what he was doing was right, but he did not convince the Member for Moruga/Tableland on his budget presentation that the country was going anywhere. You see, listening to the Member for Moruga/Tableland, I really thought we were in an EBC report, that he was still discussing the EBC report. You see, all I heard, Madam Speaker, was about Moruga/Tableland, what was happening in Moruga/Tableland, and one aspect of our country as if the rest of the country did not exist. So I really believed we were still in the EBC report that we were debating the other night at the end of the area.

You see, Madam Speaker, normally in a debate it is nice to hear one side of an argument and when you get up you have to refute some part of the argument. I have nothing to refute. It is sad, so I wonder how I will make up my 50 minutes, [*Laughter*] because the Member for Moruga/Tableland stood there—God, I mean, I was taken aback, Madam Speaker. [*Laughter*] What can I respond to?

Madam Speaker, what is there in this gentleman's substance, who is supposed to be a university lecturer? [*Laughter*] I wonder if they have lowered the standards in UWI, because I tried my best and the last set of words I heard was, the country is unproductive and we need to be more productive, we need more diversification. I also heard he said that—[*Crosstalk*]

3.30p.m.

Madam Speaker: I am so happy that it is after lunch and some people could just bring all this energy from us, but I would still ask us to not shout across the floor, contain the crosstalk.

Dr. F. Khan: Thank you, Madam Speaker. You see, the truth hurts.

Now, I heard something about—this is what the Member of Parliament for Moruga/Tableland was saying: We need to diversify our economy. We need to be more productive. We need to do this, we need to do that. Is he attacking the Member for Diego Martin North/East, the Minister of Finance? [*Desk thumping*] I was at a loss to understand what side was he on. Normally he would leave that for us to say in Opposition, but he did a very good job attacking the Minister of Finance so I will not bother with that, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker, I liken the economy of Trinidad and Tobago, I look at it in layman language as a house. If you look at a house, you have a father, mother, children, et cetera, people belong to the household, and in the household certain activities take place. You could call them little ministries: people do washing, cooking, whatever it is. Now for that whole ecosystem to operate, it cannot operate by itself. It has to operate in a manner where whatever you are doing inside, you have to eat, you have to drink, you have to do whatever it is, somewhere that has to come from. You cannot live in your own selves and end up elsewhere.

For that ecosystem to work you must have revenue generated on the inside to purchase goods and services to run the household. You cannot expect the father of the house, who could be considered the Minister of Finance, every morning to get up and take the money out of the pockets of those living in the household and run the household, without bringing out anything to do revenue afterwards. This budget is exactly that, taking things internally to run internally without producing a revenue generating stream. [*Desk thumping*] There is nothing in this budget to produce revenue. But what it does have is expenditure, expenditure to the extent where the internal people of the country, money will be taken from them to run the affairs of the country.

I want to say, I am happy he raised the minimum wage. I am happy that he is increasing the OJTs, the 8,000 OJTs. I am happy for the people. But what is going to happen?—I have heard nothing to compensate for small business. The small business and small retail business, they are going to suffer because there is nothing in this budget to assist them in revenue generation, but is more in expenditure. [*Desk thumping*]

So you are going to have, one, because of the rise in minimum wage, you are going to have people at the lower skill level losing their jobs. That is what you are going to have, because the people who are hiring them are the small and medium enterprises, not the upper and not the lower. They are going to cost cut, because they have to either raise the prices of their goods or the expenditure is going to increase. You have to pay minimum wage, you have to pay higher national insurance, you have to continue paying your Green Fund. Your business levy and all those other expenses have to be done.

Now, certain businesses are still at that level, at basically breaking even level, so they will have to let go staff. Whenever the minimum wage goes up to such an

extent, the lower skilled people are released first, or the business closes down because sometimes they just cannot afford it anymore based on the regulations. So you are going to see people, more and more people on the breadline, Madam Speaker.

The other thing with the OJT, OJT is a good thing if it is used correctly. You see, putting more and more people into OJT what you are going to get, you are going to get a large amount of people going into the OJT programme getting high salaries, increase of 10 per cent, et cetera, and then you are going to have less amount of those skilled people for the small and medium enterprises. So they are not going to get people to work for them at a cost that is above minimum wage, but equivalent to a certain level, because usually OJT pays very well for two years and it is very difficult for those people to come back down to a private sector level, or work in the private sector because they want to continue in the OJT. So you are going to be devoid of a certain skill of labour. You are going to lose labour, but at the end of the day it is all done unfortunately in a time of not plenty, a time of less, to get votes. It is simple as that.

Now, nobody says do not fight for your votes, that is normal, every government does that. But you are going to lose this part of the equation, people are going to lose their jobs. Maybe they did not think of that. Maybe they think you just say minimum wage is this. Sometimes you have to tie wages to performance, not just throw a minimum on somebody, because a lot of small and medium enterprises now are having a hard time.

If you look around the country, Madam Speaker, you would see more and more places up for rent or for sale. That was not so three years ago, two years ago, four years ago, five years ago. We have a lot of places up for rent, and that is an indication that the economy is struggling because nobody is renting. Nobody is

buying to any great extent. It is contracting. I am not saying that because I want to score political points, but it is the reality of the situation.

Another thing, Madam Speaker, foreign exchange in this country is difficult to get, we know that. There is a black market outside there, I think it is eight to one, some people nine to one, 10 to one, 7.5, whatever it is. There is a whole different system outside there for foreign exchange. But when you see the banks tell you that for every person to purchase anything, your credit card—you could have 10 credit cards, two credit cards, one credit card—your maximum amount of money you can utilize is \$5,000, something is happening. Something is definitely happening. Because if you are curtailing your credit card access to foreign funds, you have to purchase it at 7.5, or eight, or nine or 10, whatever it may be to get your stuff done, there is something happening in the economy that we are not addressing in this budget. This budget has not addressed any sort of revenue generation or ideas to change some sort of things. You have to start thinking differently.

Barbados and Guyana, they have done a system where you have foreign exchange, which is US dollars, US dollars and Bajan dollars or US dollars and Guyanese dollars on one good—one good, and then you could choose to see which one you want to spend, which one you going to purchase, and it is all based on the exchange rate. Here we are still stuck in the Trinidad and Tobago dollars and scrambling for US dollars to purchase anything. It is a global economy, we do not live by ourselves, no we do not. It is a global economy. And if there is a global economy, you have to work with the global economy. You cannot sit and say, “We are Trinidadians you must take our Trinidadian dollars”. No, it is a global system and US currency is a global currency, so too the UK currency as well as the yen, and it is going to be soon the won. So we have to decide where we are going to go.

I am just throwing it out again. I will throw it out again that it is time the Minister of Finance and the powers in finance, look at the dualling or the dollarizing of the economy to some extent, so we can now have the ability to accept US dollars and as well release US dollars or Trinidadian dollars how we see fit. But when you see that the bank is having a problem with credit card payments and credit card dollars, you know there is a problem and the economy is contracting.

I will tell you something, Madam Speaker, the unemployment rate in this country is high. No matter what you say in the CSO studies and the CSO whatever it is, the unskilled/lower skilled worker in this country they are having a hard time getting jobs. Because if your construction sector is down, although your cement sales are up, but the actual construction sector is down, because all the different Government projects are using cement. The Government projects of the Interchange, the Debe campus, the central block, every one is using cement. But guess what they are not using? Labour; they are using cement because they are building, but the labour is Chinese labour, it is not local labour. So you are not using labour. So all these semi-skilled, unskilled labourers, et cetera, they have no jobs to get, because the majority of Government projects are not using that labour. So what are they doing? They have nothing to do except turn to crime. So if you have unemployment to that extent, you cannot eat, you are giving away your employment to other people, your cement sales in the country, TCL, is rising, but it is not given to the people of Trinidad and Tobago.

Now this is what I thought the Member for Moruga/Tableland should talk about, that. [*Desk thumping*] Why is it? And he is in a side that he could look at it and determine where we are going to go. I would expect that from a university lecturer. Like Dr. Tewarie, that is how he speaks. He teaches me like that. [*Desk thumping and laughter*] I was having a discussion with Dr. Tewarie and that is the

kind of discussion I had with him. That is what you call a university lecturer.
[*Desk thumping and laughter*]

You see, Madam Speaker, I just want to also say something about my good friend, the Minister of Health. We have a very good relationship. We always agree to disagree sometimes, that is good. The Minister of Health said this morning, and it fell in my garden, that the Arima Hospital was not financed, and the Point Fortin Hospital, financing was not available, and a whole set of framework agreements, et cetera, was not occurring. We had a framework agreement with China, and we were in the process of getting the Chinese loan from the Chinese Development Bank. However, as I have mentioned before, our design briefs were finished. The contractor was on board, based on the Chinese ambassador, and we were doing nothing, just waiting on the loan to come through.

How a loan takes place, I will tell you it is a long story. The Ministry of Health has to link with the Ministry of Finance, and the Ministry of Foreign and Caricom Affairs, who links with the Chinese ambassador, who then links with the Chinese Government, who then sends it to the Chinese Development Bank. It comes back this way, the same direction, into the Ministry of Health and the Ministry of Finance. They then have negotiations which could take about two years. We have our development brief. They have already named their contractor, and what do we do? In every single loan, every single loan, the Government pays 15 per cent of the loan, and we get the loan at 85 per cent of the total.

We decided at the Ministry to take that 15 per cent up front and start the construction of the Arima Hospital, so we could have started breaking ground and building, [*Desk thumping*] and when the loan came through, which was being negotiated with the Ministry of Finance, we would start to build more because we have more money. All this occurred around 2015, late 2014. We started putting

the structure in place. The Minister of Health is correct that the finance came afterwards, but it was all put in place by us, but it had to be negotiated by Ministry of Finance.

So nothing occurs instantly; it is not instant coffee. It takes a process in government. It takes sometimes three years to start for us breaking ground. He is reaping the benefit, and I hope the Minister opens the hospital, because the people of Arima have been clamouring for that hospital for about how much? Forty years; and we were able to start breaking ground and giving them that hospital.

The Point Fortin Hospital, we had a framework agreement pending with the Austrian Government and, having that framework agreement, we, the Ministry of Health together with UDeCOTT, we were having negotiations, and we started the process of looking for another place to put the Point Fortin Hospital. The Member of Parliament for Point Fortin was Sen. Paula Gopee-Scoon, myself, Vasant Bharath at the time I think he was the Minister of Trade and Industry, and he doubled up in Planning, Ministry of Health, we went down to Point Fortin, and we know what was going to happen to Point Fortin. The Point Fortin Hospital was going to be closed down, and everyone who went to that hospital was going to be sent to the San Fernando hospital, way off, and the Ministry of Health—this is what I met when I was there—they were going to open a small health office while the hospital was being built.

Together with Mr. Bharath and myself we decided to change the location of the hospital to a more accessible area, but unfortunately it had wells, so we had to cap the wells before we started to build. You cannot build on the uncapped wells. *[Interruption]* So we capped the wells, sorry. The design brief was ready, and we were ready to move forward. So that is how Point Fortin started to be built. So it was another project that we had to take our time to move forward. Framework

agreements and negotiations, together with finance and everything else was coming on.

You see, Madam Speaker, if you want to do something small, such as the Diego Martin Health Centre, which is being touted, you could do that in a year. But guess what? We had to be—negotiations for five years on—I forget who it was. It was not Rebirth House, I think was one of the friendly societies—to change the land that they owned to give them a piece of land so we could start building the Diego Martin Health Centre. Design briefs were being done in place with the North-West Regional Health Authority, et cetera.

I will not take it from the Minister of Health, because health is not a political issue. It is a continuum. Health is a continuum, [*Desk thumping*] and it continues as we move forward into where it is supposed go in the next 50 years. We had signed a contract and we had areas called the “master plans” for San Fernando, Port of Spain and Eric Williams. I think the Minister should look at that. It shows where the whole hospital system in this country was going to be changed, not just coming and shutting down a central block because you are afraid that an earthquake will destroy it, [*Desk thumping*] and that central block just went through a 6.9 Richter scale earthquake and stood up straight on. But because of fear it might fall, which it did not—it has not fallen since—you basically closed the hospital, and you sent all the patients off. Now you are scrambling for a place as the Member for Caroni East said. Scrambling to get a piece of hospital somewhere in the eye clinic, different places—what you call it—St. James and whatever.

So, Madam Speaker, that in itself threw an unnecessary load onto the other institutions. So you end up now with a set of people lying down in trolleys in all the emergency sectors: San Fernando, Eric Williams, Sangre Grande, wherever, even Port of Spain. So you have that problem ongoing. That is what is happening

right now because of the decision—a decision causes the problem. Now, you have to anticipate the problem before making the decision and work backwards not forwards. [*Desk thumping*]

The other thing, I want to talk just a little about the CT scan the Minister brought up in San Fernando. When I became Minister I wanted to put a CT scan, and we wondered why the CT scan was not working in San Fernando. I was told that a CT scan was bought by the previous regime and it was sitting in a container two years. So the Ministry of Health, we decided to build the suite for the CT scan. So we started building the suite for the CT scan. It took about a year and a half, about that. When we were about to put the CT scan into the suite built for the CT scan, it went in, but guess what? It was not functioning because rain had gotten into the container and destroyed most of the electricals in the CT scan. That was not the fault of the then Government. Whoever put it in that container and left it outside for the elements should be held responsible. That is what happened to that CT scan, but we were able to put a CT scan in the emergency unit in San Fernando hospital, so people were getting the CT scan while that was being repaired. The Minister now is the one who has the problem with that CT scan. I do not know how he is going to move it out.

Another thing which is a kind of a bugbear, Port of Spain is one of the largest catchment hospitals in the country. There is one CT scan there. Before I left the Ministry we were looking at the Northwest Regional Health Authority to put an MRI and a CT scan in Port of Spain. It is now four years going in five years that has not been realized. The people of Port of Spain, they have no MRIs. They have to purchase MRIs from external sources.

Now if it is done by design, is what I found out, sometimes CT scans were happening like that, I would like the Minister to address that and deal with that,

because there is a place arranged for the CT scan. You might have to wait till the central block is finished before that.

Madam Speaker, we had decided to change around the whole hospital sector, and together with the Member of Parliament for Caroni Central, who was then the Minister of Planning, we were able to work with the IADB to look at public/private partnerships with diagnostic centres. You see, building a hospital all over the place with one diagnostic, one CT scan, one MRI, one this, one that, is not auguring well for the population. If you have ever been to Miami you would notice that there are standalone centres for MRIs, standalone centres for CT scans, standalone centres for nuclear scanning and PET/CT scanning, et cetera. There are standalone centres.

The reason behind that is when the hospitals are taking care of their patients in-house, the population needs to go to an area that they can get their diagnostic investigations by not clogging up that inside the hospital. So we are building hospitals. Now I heard one will go in Sangre Grande—now Sangre Grande was supposed to have the first diagnostic centre. We were going to build the diagnostic centre in Sangre Grande together with the IADB, two CT scans, one MRI, a couple of ultrasounds, lab area, et cetera, in the Sangre Grande hospital. That is what was supposed to be in Sangre Grande and duplicate it throughout the country so people would go there to get their standalone diagnostic.

We were going to have standalone cardiac surgery centres, standalone ophthalmology centres, standalone neurosurgical centres, standalone ENT centres. We also were going to do a standalone oncology centre and that oncology centre would have had two linear accelerators, one cyberknife linear accelerator, PET/CET scanner, and ultrasound and diagnostic capabilities for cancer itself, like MD Anderson, with a cyclotron producing radio pharmaceuticals. That has been

shelved, and the Minister of Finance could answer me, but I see \$1.6 million has gone for the oncology centre which does not exist. This is what I found, and they could answer, the Minister of Finance may be able to answer where that money is going to go, the \$1.6 million that has been itemized for the oncology centre.

Madam Speaker, while at the Ministry we did a couple of legislative measures. The legislative measures that we did—we did the tobacco regulations. We started the IEA nuclear energy regulations. We did the RHA amendment for procurement of goods and services. We did the specialist qualifications legislation. We did the Opticians (Registration) Act, we changed it. For the first time in this country opticians could dilate somebody's eyes to see in the back of the eye, which is called the retina, so you could determine in young children as well as adults the disease of the retina, such as retinopathy, et cetera.

The reason I go to legislation, Madam Speaker, two years ago I started speaking about the need to decriminalize marijuana—two years ago. It was met with some derision, which is expected, and it has now come almost full circle. Speaking with the Leader of the Opposition, I was pleased to note that she has taken kindly to that utterance and looked at it, and we have found that there is a need to decriminalize the utilization of marijuana for medical uses. You see, medical marijuana, and I will give you a story—it came about looking at marijuana in the early days. When I was a medical student, Prof. West in the University of the West Indies Pharmacology Lab, he taught us pharmacology, had extracted something call “canasol” from the marijuana plant and it was being used as an eye drop for glaucoma very effectively in Jamaica. That could have been the start. Now, we wondered if he was just making a joke, but it used to work. People bought it in the actual pharmacies in Jamaica.

There is a condition called “Dravet syndrome”. It is a sort of an epileptic

syndrome where young children have constant epileptic attacks that do not stop. The epileptic attacks continue onwards to such an extent that they hardly live past the age of five and 10. You see, a young girl was given the cannabinoid. We got the approval to use the cannabinoid, and the dramatic changes that occurred as use of the cannabinoid, CBD, with the Dravet syndrome and the epilepsy, started to change the thinking of the utilization of medical marijuana. Medical marijuana is now used for things like neurological problems. It is used also for bowel problems, muscular relaxants, and it is starting to be used for Parkinson's disease. Now that is one side of the coin, the medical part of it. However, because it is not decriminalized in Trinidad and Tobago you have many young people who have been caught with a joint or two languishing in the jails of Trinidad and Tobago, and because of simple possession, heavy enforcement, call it the war on drugs, black market, and the law of the land, these people are serving sentences without bail, waiting for their day in court but going above and longer than their time they would have gotten if they had gotten indicted, and that part of it will disappear, Madam Speaker.

The medical marijuana industry is a \$75 billion industry; \$75 billion. It is projected to be in 2025, \$75 billion. Nevada has earned \$100 million in revenue by utilizing cannabis. There is an increase in the drugs related to cannabis—22 per cent. The drugs are increasing by 22 per cent. It outpaces the national average of 10 per cent.

The non-medical use has been decriminalized in 15 states in the United States and legalized in 11 states. There is a public support from 12 per cent in 1969, to 70 per cent today. It will boost the economy about \$24 billion in 2025—these are figures from the United States—and it increases tourism, banking, real estate and construction. All that will be increased in the utilization of the decriminalization

of marijuana. You see, it could generate in this country valuable foreign exchange. You see, there are proponents for and there are proponents against, however, the utilization of medical marijuana has shown that it is necessary for the utilization of severe medical conditions that cannot be treated by conventional medicine. Conventional medicine, Madam Speaker, if you had irritable bowel syndrome you had to do a lot of investigations, taking intra-rectal steroids. You have to use steroids that have their own problems. However, with medical marijuana, with just a couple drops of the oil subliminally three times a day, or whatever the dose doctor gives you, you can definitely get a positive response.

4.00 p.m.

Mr. Deyalsingh: Would you permit?

Dr. F. Khan: Sure.

Mr. Deyalsingh: Thank you for giving way, Member, and I am glad you raised the issue of medical marijuana. You know what we are going to have to do? You and I, medical board and all of that? There is going to have to be a serious retraining of physicians, because what is coming out of the United States now, is that many people who are using medical marijuana are presenting to A&Es and they do not know how to treat either the over dosage or the drug interactions with medical marijuana. So all of us together have to come on board with retraining through TTMA on training doctors how to use medical marijuana. Thank you very much.

Dr. F. Khan: Thank you, Minister. And he is correct, the Minister is correct, but the thing about it is, what is happening, a lot of people, as you quite rightly said, the doctors have to know exactly the dosage. The dosage has to be accurate and utilization with proper studies now. I think there is need for proper scientific papers, scientific studies for medical marijuana.

You see, Madam Speaker, I would like to digress a little bit, digress a little bit from that. I just want to talk a little bit of CARPHA which is the Caribbean Public Health Agency. CARPHA, I have seen in the allocations, CARPHA National Public Health Laboratory and the National Blood Transfusion area is going to be moved to Valsayn which is another project we had started off together with the Pan American Health Organization, and I am extremely glad to see it being allocated to for the designs and the movement into the Valsayn area.

The National Public Health Laboratory, Madam Speaker, is a mess. It needs to be done, we need to have a proper national public health lab, and I am very glad to see there is allocation for it.

Also, we need to start looking at blood transfusion, the blood transfusion system in this country in a wider area, a wider scope. We need to look and see if blood transfusion alone could belong to the State or possibly recognized licensed public labs or for transfusion, because trying to get blood in this country sometimes it is a horror story and the Minister would agree with me sometimes, you know.

Now CARPHA—I want to give a little history on CARPHA. CARPHA, the Caribbean Public Health Agency lab, when I was Minister in 2011, I went to the Pan American Health Organization meeting, and the Minister would know this, 11 years prior to that, CARPHA was being kicked around and bandied around throughout the whole of the Caribbean. I was able to take it because nobody wanted it, Madam Speaker, because of the cost. I spoke to the then Prime Minister, the Leader of the Opposition today, and indicated that we should bring this CARPHA into Trinidad and Tobago, set it up in such a manner that we would be like the CDC of Atlanta, and the hon. Prime Minister and the Leader of the Opposition agreed.

So we brought CARPHA and we housed CARPHA in Federation Park where it

used to be CAREC. And it is now being—we had started looking at developing an area for CARPHA, tied to the National Public Health Laboratory and the blood transfusion service in the Valsayn area that we owned a piece of land that was supposed to give the C40 warehouses. And that plan I see is coming to fruition, again, and I am extremely glad as I said that once again, there is continuity, Madam Speaker, in government, and I think government continuity needs to be looked at in a serious manner, and I am very glad to see it being allocated for.

You see, Madam Speaker, looking at this some people might think it is a dry topic, but CARPHA sees about the communicable diseases, more so than the non-communicable diseases such as dengue, Zika, malaria, tuberculosis and all the other public health infectious diseases, it is on the ball with that.

The non-communicable diseases, we started off and I see that once again, there is allocation for the national wellness area for the NCDs plan. That was a plan, Madam Speaker, that we were able to work with the IDB for wellness centres throughout Trinidad and Tobago, and the Member of Parliament for Caroni Central was the Minister at the time, we were able to get that subvention from the IDB and the approval so we could have put a system in place, Madam Speaker, to look at childhood obesity, sugar, and all the other things that the hon. Minister is going forward with.

You see, Madam Speaker, we have a serious problem in this country of obesity, and if it is one thing we agree with, is that obesity is a problem among everybody. It has gone from about 10 per cent to almost 55 to 60 per cent on the average. Our children are becoming fatter and we need to do something about it. Even our young ladies and basically the testosterone level in young boys [*Interruption*] are keeping them slim but, Madam Speaker, it is a serious thing, because the amount of complications of NCDs, I feel very strongly about it.

And also, the reason I feel strongly about it is because I was educated by the breastfeeding unit in the Ministry of Health and the breastfeeding association [Interruption] Tips. Yeah. They actually showed that utilizing breastfeeding decreases NCDs in later life. What we have right now, Madam Speaker, is a force feeding of children with formula, high sugar, high carbohydrates. Breastfeeding contains the correct amount of carbohydrates and the correct amount of sugar, and it decreases obesity and NCDs later in life.

So we started off by putting the director of women's health, I remember the director of women's health in the Ministry, a Cabinet note, tied to the director of breastfeeding, there was a breastfeeding director; and I understand that that is to be looked at, the director of breastfeeding.

Mr. Deyalsingh: It falls under—

Dr. F. Khan: It falls under the women's health. We had separated it out to have one—Okay. The reason we had that, Madam Speaker, we wanted to promote baby-friendly hospitals in this country, and I noticed that that is where we wanted to go, the need for breastfeeding, and the decrease in the formula in baby-friendly hospitals because, Madam Speaker, I will tell you something. When you start the addiction with the sugar of the baby formula, it continues, and when the children have sugar, fast foods, oils, salt and those things, it is called a concoction, and that stimulates a part of your hypothalamus called your addictive centre in your brain, and no matter what food else that you eat, it does not taste as good as if you go and look for the fried food or the one with the additives. That is why children tend to—parents on the other hand, Madam Speaker, have to be strong enough not to give in, parents have to be smart enough not to give in.

You see, Madam Speaker, once the parents give in, you are making your children fat. If you are making them fat, you have fat adults, fat children make fat adults.

Nowadays the children they have high cholesterol, Type 2 diabetes and all that is going on in young children today, so we have to work it in such a manner that the school nutrition programme that we put in place, the Minister of Education, the Member for Caroni East and myself, we had what they called the red, green and amber school nutrition programme, and I see the Minister is carrying it out together with the decrease in soft drinks, decrease in carbohydrates and the low sugar system. Madam Speaker, that is with the NCDs.

I want to turn to something, Madam Speaker, mental health, and I see the Minister brought it up. Mental health in this country is a serious problem. I remember saying about six or eight years ago that one in four people in Trinidad and Tobago suffers from mental health, 25 per cent of the population. That was met with a sort of derision and a gasp, I said it on a radio programme. And I remember a caller called in and said “Dr. Khan is wrong, you have more than that”. So he was—and I remember that conversation.

You see, Madam Speaker, we have dealt with mental health. St. Ann’s Hospital is a mess, the Minister would agree. St. Ann’s Hospital needs to be done, maybe broken down completely, take the real estate money and put, as you say, community health system around the place. We had Couva, the old Couva hospital, we had Arima Rehabilitation Centre, the Tacarigua centre was supposed to be for the young adults, the new Tacarigua health office, and we need community health centres around the place; now I would not belabour that.

What I want to say and I want to listen, as well as the Minister of National Security. You see, Madam Speaker, there is an invisible group in this country who suffers from serious mental health, but they do not get help. Who are these people? These are the children of incarcerated parents. Madam Speaker, these children of incarcerated parents, had their parents removed from them and

incarcerated. Because they are under the age of 18, the visiting rights are almost negligible or not at all.

Madam Speaker: Member for Barataria/San Juan, your original time is now spent.

Dr. F. Khan: Thank you.

Madam Speaker: You are entitled to 10 more minutes to wrap up. You may proceed. [*Desk thumping*]

Dr. F. Khan: Thank you, Madam Speaker. This invisible group of children, they are languishing outside and they are seventimes more likely to become truants as compared to the normal child, somebody with parents. These children of incarcerated parents, we need to look at it, Madam Speaker, because there is a high population in the jails itself, mother and fathers, single mothers and fathers and others. These children are either taken care by grandmothers, by aunts, uncles and are abused. Mentally they feel deficient, they feel ashamed and they look for outlets, and the outlets that they look for are either alcohol, gang-related activities, as well as substance abuse and they become truant, and they are seven times more likely to become, as they say, the other group like their parents onwards. I would like the Minister of Health—and they have serious mental problems—to dedicate a place for those children to go to; [*Desk thumping*] dedicate a place.

Also, I would like the Minister of National Security to look at this, Madam Speaker, because there have been studies in the United States of America about these children of incarcerated parents where they have bonding with their parents on a weekly basis, Madam Speaker, being able to go to specific areas in the prisons made to be friendly to these children—

Brig. Gen. Antoine: Madam Speaker, 48(1), relevance to the budget.

Madam Speaker: Overruled.

Dr. F. Khan: I do not have much time to deal with him. I am trying—[*Crosstalk*] Thank you, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, I would like the Minister of National Security—because years ago when we were speaking about it, we were able to get the children to go in to meet their parents at specific times, Mother’s Day, Father’s Day, sometimes Christmas, but for this programme to work, together with a dedicated centre for children of incarcerated parents, because they need to work on their mental health and to decrease the crime levels, to decrease the amount of people going into gang activity and less substance abuse, Madam Speaker, you need to have that put on the front burner so we could deal with it.

Madam Speaker, I just want to touch a little bit on the national health insurance system. We need a national health insurance system in this country, Madam Speaker. This national health insurance system [*Desk thumping*] we started under my tenure of the People’s Partnership, started laying the foundation for it, and I noticed the Minister talked about medical records, however medical records it is only one part of the equation. You have to have some area to attach the medical records, to attach the primary care, secondary care, hospital investigations, doctors’ visits to one area, one secure area where it could be retrievable and accountable. That is what we had designed, the initial CDAP card called the “health card”. That was going to, as they say, attach all those parameters to one area that was going to be secure—name and also records in one area. The Minister should look at that type of model.

You see, Madam Speaker, that is the basis of a national health insurance system. Once you get that in place, you could then put costing as the Minister has talked about costing, 500,000 maybe for investigation, everything else in the cloud, so all this thing could happen in the cloud, Madam Speaker. There is not much hardware and could be retrievable throughout the system.

So, the national health insurance could be married together with public health, private health such as Singapore. Singapore has a whole different ballgame, and also France, and their national health system, Madam Speaker, it uses that mechanism of approach. It uses linking, because we have the technology now, in fact, the technology now is better than when we had it, technology now is way advanced with artificial intelligence, et cetera.

You see, Madam Speaker, it is time that we—now, we have heard year one, two, three and four, I have heard the Minister of Finance talk about national health insurance, but he kinda dropped it off last year and it is nowhere to be seen in the budget this year. But I am starting to say that I have spoken to the Leader of the Opposition and she has promised me that in the first 90 days, Madam Speaker, of the new UNC government when it does occur [*Desk thumping*] one, the Leader of the Opposition said she will bring legislation to decriminalize marijuana. [*Desk thumping*] Two, bring legislation to allow children of incarcerated parents to visit their parents. [*Desk thumping*] And three, start the national health insurance system in the manner. [*Desk thumping*] And with these few words, Madam Speaker, thank you very much.

Madam Speaker: Member for Point Fortin. [*Desk thumping*]

The Minister of Housing and Urban Development (Hon. Maj. Gen. Edmund Dillon): Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, thanks for allowing me the opportunity to contribute in this debate on the Bill:

“An Act to provide for service of Trinidad and Tobago for the financial year ending the 30th day of September, 2020.”

Madam Speaker, let me first of all on behalf of my constituency of Point Fortin and, of course, the wider Trinidad and Tobago, extend sincerest thanks and appreciation to the Minister of Finance, the Member of Parliament for Diego

Martin North/East, the hon. Colm Imbert for what I consider to be an excellent delivery and, of course, an excellent budget. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker, I also want to thank the Minister of Planning and Development, the hon. Camille Robinson-Regis for her contribution [*Desk thumping*] on an excellent budget. Of course, all this would not have been possible had it not been for the guidance and the input of our Prime Minister the Dr. Keith Rowley. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker, when one looks at what is happening today in terms of the economic situation throughout the world, when you look at what is happening in our region, and when you look at the measures adopted in this budget and you understand what the people are saying, it has been well received and it is an excellent budget.

Madam Speaker, before going into my contribution which will touch basically on the work done by the Ministry of Housing and Urban Development, let me just deal with one or two feedbacks based on the presentation before me. I also want to congratulate the speakers on this side who as far as I am concerned did an excellent job [*Desk thumping*] in dealing the presentation, an excellent job.

Madam Speaker, time and time again you hear on the other side justification for the start of the Point Fortin Hospital. I heard it from the Member for Caroni East; I heard it again from the Member for Barataria/San Juan. I am the MP for Point Fortin, I was on the ground in Point Fortin, I was born and grew up in Point Fortin. And, yes, it has been a hospital that has been talked about for also 40 years since Shell gave us the area hospital that now exists in Point Fortin, but the claim that the past administration is making that they started the Point Fortin Hospital, Madam Speaker, is a sham.

Madam Speaker, I can tell you that that site was literally a hoarding site with

galvanize barred around it and a conceptual drawing at the time we came into power. About a month before the general election there was a rush by the past administration to open everything, to open the construction site at the Couva hospital, the Mayaro fire station. If you recall, Madam Speaker, the sign did not last long enough, it fell off, and their similar move to open the Point Fortin Hospital which there was not a pile that was driven into that ground, there was still an uncapped well at the time, Madam Speaker, yet you hear claims that, “We have started the Point Fortin Hospital”. The Point Fortin Hospital, Madam Speaker, was started under this administration. [*Desk thumping*] Under this administration.

Madam Speaker, I heard the Member for Siparia mention in terms of the defence force, and I want to join my colleague the Member for D’Abadie/O’Meara and former Chief of Defence Staff who said yesterday, he asked the Leader of the Opposition, the Member for Siparia, to stay out of the defence force business. I want to endorse that statement, Madam Speaker, [*Desk thumping*] because the retirement of the defence force personnel is based on a long-tested system that is done not only in Trinidad and Tobago, but you will find the similar kind of age and retirement combination in the Jamaican Defence Force, Barbados Defence Force, Guyana Defence Force, the British Army, the Canadian Defence Force, and even to some extent in the American military; it is unique to the military.

So I also want to say, do not interfere with what is considered to be a total institution, one that is non-unionized, one that pays contributions towards their pension, and they enjoy what we call resettlement training to prepare the individuals, notwithstanding their early retirement to be able to be gainfully employed. If you need to address issues in the defence force, two things you need to address: One, is the early accessibility of the national insurance, because of the early retirement age, if you retire at 45, 47, 50, 55, you still have to wait until you

reach age 60 to access your national insurance. The other one is the annexation of pension. That is another area that you want to address. If you want to deal with that, then deal with those two issues, but do not interfere with the retirement age of the defence force. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker, the Ministry of Housing and Urban Development is mandated to treat with affordable housing solutions, regularization of squatters throughout the length and breadth of our citizens of Trinidad and Tobago, and we do that through various agencies. The Housing Development Corporation, the Land Settlement Agency, the East Port of Spain Development Company, the New City Mall, the East Side Plaza, the Trinidad and Mortgage Finance Company, those are the institutions under the Ministry of Housing and Urban Development.

Today, Madam Speaker, I want to speak to the people of Trinidad and Tobago. I want to let the people of Trinidad and Tobago know and be aware of what has been delivered to them between 2015 to date that the Ministry of Housing and Urban Development.

You see, Madam Speaker, the People's National Movement, the party under which this Government falls, has been instrumental in providing housing to the people of Trinidad and Tobago, one can trace all the way back to the 1960s, the 1960s when the housing project by government fund had started, was under what was then called the "Self-Help Project". And even today one can look at those areas and see the similar kind of architecture, the similar kind of structure in Point Fortin, in Guapo, in La Brea, in Pleasantville, in Morvant, in the east in some areas of Toco/Sangre Grande. That was a concept that was developed under the People's National Movement in the 60s. And to date, Madam Speaker, this Government continues that philosophy of providing affordable income—affordable and low income—housing to the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago.

Madam Speaker, when we assumed office in 2015, we were faced with a situation where the economy was not where we wanted it to be, but notwithstanding that we know that we have a responsibility to still continue to provide low- and middle-income housing solutions to our people of Trinidad and Tobago. And to a large extent, Madam Speaker, that is captured in our *Vision 2030* document. And while to a large extent the other side continues to say that there is not a plan, of course, there is a plan, Madam Speaker. Our plan is anchored in our vision statement of *Vision 2030* in particular with respect to the Ministry of Housing and Urban Development is, in fact, putting people first, nurturing our greatest assets. That is our tagline; that is where we are embedded as the Ministry of Housing and Urban Development on our *Vision 2030* document. We always put people first, Madam Speaker. As a matter of fact, I mean the People's National Movement always put people first, it starts with people, People's National Movement. [*Desk thumping*] Unlike the unpatriotic National Congress, which the "U" stands for. [*Desk thumping*]

And so, Madam Speaker, we have continued to adjust to suit our policies in order of providing those low- and middle-income houses, the very first thing that we did in 2015 was to lower the income ceiling gap. It was then \$45,000 per individual, to \$25,000 per individual. And the reason why we did that, Madam Speaker, because we realized that in terms of the accessibility to low-income housing, a larger percentage was being captured by people in the higher income group, basically between the 25,000 to 45,000 ceiling gap. And therefore, people at the lower strata were being missed out to a large extent, so the Government took the first decision to lower that income ceiling from \$45,000 to \$25,000, again, catering for the low- and middle-income persons.

Madam Speaker, but when we came into 2015 we met a situation where, again, due

to neglect, due to political vindictiveness, there were a number of stalled projects, stalled projects that we met that were laid there, were never touched between 2010 to 2015, and I can testify to that. In Point Fortin, for example, the Lake View Housing Development was never touched by the last administration for the five years that they were there. There were cows, goats, vandalism that took place in those structures. This Government restarted that project, and I can count a number of different projects throughout the length and breadth; it was based on vindictiveness.

I do not think the Prime Minister of the last administration ever visited Point Fortin during the five years that she was there. I do not think she ever visited Point Fortin, not even to turn the sod for the same Point Fortin Hospital that they mentioned a while ago, she was not even there when they did that. She never visited Point Fortin. So there was total vindictiveness in terms of providing housing for the people of Point Fortin. This Government has taken that on board and presided that we must provide.

And so, Ministry of Housing and Urban Development also had to deal with starting new projects and completing those. Notwithstanding, again, the talk on the other side that we have not built one single building, I will give you the details in a while, Madam Speaker, and the people of Trinidad and Tobago, to understand that, we have started and completed buildings under this administration since 2015.

[Desk thumping]

Madam Speaker, you see, with this Government it is not about wasting the taxpayers' money, because when you leave those buildings incomplete for five years, Point Fortin; Valsayn; Real Spring, Valsayn; I can go on and on, it is a waste of taxpayers' money, because now you have to come back after five years, deal with those, some of them deteriorated to the extent where they have to be broken

down and rebuilt, so there was a waste of taxpayers' money during those five years under the last administration.

Madam Speaker, let me itemize for the benefit of the people of Trinidad and Tobago some of the stalled projects that this administration completed between 2015 and 2019 and I will itemize. We completed 2,067 units, those were stalled projects between 2015 and 2010, [*Desk thumping*] 2,067 and I will itemize them. These include 96 units in Chaconia Crescent, Diego Martin; 34 units in Malick/Barataria; 264 units in Victoria Keyes, Diego Martin; 137 units in Vieux Fort, St. James; 84 units at Real Spring, Valsayn; 336 units at Lake View, Point Fortin; 72 units at Nepuyo Court, Malabar; 46 units at Hubert's Town, Guapo; 21 units at Cumana, Toco; 12 units at Buen Intento, Princes Town; 150 units in Bon Air North; 281 units in Cashew Gardens North, Carlsen Field; 116 units at Eden Gardens, Freeport; 78 units at Pier Road, La Brea, and 100 units in Trestrail, D'Abadie.

Madam Speaker, these were all stalled projects under the last administration that they never touched. They started under 2010 under a PNM Government and because of political vindictiveness they were never touched. This Government completed those units. You see, it is a government that cares, a government that does not concern itself with political expediency.

Madam Speaker, it is projected that an additional 1,620 housing units will be completed, and these stalled projects—we have not completed, there were so many, Madam Speaker, we are still dealing with stalled projects that were left abandoned by the last administration. We hope that during fiscal year 2020 we will complete another 1,620 of these units. [*Desk thumping*]

4.30 p.m.

Madam Speaker, September 2015 to 2019, we continued work on new projects under the accelerated housing programme. Again, I speak to people of Trinidad and Tobago to understand what we have delivered. Two hundred and thirty-three units were completed at the following sites: 71 at Gomez Trace, Phase 2, Moruga; 24 at WoodStar Villas, Bon Air South; 26 at Corinth and 102 at Carina Gardens, Arima. [*Desk thumping*] Again, a Government that delivers. A Government that delivers. Three hundred and thirty-one units are projected for completion 2019/2020 at sites including Carina Gardens, Corinth, Carlton Lane, WoodStar Villas, Bon Air South, and Harmony Hall. You see, Madam Speaker, the HDC is not just about providing houses, building houses, it is about building communities. It is about building communities so that the development of Trinidad and Tobago could be expanded, because by building communities we build the country.

So that we have done work such as street signs in our development, we have done work such as welcome walls in our development, directional walls, directional signs, speed bumps, and recently what we have been doing in most of the developments is in fact putting play parks so that the children can get activities. [*Desk thumping*] The children and the senior citizens can walk out and enjoy the ambiance in those developments. We have also gone so far as to planting trees in some of those developments, again, based on the environmental friendliness dealing with climate change and those kinds of things. So, we are building communities in most of the development. So far we have constructed 14 play parks in some of our developments [*Desk thumping*] and I want to thank the corporate citizens who came to our assistance, in particular, First Citizens Bank who came to our assistance in helping us, working with us, partnering with us to put play parks in some of those communities. [*Desk thumping*]

You see, Madam Speaker, we recognize that the challenges that we met can be

overcome to a large extent. Notwithstanding the economic situation we feel that we owe it to the people of Trinidad and Tobago. We owe it to those who are vulnerable, we owe it to others to try to eradicate poverty, we owe in terms of providing that basic need of man and woman, providing that shelter that is required. You see, Madam Speaker, this Government caters to the needs of all of its citizens. Over the last three years we have provided the impetus to attract private sector contracts, because again the Government—in fact no Government can really produce, provide the kind of housing requirements, housing demands to its citizens. In our case we are looking at almost 170/180,000 people in our database. The Government certainly cannot provide housing for each and every one of them. As a matter of fact, even if we were to provide housing for 2,000 of those people and there were 3,000 names were there, by the time we completed those another 3,000 would be added on, because persons come to age and they put themselves on the database. So it is a never ending continuum. Nevertheless, we will continue to partner, and so we have adopted two initiatives: One is the public/private partnership, and the other one is housing construction incentive programmes. Those programmes are programmes designed where we invite the private sector to join with Government, to partner with Government with certain incentive along the line, to help us to distribute and provide houses for those who require them in our society, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker, under the PPP procurement arrangements there are currently five private construction firms utilizing design, finance, and build model. Eighty two units have been completed, 20 at Trestrail, D'Abadie; 40 at Mahogany Court, Mount Hope; and 22 at Bamboo Creek, Cunupia. Again, a success story in public/private partnership. [*Desk thumping*] It is projected that during fiscal year 2019/2020, 868 units will be completed under the PPP programme. This includes

72 at Corinth, 58 at Malabar, 428 at Trestrail, 80 at Mahogany Court, 206 at Bamboo Creek, Cunupia, and 24 at Roy Joseph, San Fernando. [*Desk thumping*]
Again, a Government that cares, a Government that delivers. The Housing Construction Incentive Programme is another programme that we can talk about, because any person or developer who has land, or lands can be provided for you, can participate in that programme. The incentive is that for houses that can be constructed under \$550,000 the developer gets a 75,000 incentive for each unit that he has constructed. Between \$557,050 the developer get \$100,000 for each unit that he has constructed. Madam Speaker, that has been doing quite well, but we want to invite and encourage more of our private developers to join the incentive programme. We will go out and market that under 2020 again. [*Desk thumping*]
Madam Speaker, currently there are 71 units being constructed under this initiative, with a projected completion date of 2020, in fiscal year 2020. Another one of the stalled projects again that we met was the Victoria Keyes. And again, when we met Victoria Keyes we realized that the last administration changed the whole concept of lower- and middle-income housing. They built those—I do not know if they had stakeholders involved in it, I cannot say. I do not know. But they refurbished those apartments at Victoria Keyes and the costs were in fact above what we consider lower and middle income. This Government took a decision then that because of the cost of the construction we had to subsidize it and put them on the open market. We had to put it on the open market. That is a decision taken by this Government. That is because of the cost of those units at Victoria Keyes. We still do not understand what it is, what was the intention of the last administration, because if they are building houses for low and middle income the cost of those construction at Victoria Keyes is designed for something else.
And so, Madam Speaker, we have been able to sell a number of those units. As a

matter of fact, 121 of those units have been sold earning the Government a revenue of \$232.5 million; [*Desk thumping*] \$232.5 million. There are still some units to be sold and I know that they will be sold probably by the end of fiscal year 2020.

Mortgage conversion rates we continue in terms of earning income for the people and Government, and to continue our housing structure. We have been working with Trinidad and Tobago Mortgage Finance in terms of converting mortgage of rent to own, license to occupy, and so to date we have collected over \$1.5 billion in revenue from September 2015 to present. Madam Speaker, \$1.5 billion as income coming in from conversions of mortgage sales. So the Housing Development Corporation continues to provide income to sustain their housing development throughout the length and breadth of Trinidad and Tobago.

One of the areas that we have made some headway again is in our delinquency rate. As you know, Madam Speaker, our rental units throughout the length and breadth of Trinidad and Tobago, there was a large delinquency because persons were not paying their rent on time or sometimes not at all, sometimes owing the HDC for three months, four months as the case may be. We believe that that is revenue lost. And again, we believe that people must pay for what they have been given, and so we have developed—we have put in place a debt collection agency that goes out with a car, written on the door “HDC debt collection”, and they come in front of your door, so your neighbours would know, because the persons who are not paying their rent, there are sometimes two vehicles parked up in the porch in the driveway. And they have all the amenities of good life, yet their rent is not being paid. So we have been able to reduce that significantly, so it is reflected that almost there has been a \$33 million reduction from 2018 and 2019, and we continue to do so, to reduce it to the extent where little or no one owes the HDC rent for apartment that you are living and enjoying. [*Desk thumping*] You see, we

are making the people more responsible, and try to get away from this handout syndrome, because you have a responsibility to pay your rent before some of the other items of enjoyment.

Madam Speaker, this Government understands quite well what it is we have to do. As I mentioned a while ago, 175/180,000 people on the database, by no short feat is something that we can deal with. But what is happening thus, is that as we continue to deliver, as we continue to distribute houses, it means that there are some successes that are showing. So people are seeing the distribution of houses and therefore they come onto the database. So success breeds success, and in other words—so while we are trying to reduce the amount of people on the database by merely distributing houses, we are encouraging people to say there is something good there so let me put myname on the database. So the number continues to be almost around the same or even increasing as we go along. And that has to do with the good work that the Housing Development Corporation is doing. And I also want to thank the contractors. [*Desk thumping*] I want to thank the contractors for working alongside the HDC for delivering and distributing these houses. [*Desk thumping*]

I want to again commend the Minister of Finance, because in terms of funding the development programme so far as housing is concerned, he has come up with some creative and innovative ways to provide the funding necessary, again, to meet that demand of 180,000 people on the database. He has done so notwithstanding the challenges facing for us, and I want to compliment him on not one of the initiative in this budget that we are dealing with, Madam Speaker, and that is the housing bonds. The Minister of Finance has amended the Government Savings Bonds Act to include a housing bond. He has extended the amount from \$2 billion to \$3 billion to cater for that, and that housing bond would go a long way. It is a sort of

a win-win situation, one in which those who are encouraged to purchase those bonds at 4.5 per cent interest. I repeat, Madam Speaker, 4.5 per cent interest.

So those who were encouraged to purchase these bonds, it comes like a saving for them, by investment in future, but at the same time the money from the bonds can then be used to construct new homes, to develop new communities and so on. So it is a win-win situation for the people, and of course for the Housing Development, for the Ministry of Housing and Urban Development, and of course for the Government of Trinidad and Tobago. And I will encourage people, good initiative by the Minister of Finance, very good initiative by the Minister of Finance, and know that that would go a long way in treating with the housing stock of Trinidad and Tobago.

Madam Speaker, another initiative that was mentioned in the budget, and this is where again the Minister of Finance, taking into consideration that we need to encourage some of our small contractors, create the environment where we can encourage them to participate in the housing construction industry, and so part of the budget measure that he mentioned had to deal with encouraging small contractors to build houses at a cost of \$500,000. And those small contractors, as he mentioned, with the given in any development, let us say the development of 100 units, you could have at least 20 contractors, small contractors, giving them five units each, and then based on their performance, next development they may get 10 units each, but each of those small contractors—you could imagine the multiplier effect, Madam Speaker, those small contractors coming to work, delivering, and again it is based on what HDC has put in place, a 21-point quality control measures. So they are not left alone, they have been given the plans, the drawings, the architectural approval, the Town and Country approval, the infrastructure development, and is monitored by the HDC so it is built within HDC

specifications, but the important bottom line here is that it is creating employment for the small contractors in Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*]

Another part of the budget as mentioned by the Minister of Finance, is that low interest loans have been provided for the people of Trinidad and Tobago of \$300,000; a low interest loan of \$300,000. So, Madam Speaker, when you combine those initiatives, the \$300,000 provided at low interest is really the tip of the iceberg, you know. Because now we are providing you with the \$300,000 no interest, providing you with construction, and then when I tie that into the LSA, which I will deal with in a while ago, in terms of the provision of land, you would see that there are a combination of things that are put in place by this Government to treat with low- and middle-income persons with the genuine aspect of being able to access and build or occupy/purchase your own home. What else can this—what government can stand up like this? No other government can say that they have done this combination of activities. The budget is a very good budget insofar as housing is concerned. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker, I turn a bit now to the Land Settlement Agency. The Land Settlement Agency is based on regularization of squatters, but also in terms of providing lands and so on for the construction of homes and to a large extent they have been very successful; very successful. The Land Settlement Agency has been successful in a number of ways. Still utilizing the same philosophy of persons, catering for persons with an income gap of \$25,000, the Land Settlement Agency has been able to provide fully developed lot under the Government Aided Self-Help Programme. How this operates, Madam Speaker? We do have designated lands in Trinidad and Tobago. We have developed lots that have been developed by the Land Settlement Agency in terms of infrastructure, so that lights, water, roads, drainage, have already been developed on these lots. It is based on random

selections.

To date we have been able to—there were 5,000 applicants. Out of that 1,000 were based on random selection. To date, we have interviewed almost 700 of those, and I can say to the people of Trinidad and Tobago 500 of those have qualified to be able to build their own homes on these lands. [*Desk thumping*] The criteria is simple: You must be 21 years of age, you must qualify for at least \$320,000, and you have two years with which to build your home. Two years. Two years! In normal situation you have three months if you are doing a bridging finance and so on to build you home. Under this programme the individual has two years, 24 months to build his house. [*Desk thumping*] Sometimes you can even build that from your monthly salary, if you really want to without taking out a loan, because you have two years. You have the plans drawn up for you, you do not have to pay for the plans. You have the infrastructure in place, roads, lights and water in place, and you have a supervision. We provide you with a project manager. What else, Ladies and Gentlemen? What else, Ladies and Gentlemen? The Government will be providing houses for the people of Trinidad and Tobago. And this programme, Madam Speaker, has been very successful. As I mentioned a while ago, 503 persons out of the 700 randomly selected have been approved by the Trinidad and Tobago Mortgage Finance to date. To date there are 332 sale agreements that have been completed and signed by the lessees, 194 applicants, applications for persons with land who requested financial assistance, and technical support has been processed. In other words, you could also have your own land and benefit from this. It is not just State providing the land. But if you have your own land and you want to build, you can also access this service, we are provided with the same facility, architectural drawings, project management and so on, and of course the loan. When you combine that with the 300,000 low interest loan, you

get the land, and the land is sold at 25 per cent of the market value; 25 per cent of the market value. In other words, if the land costs \$200,000 then you pay \$50,000 for that land. So, Madam Speaker, it is a win-win situation. It is a win-win situation. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker, another initiative by the—in fact, let me just mention, there are also development in these areas in so far as the land is concerned in La Romaine, in Glenroy, Princes Town, Allamby Street, Golconda, also in Cunupia, in Felicity. So, the land is spread out throughout a number of different areas in Trinidad and Tobago, so you have some choices, even the persons, you have choices in the areas in which you would want to build your home.

Madam Speaker, I want to touch on another programme that was mentioned by the Member for Moruga/Tableland, which is the Housing Village Improvement Programme. He went at length, because the programme started off in Moruga, as he mentioned, under the guidance of Dr. Keith Rowley, Prime Minister of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago, who, in his walk around, saw the kind of living conditions, starting with the Merikins in Moruga, in Samuel Cooper Drive. When he saw that he made a promise, and as a man of his word he kept his promise. But that was the model. That was the model programme for that, a very successful, very successful initiative. So successful, Madam Speaker, that that programme won the IADB award for innovation and excellence. First prize. First prize for innovation and excellence for 2019. [*Desk thumping*]

I see, Madam Speaker, the programme builds on what people my age would call probably the “gayap” system. In those days people used to come together and build the homes. The ladies would cook the food and so on, the men would mix the cement, lay the bricks, lay the foundation and so on, in the village area. Of course, there would always be some libation, but even the children partake in that,

participate in that. I remember as a child in south, growing up in Point Fortin, when you are building a home everybody came together, the children would carry water and throw it on the cement when they are mixing it, or carry water for the workers, for the people who were in the trenches and so on. This is a similar concept that they use in this low-income housing that started off in Moruga, where the community comes together, but today you do not get anything for free, so you employ the local contractors. So you have the local contractors coming together, ensure that the local contractors are from within the community itself, and he employs people from within the community.

And when you do that, Madam Speaker, you are contributing to the development at various community. But it is people building for people within the community, everybody knows one another. And what I saw in Moruga, the kind of structure that I saw, when you saw the before and after picture you would be amazed at what is happening. And when you hear the people for themselves talk about their understanding and the belief from what they have received, it would shock to a large extent. And so this HVI Programme has been able to deliver 30 homes in Moruga, 10 homes were repaired at the same time, so those who needed repairs and those who needed total construction. So there were in fact 30 new homes, 10 were repaired, but also we did not just do the homes and the repair, we did drains, we did sidewalks, we did roads. So it is really an enhancement in the community. We still have to do a lil community centre for them, so that they can meet, and treat, and talk in the marketplace. It is about developing communities. This is what this Government is all about.

So, Madam Speaker, under Phase 2 of this, and I said based on that we used that model, but in terms of going forward we say let us do a social survey. We do a social survey throughout the length and breadth of Trinidad and Tobago. We hired

about 116 young people to go out through the length and breadth of Trinidad and Tobago to do a social survey for us. And the LSA, I want to congratulate them, they have a new tool using technology. These young people went out with a hand-held device like an iPad, when they come to your home they have your name. As you punch in your name and so on it goes right back to the LSA on a map that is mapped out. So we can pull up that database at any time and say John Brown lives here, John Brown has two children, his family is two children, two boys, two girls, we have that. Those were what these young people were able to do.

So, we had employment, we were able to map out those areas in Trinidad and Tobago right now. And it is based on the social survey and then determine where we can expand that programme to. So to date, Madam Speaker, we have done Phase 2 in Moruga, continues, and the Member for Moruga/Tableland has mentioned it, but I would give you some numbers. He did not touch on the numbers. There are 20 units in Moruga, 30 in Marabella right now, 32 in Sangre Grande, 20 in St. Joseph, and in this way employment is created for about 600 persons, using the same concept, and we continue the social survey throughout the length and breadth of Trinidad and Tobago.

So, there are more areas under 2020, they would expand based on the needs, based on the requirements. And these houses, Madam Speaker, were built—the initial ones, the pilot project were built at a cost of \$100,000. We learn from some areas and so on, so we have increased those in Phase 2 to \$120,000. Where else you can get a house that you can do, well you can safely occupy from a before wooden, shack, no floorings, toilet outside, to one in which you have is concrete, solid concrete house, a solid roof over your head, toilet and bath inside. I went recently to Rampanalgas where we delivered some of those houses, and one lady showed where her house was before, and the present one. She actually did the walls and

everything inside. Beautiful two-bedroom house, Madam Speaker, for \$120,000. A \$120,000. [*Desk thumping*] A beautiful concrete structure for \$120,000.

This is a Government that cares. This is a Government that provides for the low- and middle-income people of Trinidad and Tobago, and I want to thank the LSA for that initiative, for going out there into the fields and providing much needed ease to those people. You see, the LSA, the Land Settlement Agency, also continues to do preconstruction work, which we have done 10 sites around the country, including Demerara Road, Arima; off Rochard Road, Penal; off Rochard Road, Penal; Bacaday; Sangre Grande; La Phillipine; Gran Couva. And these are sites that have been designated under the Act, under the Land Settlements Act, so we do the infrastructure work for these sites in terms of roads, in terms of drainage. We also do infrastructural work, preconstruction and infrastructural work.

We have done infrastructural works in 30 sites, and 14 sites have been completed to date, with a yield of approximately 2,600 lots. This is delivery, Madam Speaker, and I want the people of Trinidad and Tobago to understand what I am saying. [*Desk thumping*] I am saying this so the people of Trinidad and Tobago can see what has been done in the housing sector in Trinidad and Tobago. We as the housing and also the Land Settlement Agency, 2,600 lots out of those 30 sites, and these sites include areas such as Ackbarali Trace, Arima; Glenroy, Princes Town; Harmony Hall, Gasparillo; Jacob Hill, Wallerfield; La Paille, Caroni; Pine Settlement, Sangre Grande; and others. I can go on and on.

You see, the LSA has also infrastructural projects related to region in relation of communities in greater Port of Spain region. You see, that is the urban part of the Ministry of Housing and Urban Development. We also treat with development and looking at areas in the greater Port of Spain areas that stretches from Carenage in the west, all the way up to Morvant/Laventille in the east, in terms of the greater

Port of Spain area.

And so the LSA has awarded 38 contracts under this programme, 23 of the projects were completed in several areas including Scorpion Village, Carenage; Factory Road, Diego Martin; Waterhole, Cocorite; and some areas of Belmont. Madam Speaker, roughly 200 persons from these communities were employed to work on these projects.

I will treat with another area under the LSA right now, squatter regularization. The land tenure Act, No. 25 of 1998, says to us that the only time that we can recognize anyone presented with a Certificate of Comfort they would have had to apply or would have been on the land before 1998, but they would extend it to October 2000. So anyone after that cannot be provided with a Certificate of Comfort. So there are some people who figure that they are new squatters and they come and they ask for Certificate of Comfort, the law does not allow the Government to give anyone a Certificate of Comfort who entered into state lands after 2000. And you were supposed to have applied for the Certificate of Comfort before the deadline of October 2000. But there are some that have applied and have not been processed, the Land Settlement Agency processing those persons who applied within that window up to October 2000, were not presented with a Certificate of Comfort.

Madam Speaker, in keeping with that, the Land Settlement Agency has been truly doing something that never happened before in this country. You see, there is a three-stage process. There is one: Certificate of Comfort is the first stage of that process given to persons who would have applied before October 2000, so we present you with Certificate of Comfort. After the Certificate of Comfort we move to the statutory release. The statutory release is a 30-year lease which is provided for you, and during that 30-year lease you are asked to pay for the land. That land is at 25 per cent of the market value of the land.

Again, let me use the example to illustrate. If the land cost \$200,000 the individual, the applicant, pays \$50,000, and that \$50,000 when you are given your statutory release you have 30 years to pay that. Madam Speaker, the calculation that worked out to about \$1,600 a year, roughly \$138 a month. For an individual earning a piece of land for \$200,000, you are paying \$50,000 for it, and they can pay \$138 per month for 30 years statutory release. Now, they can pay it off before that. So if you pay it off before that you are now entitled to a deed of lease. The deed of lease is 199 years.

Madam Speaker, which government? [*Desk thumping*] You are getting a piece of land worth \$250,000 and paying \$138 a month, and when you pay it off you get a deed of lease for 199 years. This is the first time any government has moved this process from Certificate of Comfort to statutory lease. [*Desk thumping*] It has never happened before, notwithstanding the rush from the last administration to give CoC, CoC, CoC. They never moved the process forward. Not one! They have moved that process forward, people are still in a state of Certificate of Comfort, which has no collateral, has no bearing, all it tells us is you that you would not be ejected from the Government land. We have said we have moved that process now to move you from CoC to statutory release, so you have a sense of comfort. [*Desk thumping*] You have something that can pass on from generation to come as a legacy. Oh, man, it is a government working, a government that is caring.

Madam Speaker, over the years the number of squatters have increased exponentially since we came into power, and it was encouraged to a large extent by the last administration. It was almost like a free for all, because you see people were of the belief that once you go onto state lands you get a Certificate of Comfort. It was encouraged by the last administration, especially to the end, when

they see the end was near in 2014/2015. They encouraged a free for all to the extent where we have forest being destroyed in Toco/Sangre Grande. Through the largest areas by LSA's mapping or squatting right now is Toco/Sangre Grande and Point Fortin, my own constituency, and that was encouraged. And people were of the false belief that if they were presented with a Certificate of Comfort they good to go. But just go on the land and live and you get a Certificate of Comfort. We cannot give anybody a Certificate of Comfort who did not apply up to October 2000. That is the law, and we have not changed that law.

So those who are going and build on the state land they would not move that process. The process cannot be moved because we have a map of everybody who were there before and after, and we will continue. We will try and see how best we can help. And so, Madam Speaker, we continue with that survey again to see what is the true picture. What is the mapping picture? The survey is designed to really access the current level of squatting, and the real and potential impact of informal settlements throughout the length and breadth of Trinidad and Tobago.

5.00p.m.

To date, 240 sites and 28,000 structures have been mapped on state lands. I repeat, Madam Speaker, 240 sites and 28,000 structures have been mapped on state lands. And that is why I talk about the young people going outside their employment, using technology to get that information almost at their fingertips. It is employment for them but it also gives us the kind of data that is required and that data can be used otherwise. Other agencies can use that data, Social Development and Family Services can use that data because the data is there. Town and Country Planning could use that data. So it is the data that we have captured and we are willing to share the technology across Ministries. But at the end of the day, it is a whole of government approach that we are dealing with, Madam Speaker.

So, Madam Speaker, the Land Settlement Agency continues to do its job in terms of squatter regularization, in terms of moving people from CoC to statutory lease to deed of lease. Another initiative by this Government with respect to housing had to do with the whole question of financial arrangements. You see, Madam Speaker, again, the Government in its policy in housing had to look at the financial capability or ability of individuals. And so one of the measures that we did under the Trinidad and Tobago Mortgage Finance was to look at the interest rates. And so working with the TTMF we lowered the interest rates to 2 per cent and 5 per cent respectively. The 2 per cent, persons who are working for a salary cap of \$14,000 and below, they are entitled to a 2 per cent from the Trinidad and Tobago Mortgage Finance. So that an individual with a 30-year mortgage—

Madam Speaker: Member for Point Fortin, your original speaking time is now spent. You are entitled to 10 more minutes to wrap up.

Hon. Maj. Gen. E. Dillon: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. The Ministry of Housing and Urban Development has so much to say that time will not permit me to say as much, but I will wrap up within that time. Thanks a lot for giving me the time. The 2 per cent and the 5 per cent—2 per cent as I said with a cap at \$14,000, individuals or combined households are entitled to a 2 per cent mortgage and that sum, the value up to about \$1 million. At a 30-year mortgage an individual can get \$1 million at a 2 per cent for 30 years. Over \$14,000, between \$14,000 to \$25,000 which is the cap, you can get a 5 per cent based on your salaries of course.

So, that again is an initiative done in partnership with TTMF and the Government. So we have lowered the interest rate. We are making the land accessible, we are making the interest rate—we are making the loans at a low cost. Madam Speaker, it is a wholesome thing that we are doing to ensure that the

people of Trinidad and Tobago get what is required, the basic needs of man: shelter, land, owning your own home. We continue to work with the TTMF. And another thing, Madam Speaker, you see the 2 per cent, no down payment. You do not require a down payment for the 2 per cent loan. So those people who are working for under \$14,000, with the TTMF you are getting your loan at 2 per cent, you do not require a down payment. You can go straight and get 100 per cent financing.

Madam Speaker, this Government is one that cares and works, cares and works, Madam Speaker. [*Desk thumping*] Our Ministry of Housing and Urban Development continues with its grant. We also have two grants: the Home Improvement Grant, which gives individuals based on assessment and based on random selection, \$15,000 to improve your homes. Again, it is based on cross-checking to see your situation. Once you are selected, we have to see what your situation is, whether it requires you, based on your income and so on, whether you are entitled to that grant, and you get first half, \$750,000 to do the repairs. When we see that as being done we do an assessment again and then you are provided with another \$750,000 based on what is required to improve your home condition.

We also have the emergency shelter grant, that is based again on individuals who have experienced emergency hazards and so on, such as fire, floods and so on. We treat with that in the Emergency Shelter Grants, so another \$15,000 that we make available under this Government for those who have been so exposed.

Madam Speaker, we have done an exciting exercise recently, that is about two Saturdays ago at the Hilton. We did what is required, what we called an exhibition and we developed what we consider the manual, called the "Know How Guide, Housing 101". Why we did that is because several citizens come to the Ministry asking about housing, how to purchase their own house, how to do mortgage, how

to rent, sell, as the case may be. We packaged all that into one book called the Housing Manual 101. We had a launch last Saturday at Hilton and we also invited exhibitions to come and show products and so on. We had banking institutions, we had home developers there, and so they were all there.

Madam Speaker, we were overwhelmed. There were almost 2,000 people who turned up for that function. [*Desk thumping*] We were overwhelmed. [*Desk thumping*] People from the Hilton Ballroom back to the carpark, people were in the line from 10.00 in the morning to 4.00 in the afternoon because housing is something close to the people of Trinidad and Tobago. We provided them with on the spot assessment by TTMF, on the spot assessment by some of the banking sector. Alternative solutions.

In fact, there were some developers who were able to produce housing at a cheaper cost than HDC. So we were giving the people the alternative and we are glad for that, because the 180,000 people, we cannot provide for everybody. So if there are private developers who can produce a house for less than the HDC, we could want to partner with you also to get the prices down. [*Desk thumping*] But they were all there. I am sorry I did not have the Member for Tabaquite to come and exhibit with us because I know he is also in the housing sector. But anyway, it was overwhelmed and I want to compliment the Ministry of Housing and Urban Development, especially the Permanent Secretary. [*Interruption*] I apologize for that, next time. We are going to have one in South, it was so overwhelmed that we plan to have one in South and I will ensure that you have an invitation, Member for Tabaquite.

Madam Speaker, let me quickly talk about the urban development part of the Ministry. Under the East Port of Spain Development Company Limited, we have done several works throughout the length and breadth of Port of Spain. Sixteen

development projects comprising 44 physical infrastructure projects, 16 projects under the social economic programme for East Port of Spain were delivered. Forty-four physical infrastructure projects were done by small contractors and employers within the community. [*Desk thumping*] Two hundred and fifty pit latrines were replaced by modern bathroom toilets, done by local contractors, small contractors within those areas. Three community impact centres have been upgraded in Chinapoo, Trou Macaque, Never Dirty. State-of-the-art recreation facilities are being constructed on existing recreation facilities. Recreation grounds at the Beetham, at Point Pleasant Park, a boxing gym at Basilon Street, Sea Lots East play-park, cultural facilities have been done, pan yard upgrade programme, all of these are being done by East Port of Spain Development Company. [*Desk thumping*]

Garbage disposal platforms have been done, constructed at Poinsettia Drive and Picton Road. I am seeing over 400 youths completed a youth entrepreneur programme in order to develop the culture of entrepreneurship. [*Desk thumping*] One hundred and eleven persons have been trained and certified in construction skills and heavy equipment operations. This training was facilitated by MIC and NESCC, Madam Speaker. A Government that cares. Residents have also participated in soft furnishings, art of fine dining, cooking, boxing and glass engraving.

Madam Speaker, again, people of the Gonzales community—a very good initiative here, training in business. The Gonzales Food Park located in Gonzales was established to develop an urban agricultural sector in Port of Spain. [*Desk thumping*] They grow and sell their agricultural produce and they also encouraged in agri-based business, Madam Speaker. This project has benefitted an investment of \$65,000 and it is well worth it. The people are encouraged to do agri-business

in the urban part of Port of Spain. Eastside Plaza and New City Mall continue building in local and small business entrepreneurship and we continue to do that.

Madam Speaker, let me take the last couple of minutes to talk about my constituency of Point Fortin. I have much more to say, but time does not permit me so to do. But, Madam Speaker, I want to thank the people of Point Fortin constituency for giving me the privilege to serve them for the last four years of this Government. [*Desk thumping*] Madam Speaker, Point Fortin constituents have been very supportive, are very supportive to us, to me as their MP, but also the Government of Trinidad and Tobago. We have seen some capital projects in Point Fortin constituency, such as the Point Fortin Hospital which is due to deliver next year by this Government, [*Desk thumping*] by this Government. We have seen what I called the highway from Point Fortin to San Fernando well on its way, Madam Speaker. [*Desk thumping*] We started it and we did it. [*Crosstalk*]

Madam Speaker, we have seen the construction of the pavilion at the Mahaica Oval. [*Crosstalk and desk thumping*] No, no, no, Mahaica Oval, Madam Speaker. No, no, no, we started that. No, no, no, “doh” take no claims. We have also seen the start of the geotechnical survey for the lands to build the Point Fortin Fire Station. [*Desk thumping*] All capital projects. There are other projects: community centre in Techier, lights in Buenos Ayres, lights in Pundit Trace, lights in Fullerton sports field, community centre upgrades in New Village, community centre upgrade in Guapo.

Madam Speaker, this constituency of Point Fortin is as I always say, Point Fortin is PNM and PNM is Point Fortin. [*Desk thumping*] Madam Speaker, I want to thank the people of Point Fortin for being patient, for once again when we finish Mahaica Oval we will move on to the Civic Centre and once again Point Fortin will restore to its glory of being the cultural centre and the sporting centre of Trinidad and

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

Dr. Surujrattan Rambachan (*Tabaquite*): Thank you, Madam Speaker, and let me say how happy I am to join this very exciting debate. Madam Speaker—

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: This is definitely your last budget speech.

Dr. S. Rambachan: Madam Speaker—

Hon. Member: Madam Speaker, too much cross-talking.

Dr. S. Rambachan: Firstly, let me express my gratitude to my constituents of Tabaquite. Somebody mentioned that this might be my last budget speech. Who knows, nobody can determine what is there in the divine plan for you. [*Desk thumping*] But, Madam Speaker, I have been very happy to serve my constituents, I thank them for being very understanding, very supportive and very patient in the light of the development they required and perhaps that which was delivered.

Madam Speaker, the hon. Member for Point Fortin and the distinguished Minister of Housing and Urban Development spoke about the programme to build the houses for 90 to 120,000. It is a commendable programme, one that I was in fact doing while I was the Minister—with URP under my control. And there are several poor families, very poor families who have really benefited from that programme. And one of the important things that any government must do is always focus upon the vulnerable in the society. If you do not focus on the vulnerable in the society and if you cannot make plans for the vulnerable in the society, then you are going to have social problems of a kind that you would not be able to deal in the long run.

But while you spoke about housing, you also said that no government is capable of providing all the housing that people require. And I agree with you. And this is where it is very important that the private sector be motivated and inspired to enter the housing development sector and to provide accommodation. However, being a

developer myself—and again I declare my interest, I just want you to know that I am a registered developer with the HDC, I am registered with the FIU, I have met all the necessary things that I need to meet as a developer—let me say that we need, through the Ministry of Planning and Development in particular, to speed up the bureaucracy in terms of the system of approvals.

Only a couple of days ago I referred to the hon. Minister a situation where, if you go to the San Fernando office of Town and Country Planning you will see that they state there 60 days as the regulated time in which they will respond with a plan. But what has been happening is that they will wait 60 days and if there is a simple problem only on the 60th day they will call you and tell you come in to check the plan. And I had a plan there and I wanted to bring to the attention of the Minister, and this is the first time I ever did it, just to show her what was going on. And it took me 71 days in the Town and Country Planning Division to get the plan passed. And I want to say to you, Madam Minister, that situation arose after I spoke in this Parliament and criticized the Town and Country Planning Division. And I am very sad that people are applying political victimization simply because I happen to be in a business which they have some kind of responsibility.

I think it is very sad, I do not want to press my case here, I am not doing that, but I press the case for developers as a whole, because developers who know that I am in the business are coming to me and saying, why do you not go and make representation on our behalf. And they are afraid to make representation on their own behalf because they are afraid of political victimization, believe it or not, believe it or not.

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: Am I victimizing you?

Dr. S. Rambachan: No, I am not saying you are victimizing me, Madam, not at all; you helped.

Hon. Member: Yes, it is you. [*Crosstalk*]

Dr. S. Rambachan: But I think that you need—[*Crosstalk and laughter*] no, no, no, you help to “un-victimize”. But you need to go in there and deal with it. An officer must not be allowed after a person visits a site in the first 30 days to wait 30 days before they contact you. [*Desk thumping*] Officers must not have—abrogate that power onto themselves. As I told Mr. Le Hunte, this is also happening at WASA in the new services department.

Ms. Ramdial: “He sharing bulb.”

Dr. S. Rambachan: So I think it is taking too long for the developers to get their approvals and therefore that is causing construction to be delayed at a time when the construction sector is down. All you are talking about selling cement and so on, that is for the big projects. But even in the small projects you cannot hire the skilled labourers and the unskilled labourers, you are going to have a big problem. So separate the cement sales to the big projects from the cement sales to the housing sector and you will see what I am talking about. And there are many, many persons who are now without jobs, skilled persons without jobs.

The other thing I would like to suggest to the hon. Member for Point Fortin in terms of housing is, Minister, I am not happy with the quality of houses still that are being built. And I want to suggest to you that we live in an earthquake zone in Trinidad. And despite what your architects and engineering design consultants are telling you, I think that every house in this country, whether it is a single story house or a house on stilts, must be piled at least 10 feet. I am saying to you that, because when an earthquake takes place it is your foundation that is going to hold your house. And a lot of those houses as you know are not being piled and they are building on trenches and sometimes they are building on the trenches with half-inch steel rather than 5/8's steel and what have you. So that is something you have

got to look at.

And to the Minister of Planning and Development, all I would like to say is that Town and Country has allowed one super developer in Chaguanas, Caribbean Housing, to build houses on less than 5,000 square feet and it is a facility that is not being afforded to other developers in the country. And I think that in itself has to be examined. Why are you giving one person the power to build houses on between 3,000 square feet or about there, or 3,300, and you are not allowing other developers to do the same? What is the reason for the particular kind of zoning that is being spoken about?

Hon. Member: He is a PNM.

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: No, he is not.

Dr. S. Rambachan: Madam Speaker, I want to begin my contribution with the following quote from a very respected journalist and researcher, Mr. Curtis Williams, in the *Business Guardian* of October 03, 2019. This is what he said:

Minister—"Imbert has spent the last four years increasing taxes on businesses and some individuals, slashing government expenditure, refusing to pay billions of dollars in bills in an effort to 'stabilise the economy' from the shocks that it faced post the seeming permanent fall in crude oil and natural gas prices.

To a large extent he has been successful in at least getting the population accustomed to having less support from the government, while maintaining inflation at a manageable rate. But in doing so there has been a reduction in demand,"—there has been a fall in—"private sector confidence in the distributive sectors have been damaged and the country continues to fail in its effort to improve its ease of doing business."

And I think that is a fair criticism of what has happened over the last four years.

The economy has not been diversified, new streams of revenue have not been identified and like my colleague, the Member for Barataria/San Juan has said, we are at a situation where everything is still pegged on oil and gas, and oil and gas prices, but really there are no new streams of revenues that will take us out of the shocks that are so inevitable it seems in the oil and gas sector, particularly in a situation where in the United States, shale gas is available so much now and what is happening in Guyana, you know, puts some kind of damper upon our own resources here.

In this Parliament we have had a very interesting situation in this debate. The Minister of Finance presented his budget. And one would have thought that he would have a map, a more clearly mapped out plan as to where this country will be going in the next five years. And if you notice very carefully, there has been no real debate on what the Minister has said, because there was nothing to really debate. And it is in this context I think, that I must allow my colleagues as they have done, congratulate the Leader of the Opposition, [*Desk thumping*] because in my recollection of Parliament it is perhaps the first time that a Leader of the Opposition after making her comments about the budget in the first 20 minutes of her contribution, she presented what I would like to term, “an alternative development agenda” to the country. [*Desk thumping*]

I do not think it was a manifesto. It was an alternative development agenda, a practical approach to reconstituting and reconstructing this country for the next five to 10 years. A developmental agenda which proposed a strategy to increase non-energy revenues, reduce expenditure in critical areas and put the nation on a path to prosperity. And as I said it is perhaps one of the very first occasions on which an Opposition has shown that at least 12 months prior to a general election that it is preparing and will continue to prepare and be prepared to take over the

reins of government and to create prosperity for everyone in this country. [*Desk thumping*] I think what the Leader of the Opposition has shown is that there is a new level of confidence in the United National Congress, so that 12 months before an election we could present an alternative development agenda [*Desk thumping*] to the population of Trinidad and Tobago.

And this agenda, I consider it to be an agenda for sustainable development where it reduces the emphasis on gas and oil. It reduces what I like to call the vagaries of price and revenue associated with the energy sector and it is an agenda that will generate new streams of revenue and foreign exchange, manage climate change impacts, enter the world of renewables and renewable energy thus giving real meaning to the concept of a sustainable economy. That is what this alternative agenda does. And the population, tired as they seem to be, of having to hear for four years, who, and who, and who again are to blame, finally are getting an opportunity to listen to answers to their questions from the Leader of the Opposition.

The question they asked, what are you going to do as an Opposition? [*Desk thumping*] They were waiting to hear this because they know the choice they have to make. The choice between the Government and the Opposition which is a government in waiting. And they got several of their answers. And over the next few months those answers will be amplified and the details of the strategy will be presented. You see, we must never as politicians underestimate the intelligence of our population. Even the very young ones in the primary schools, they want answers and now they have an opportunity through the presentation of that alternative development agenda to analyze and decide. And the role of a responsible Opposition is not only to alert the people of the impacts of government policy upon their livelihood, but also to convince them that there is a better way.

And the UNC has provided in its alternative development agenda through the lips of the Opposition Leader that there is a better way. [*Desk thumping*]

But, Madam Speaker, what is going to be the deciding factor? You have the PNM and you have the Opposition, the UNC. The deciding factor is going to be who is more capable of providing the quality of leadership and the implementation skills which will make a difference to the country in the context of the citizens' agenda. Because if you examine what the citizens of the country are asking for and you examine the developmental agenda of the UNC, you will see that there is a matching of minds.

The leadership you see promised by the PNM in the run-up to the 2015 elections has not been provided, it has not been materialized. Had the leadership been provided, had the leadership materialized this country would not have had to peg its economic future only on oil and gas. Had the leadership been provided, the ease of doing business would have improved in this country. [*Desk thumping*]

And the Minister of Trade and Industry would not be standing up two weeks ago saying that we are going to do something about the ease of business. Four years is a long time to have done something about the ease of business.

If the leadership had been provided, people would not be lining up at 3.00 a.m. in San Fernando to get a birth certificate. People would not be lining up at six o'clock outside; six o'clock in the morning outside of the Chaguanas Passport Office to get a passport. [*Desk thumping*] People would not be begging for an appointment at the passport office and would have to wait weeks and sometimes two months to get a passport. And if the leadership had been provided, business confidence resulting in the kinds of investments that this country needs outside of the oil and gas sector would have in fact improved.

In fact, the Minister of Finance had said in his budget speech that private sector

credit went up from I believe 57 billion to 59 billion. But what he did not say is that that private sector investment was not really investment, but a lot of it had to do with people reconstituting their loans—

Hon. Member: Refinancing, consolidation.

Dr. S. Rambachan: Sorry?

Hon. Member: Consolidation.

Dr. S. Rambachan: Yes, on consolidation and refinancing their loans and that is a vast difference. And that is why you are not seeing investments in terms of an expansion of the economy and the economic base. [*Desk thumping*] People have had to do things to save their businesses in this country and that is where that \$2 billion have generally gone. This country requires a leadership that inspires, it requires vision but also demands strength to initiate changes. And we initiated changes when we were there in the People's Partnership. If you look very carefully you may not want to admit it, but today tourism is struggling in Tobago and Trinidad is known for its business tourism but had the right marketing emphasis been placed upon the Aquatic Centre, upon the National Cycling Centre, upon the Tennis Centre, and had we used, for example, the fact that we have one of the highest number of birds in this country, we could have had a vibrant tourist, nature tourism. [*Desk thumping*]

You can say what you want and criticize Mr. Anil Roberts as you want to criticize him, but he had a vision which he brought to the Cabinet. [*Desk thumping*] And he knew that in the winter months if you market it properly, you would have gotten cyclists coming from away to train here and the swimmers coming to train here. Let me also say that I see a real connection between that National Cycling Centre and the recent performances of our cyclists winning gold medals. [*Desk thumping*] It proves the point that if you provide the environment

for people, people are going to become creative and their potential will become to the max.

But leadership—what the Opposition, sorry, has demonstrated with its—I call it the ADA, the alternative development agenda, provided by the leader of the UNC, Leader of the Opposition, is that we on this side are ready to provide the leadership the country needs. [*Desk thumping*] You see, but leadership itself is something that can only be offered if you have something to offer and you have to be prepared.

Hon. Member: Tell them.

Dr. S. Rambachan: And the fact that the PNM has not been able to provide the leadership is because they never had a plan. [*Desk thumping*] There was an illusion of a plan. And when we told the country that they never had a plan, the country did not believe us. But now the country has come to the realization that, hey, there was in fact no plan, therefore we are going nowhere and we are like *Alice in Wonderland* standing at the crossroads and asking which way to go. But with the UNC you know which way to go with the alternative development agenda. [*Desk thumping*] So preparedness means the existence of a plan which has been presented. That is the first thing. PNM declared it was ready but there was no plan, no plan to create the diversified sustainable economy.

Now, the second element of leadership required is one that replaces hopelessness with hope and opportunity. Not just hope. Hope is one thing but opportunity is what is really important. [*Desk thumping*] No government, none, can provide all the jobs, but the role of the Government is to create the conditions, probably we could say environment, I like to say conditions, wherein people feel hopeful and see opportunities to build a life. Where there is hopelessness, frustration develops and the manifestation of frustration is withdrawal from the

society. And when people begin to stand in the peripheral of a society, looking at the society, they become critics of that society, cynicism develops and you have a dangerous situation coming to hand. It has happened in other countries and it is something we must avoid in this country.

It is this withdrawal as a result of frustration that affects creativity, affects our competitiveness and affects our productivity as a nation, the very productivity that the Prime Minister himself has complained about. It goes to the point where people question whether people love this country or whether they are patriotic. The opportunities for building a life, for building a family, contributing to society, a nation, is embedded in the alternative development agenda of the United National Congress. And some people may think that this is something that just came from nowhere. It did not come from just nowhere.

5.30p.m.

We have spent four years thinking and rethinking where we went wrong. [*Desk thumping*] We have not been sitting idly. People have been asking what the UNC has been doing. We have been preparing to return to government. That is our objective. [*Desk thumping*] You can work as an opposition but when you really want to make a difference, you have to get into the seat of government, [*Desk thumping*] and you get into the seat of government by providing people the alternative choice. [*Desk thumping*] And in developing the alternative development agenda, hundreds, I tell you, of consultations were held with stakeholders, with investors, current and potential. But more importantly, we held consultations with one of the most important stakeholder groups in this country, the young people of this country. [*Desk thumping*]

Today people, even within our party, are criticizing when they see so many young faces on the front bench of the Senate, not realizing that the role of the Opposition

and the role of governments are to ensure that the young people are involved in the governance of the country. [*Desk thumping*] Because if they are not involved in the governance of the country, they will either go away with their talent to some other country and you will suffer your own development in the future.

My dear friends, your development agenda must reflect the aspirations of young people, or you are going to fail as a country; fail, because you need to capture the energy of your young people. For far too long our young people have not been as intensely involved as they can be in the shaping of the future economy. They have not been involved. Our young people are bright. Our young people are industrious. [*Desk thumping*] Our young people are entrepreneurial; very, very entrepreneurial. There are hundreds of examples in this society where young people are doing things. I will give you one example:

There is a young man in Claxton Bay, in the constituency of the Member for Pointe-a-Pierre, and he has an associate degree in political science, but for two years he has been unable to get a job. But he has the ability to make murtis of Hindu deities, and he also makes chulhas. And I saw this on the Facebook and I called him, and I asked him, “You know, I want to buy one of these chulhas”, and so on, because I was excited by what he was doing. And then in talking to him I discovered who he was, in terms of his education, and so on. And he had no compunction to doing what he was doing although he had an associate degree in political science, I believe it was.

At Rizzoni’s Ristorante in Port of Spain two Saturday nights ago, I met a young man who was serving at the table, and his accent varied between some Caribbean country and Trinidad, and in talking to him I realized he had a degree in public administration for three years and could not get a job, and he is serving at the table.

Hon. Member: Wow.

Dr. S. Rambachan: I am just saying that to tell you what is happening to our young people in this country, that we are producing young people but we are frustrating them by them not getting involved in jobs. [*Desk thumping*] So that, Madam Speaker, if you simply come to the Parliament and say “I am expanding the number of jobs available under OJT”, that does not solve your problem.

Mr. Charles: Correct. Well said. [*Desk thumping*]

Dr. S. Rambachan: That does not solve your problem. That will come to an end in two years. And in any case, I think that the OJT programme is not properly supervised, that people are being sent to do OJT jobs but they are doing less than what their qualifications provide them. They are not being matched to proper jobs. [*Desk thumping*] They are not being matched to proper jobs.

Madam Speaker, one of the underlying principles of the way that the United National Congress will function in terms of the ADA is to partner young persons to create the future, develop the diversified economy that is necessary, but too late in coming, and our young people are the ones now who have to come forward. And, therefore I want to propose, like we are proposing when we get into office, that there is a different development model that is necessary, and that different development model will entail partnering with young people; a State organization partnering with young people in which young people will set up their companies while they are even at university, and the university must therefore change its business development courses so that people can launch their companies there, and by the time they leave after three years, they are into business. [*Desk thumping*]
And where the Government—

Mr. Charles: They “doh” know about that.

Dr. S. Rambachan:—can, in fact, be partner of that company and eventually divest that shares back to the student who becomes the entrepreneur. [*Desk*

thumping] You need a new model for developing entrepreneurs in the country.

[*Desk thumping*] Young people do not have the money but they have the talent—

Hon. Member: True.

Dr. S. Rambachan:—and we have to have a new model for business development so our young people can feel part of the business elite in this country. The young people can become their own 1 per cent or 10 per cent, or what have you. [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. Member: “Dey doh want dat. Dey doh want dat.”

Hon. Member: Excellent.

Dr. S. Rambachan: And the ADA, the alternative development agenda, provides the opportunity for the UNC to do what every responsible political party should be doing, providing a new age of opportunity for the entire country. That is what it is, a new age of opportunity. It is not just about a new UNC. The UNC is always there. It has its history. It is about a new age of opportunity being provided by the UNC.

The UNC is in a better place to provide the leadership this country needs; a better place, because of its preparedness, because of the confidence that the UNC through its political leader and this team of persons here. You see, the UNC is not about one leader. The UNC is about shared leadership. [*Desk thumping*] That is why, when the political leader got up to speak here and the Opposition Leader got up, she reminded the country that the Members of this team will be dealing with the specific portfolios because they all have the intelligence and the capability and they have demonstrated that capability and that intelligence in the past. [*Desk thumping*] Our duty to our young people is to inspire and usher in a new generation of leaders for the future. [*Desk thumping*]

Now, one of my concerns about the budget presented by the hon. Minister of

Finance is the divergence between what the Government has presented and what the people would like to see in the budget. The people's agenda is reflected, in my view, in five questions which I would like to ask on their behalf here today—five questions. These five questions are as follows:

One, how are you going to protect citizens from the daily onslaught of crime? How are you going to protect them? I applaud, I congratulate Commissioner of Police, Gary Griffith for his efforts. I think he is making a difference. When he was appointed I said we needed an operational leader and that he could provide the operation leadership skills. I said also that there is going to come another point in time when he has to become an inspirational leader to the police service, and I can see those changes taking place because leadership is a function of the situation. That is the first question: How are you going to protect citizens from the daily onslaught of crime?

Secondly, what would you do about this lost generation with the thousands of youths who see crime as a way of life? What would you do with them? And I have begun to give you my answers. You have to give them sustainable employment. They cannot get it in oil and gas, and therefore, you have to be creative, and that is what the alternative development agenda provides.

Thirdly, what is your plan for stimulating the economy and getting people back to work? Is it a reality, Madam Speaker, that in an economy that is already struggling to provide jobs for its citizens, maybe about 15,000 jobs have now been taken up by Venezuelans? And have we put 15,000 persons on the breadline? Is it a fact? Or is it that people did not want to work before and these jobs were always available and the Venezuelans came in and took these jobs? But it is a question that has to be asked, because in every business you go, in every warehouse you go, you find Venezuelans working, and working very hard. So it is something that has

to be asked.

Fourthly, how are you going to achieve more transparency towards good governance? Which is what everybody is asking about. You know, there was a recent report came out from Transparency International that dealt with the whole matter of perception. I may or may not have the report here, but in that report people did say that under this present Government they perceived that corruption has increased. And that is Transparency International. That was the same Transparency International under Deryck Murray who, every Monday morning would be hitting out at the United National Congress.

Hon. Member: He “geh” a job now.

Mr. Charles: His Excellency.

Dr. S. Rambachan: He has become His Excellency. He is a good man, taking 25 catches in the English series and created a record. Yes, Fuad, I do know something about cricket. [*Laughter*]

Hon. Member: He “geh ah big job now.”

Dr. S. Rambachan: And finally, how are you going to achieve non-energy revenue but not only by taxation? So these are the questions I asked that, in my view, constitute the people’s agenda, the citizen’s agenda. Now, does this budget contribution made by the Minister of Finance answer these questions? Has the Government answered any of these questions in his previous contributions? Has the Government’s announced programmes in its budget ever led to these questions in the minds of the population been answered? Is the Government considered to be a good Government by the citizens of the country? Because it then begs the question: what exactly is a good government? A good government is one which closes the gap between the spoken work and the delivered action. [*Desk thumping*]
You close the gap.

Has this Government been closing the gap between what it promises and what it has delivered? And there is a vast difference. You know, for example, what has been the track record of the current Government? How many promises have they really delivered during their tenure? Madam Speaker, in an article entitled “Budget amnesia” in the *Business Guardian* of October 03, 2019, this question of budget amnesia was picked up, and it is a Curtis Williams article and he said here:

“Last year he told the Parliament.”—referring to Mr. Imbert—“The growth and development of the economy is being further facilitated by the recent foreign investment decision by the China Harbour Engineering Company Limited...to establish a maritime business anchored on a dry-docking facility of La Brea in southwest Trinidad. On September 7, 2018...(NIDCO) and China Harbour executed a Co-operation Agreement for the development over a three...year period and at a cost of US\$500 million, over TT \$3 billion, of a range of businesses, including:

- construction of large container and bulk transfer...”, et cetera, et cetera.

What has happened?

“He will also unlikely talk about the aluminium plants that we expected to have started construction and to date not a word on them.”

“What about the new industrial estate at Phoenix Park, Couva?”

“Last year”—he talked about—“Madam Speaker, in collaboration with the Beijing Construction Engineering Group,...we are developing a new modern industrial park in Phoenix Park at a construction cost of US \$104.3 million”—et cetera, et cetera.

Called “Budget Amnesia”, this article. What has happened. What has happened?

Madam Speaker, for the past four years the Government has spent or budgeted to

spend about \$203 billion and it had taken on also \$24 billion in additional debt. So this Government has borrowed to support. But what has it supported? Has it really supported investment that will bring a stream of revenue to the country and affect a sustainable economy? Of the \$203 billion spent, or to be exact, \$202.33 billion spent, in the 2016 to 2019 fiscal years, 92.4 per cent was in recurrent expenditure—92.4 per cent. That is money spent on wages and salaries, transfers and subsidies, goods and services and interest payments. Only 7.6 per cent of the \$202.3 billion, some \$15.5 billion was used for capital expenditure and net lending, and that was according to the July *Economic Bulletin* published by the Central Bank.

Mr. Charles: Seven per cent.

Dr. S. Rambachan: You see, the point I am making is this, eh, that policies of borrowing money, taxing the population, extracting money from the HSF and sale of state assets have not really worked in the interest of the country. [*Desk thumping*] And that question will be answered when you go down on the ground and begin to walk the ground and you will see the reality of the ground and how people are suffering. And people are really suffering in the country. Whether you are a PNM or whether UNC, people are suffering and the suffering of people—I talked about the vulnerable at the beginning—it has to be attended to. Something must be done.

You see, Madam Speaker, there are many issues, you know, that we can mention to show the poor track record of the Government, but there is a difference and that is the difference between the Government and the alternative government in waiting. The difference is between those who talk and those who perform and deliver. [*Desk thumping*] That is the difference. You see, to move this country forward the private sector involvement is critical. [*Desk thumping*] You are not

going to move this country forward without private sector involvement. The State alone cannot move this country to prosperity. It is in this incarnation, this Government in this incarnation, has demonstrated inefficiency and incompetence. The State companies continue to be a colossal drain on the Treasury. The Government says, for example, that they need rate increases at WASA and T&TEC. Let us examine whether the expenses at these organizations are, in the first case, due to poor management, bloated organizations and really situations where workers would go to a job at nine o'clock in the morning at T&TEC—like I have seen with my own eyes and I will say it, even if they take advantage of me saying it—and park up until three o'clock when they can begin to collect overtime and then begin to work.

Hon. Member: “Dah” is a good point. “Dah” is a good point. [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. Member: Yeah.

Dr. S. Rambachan: I would not sit on this Opposition and try to win a vote by not talking the truth. I will talk the truth in this country, [*Desk thumping*] because when we come into government we will have to deal with the situation of productivity; we will have to deal with the situation of people making a fair contribution for a fair day's wage in this country.

Dr. Tewarie: Very well said.

Dr. S. Rambachan: And it is time that somebody picked up the gauntlet and say it as it is, and if you are going to impose this upon people, then we have a problem. But at the same time, if you get into renewable energy, you might be able to save people costs. If you give people the opportunity to invest—you know, overseas, bp and Shell, and so on, are using their platforms to invest in wind farms and what have you. Why can we not encourage them to do it right here, Mr. Paray, Member of Parliament for Mayaro? Why can we not do it? I do not know if my colleague,

Mr. Ganga Singh, MP for Chaguanas West, remembers, but we attempted to ask once of people at T&TEC about wind farms and we were shut down. They said it was not possible. Why can it not be possible? It is very, very serious.

So the private sector, we have to look to them to play a greater role in stimulating economic recovery and translation. If, however, doing business is frustrating the private sector, they will become uninterested. They will take their money elsewhere. And the private sector is showing a lack of confidence evidenced by lower borrowing for business and a very heavy 33 per cent, unutilized manufacturing capacity, Dr. Tewarie—unutilized. This means that the Ministry of Trade and Industry has been deficient in its marketing of products from Trinidad and Tobago. The only thing that matters at the end of the day is how much you can sell overseas. This is a limited market, not just in Caricom, but beyond the Caricom borders. All the achievements that the Trade Ministry boasts about amounts to zero; winning this award and that award and so on, if it cannot manifest the increased sales and capacity utilization in this country.

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

Dr. S. Rambachan: The hon. Minister, Mrs. Gopee-Scoon, is a very nice person, very, very affable person but she is an incompetent Minister—

Hon. Member: Oh, yes. [*Desk thumping*]

Dr. S. Rambachan:—in terms of doing what she is doing. The private sector is becoming frustrated at the ease of doing business, and which has gotten worse since this Government came to power. The World Bank, ease of doing business ranking rated Trinidad and Tobago as 66 out of 189 countries in 2014.

Hon. Member: Shame.

Dr. S. Rambachan: Today, just a few years later in 2019, we have fallen from 66 to 105.

Mr. Charles: Shame. Shame. What a shame.

Dr. S. Rambachan: What has gone wrong? What has gone wrong? Madam Speaker, listen to Dr. Roger Hosein, Economist. I know the Member for Diego Martin North/East does not like to hear the economists.

Dr. Moonilal: Any one.

Dr. S. Rambachan: He had a lot to say about Marla Dukharan in one of his commentaries. But Dr. Hosein points out that with respect to construction permits in 2004, Trinidad and Tobago was ranked 77, whereas in 2019 we are ranked 125.

Hon. Member: He is “ah” engineer.

Dr. S. Rambachan: We have some of the lowest costs of electricity in the Caribbean. However, on the getting electricity sub-index, it has progressively worsened from a rank of 10 in 2014 to a rank of 41 in 2019.

Madam Speaker, you really have to be a Member of Parliament sitting like where I sit in my office to understand the frustrations people have to get a connection to their house, a new connection. [*Desk thumping*] Madam Speaker, the Minister announced to the private sector that he is giving them back \$3billion in bonds. No problem. That is nice. Madam Speaker, you know, really, I want to put on the table that nobody is going to buy those bonds from people, even if they are transferable, at the same price that the Minister has set it.

Hon. Member: Correct.

Dr. S. Rambachan: You charge people 15 per cent interest when you do not pay your taxes, but you are giving the people 1.5 per cent for their money. You are using private sector money to finance government expenditure because you are bankrupt. [*Desk thumping*] Are you bankrupt that you cannot pay your bills, and therefore you are using people’s money that they need to finance their business to finance government expenditure? That is a serious situation. So people are losing.

If I could be getting a return, I will just say a minimum of 5 per cent on my money as a businessman, and I am getting 1.5 per cent and my money has already been held up there for a number of years, what is really the net present value of my money right now?

You know, I have to ask these questions on behalf of the private sector, because it is the private sector you increase taxes upon, you know. The Business Levy, Green Fund, everything went up. The private sector cannot continue to pay this cost. You are going to frustrate them. This is why the hon. Leader of the Opposition said that we have to ease the private sector by reducing the taxes and giving them a chance to expand so that more people can get jobs and get employed. [*Desk thumping*] You do not fight crime by leaving people unemployed. You fight crime by giving people opportunity. The age of opportunity is for the future. That is what the UNC is all about. [*Desk thumping*]

So, Madam Speaker, you know, in a report published by the Inter-American Development Bank in January 2017, it was reported that in Trinidad and Tobago to get an electricity connection it takes 35 per cent less time with an illicit payment. For water connection, the results show that paying a bribe gets you a connection in 19 days, compared to 23 days if no bribe is paid. Import licences—this is the world—Inter-American Development Bank, eh. Import licences are received in nine days when payments are made, but firms that do not pay have to wait as much as much as 18 days. Jeeteendra Khadan, “Are Oil and Gas Smothering the Private Sector in Trinidad and Tobago?” IDB, January 2017. Is this Government aware of how business is being negatively impacted upon? How can we seek to stimulate business in an economy where this is taking place? We need to encourage. We need to reinvigorate the private sector.

We have talked long enough in this country about diversification, until the very

word has become a national cliché. We would not be able to diversify, as I said earlier, unless we change the model. Diversification has to go hand in hand with entrepreneurship and the active—I use the word—the active development of entrepreneurs. A new model is required. I want to repeat it for the benefit of the Government. State must partner entrepreneurs and the university much develop business incubation programmes. We are teaching people at UWI, but are we creating functional people? Are we creating people who are not going to become—and the first time I heard this word from my friend, Dr. Tewarie—State dependent, but rather independent functionaries in this society? [*Desk thumping*]

What can our graduates do when they really come out of our management studies programme at UWI? What is happening to our agriculture degree at university? Why can we not, at the university, Member for Chaguanas West, who comes from an agricultural sector—why can we not change and reconstruct that programme, so that the first two years the student goes to school, but then in the next two years, the student is placed on a five-acre or two-acre farm and the student is allowed to develop a business and then comes back for the final year or final two years in the university, so we create a person who can see their earnings from agriculture and put their skills to work and develop their skills? [*Desk thumping*]

But that is the same university you just gave away—you gave this \$500 million to, and they are not doing anything to change the manner in which they are creating new models for the development and for human development.

Madam Speaker: Member for Tabaquite, your original 45 minutes are now spent. You have 10 more minutes to wind up. [*Desk thumping*]

Dr. S. Rambachan: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker—

Mr. Charles: Teach “dem”.

Dr. S. Rambachan:—the global energy revolution demands that we reduce our

dependence on oil and gas. It demands it and we have to do it. Madam Speaker, as we all say this, and let us not forget the importance of earning foreign exchange. There has been a 33 per cent decline in the net official foreign reserves from \$10.46 billion to \$6.99 billion between the end of September 15th and the end of June 2019. We have to turn around that. You know, it was Mr. Gerry Brooks—Prof. Gerry Books—speaking [*Crosstalk*] at exportTT's Innovate to Export seminar on the 11th of September, 2019, and he stated as follows—and I respect Mr. Brooks, eh. He says:

While the energy sector has improved, the challenges which beat with BPTT and the future of Atlantic LNG Train One, looms in the background.

He said:

Energy and the old energy flows and oil flows will not take us any further. So it seems that we cannot continue to have an uncertain future. We must make an instantaneous leap into areas of manufacturing which can earn vital foreign exchange, but also employ people and there are opportunities.

Madam Speaker, the question that the Government is not answering and the question which our alternative agenda for development answered is, what does the world need that Trinidad and Tobago can produce? [*Desk thumping*] You do not just produce anything. You have to produce what the world needs. And the alternative agenda, the political leader and Leader of the Opposition outlined areas of earning foreign exchange. [*Desk thumping*] Let me give you an example. Take for example, the banning of teak. I love that.

Hon. Member: Banning of?

Dr. S. Rambachan: Ban of teak. Teak logs are being exported. Now, rough teak was banned in 2014 under the new teak and pine policy, but it is a policy placed for the benefit of local saw millers, furniture manufacturers and downstream users

since the teak is sold at subsidized prices. But where have we gone with this? What do we do? We continue to allow people to import knock-down furniture in the country from Italy, from Canada, and so on. Nobody should be allowed in this country to bring in a set of kitchen cabinets unless it was made right here in Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*] You want to develop the furniture industry, protect the furniture industry. Protect the people who are doing it.

Dr. Tewarie: They “doh” know about that.

Dr. S. Rambachan: What has happened to the programme in secondary schools where all the equipment was there and you were training people to use this equipment and to be good wood workers, and so on? Listen, there is a company—

Mr. Charles: They “doh” know about that.

Dr. S. Rambachan: Companies in Sweden have, have what is known as the knock-down furniture—

Hon. Member: Ikea.

Dr. S. Rambachan: Ikea. The Ikea effect. You just assemble it when it comes to you and they send you a screwdriver to do it, and you do it well. Why can we not do that? Why can we not do that with a Phillips screwdriver and an Allen wrench and a rubber mallet. Ikea customers can very literally build an entire home’s worth of furniture on a very tight budget.

Mr. Charles: Start it back.

Dr. S. Rambachan: What we have not done is partnered with somebody who has that expertise within that Ikea formula [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. Member: Yeah.

Dr. S. Rambachan:—to bring them to Trinidad and to teach our people to produce the furniture, to package it and get the exporTT company to do some work, nah. Go and find the market for the people so we could earn foreign exchange from it.

Mr. Charles: They cannot figure that on their own.

Dr. S. Rambachan: Our people are producing good, good furniture in this country, excellent furniture, but we need now to package it in a way that can be sold on the export market. And when you package it, you can fit into a container; you can export more and you can build a whole industry, and Trinidad can become known, because Trinidad and Tobago still has one of the largest reserves of natural teak in the world.

Madam Speaker, cocoa. We boast of our cocoa, but it seems that little is being done to ensure that cocoa grown on our shores is sold to as many markets as possible. In my constituency, there is a cocoa fermentary that is managed by a gentleman whose name is Harryman Chattergoon.

6.00 p.m.

Mr. Chattergoon has become a buying agent for cocoa and coffee. Now, I visited Mr. Chattergoon at his fermentary recently and saw that at least 50 tonnes of cocoa is being stored. This may be because he is a small fermentary and has no support to access to larger markets. But farmers are reporting that while the company is finding them some markets for the cocoa, they are often much smaller and much less profitable than markets they find now on their own. Where is the backing for these farmers? They are saying that they are being passed over for larger more reputable, as they call them, cocoa co-operatives. Why is the cocoa development company failing to find these small farmers profitable markets? Where is the marketing help?

Madam Speaker, we are paying all kinds of so-called marketing experts in all these state companies we set, but they are a failure. [*Desk thumping*] They are not doing what they are supposed to do to market the produce of this country overseas. I am sorry but they could be what professional, but they have failed us. They are

not finding the market, and if you want to review, review some of those professionals and see where their lack of productivity also is in terms of their performance.

Madam Speaker, if we have the best grade of cocoa in Trinidad and Tobago, why can we not find a foreign chocolatier to invest right here in Trinidad and Tobago? You go into Gran Couva in my constituency, several chocolatiers have developed and they are making dark chocolate in particular. What prevents us from getting somebody to come and partner here with us so we could develop a really viable chocolate industry, rather than to go Belgium and see on the shelf of it made with Trinidad and Tobago cocoa? Yes, on the box made with Trinidad and Tobago cocoa. They are getting all the value added, but we are not getting the value added here.

The honey industry is suffering. You know why? Because, Madam Speaker, the honey is being imported under cover and people who are not using their apiary licence numbers are then taking that honey and allowing unscrupulous people to bottle it under their apiary numbers, and therefore, they are affecting the honey industry. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker, we have spoken a lot about tourism, but I want to give you an example of how tourism can be developed in this country. There is a young man in my constituency by the name of Tranel Ghany and he started a mountain bike trail in Gran Couva. You can visit and see this trail that is bordering my constituency and that of Dr. Tewarie. He is a young technician, but he also runs the Gordon Village activity centre which we built. After 45 years when their community centre was burnt down, nobody built a centre for them. We built that activity centre. He is the director of the Gran Couva Community Development group as well as Ghany's Cocoa Estate. Now, what is interesting, is that Couva is becoming

the sporting capital of the Caribbean. Thanks to what we did there with all that we did. Thanks to the progressive vision of Anil Roberts. [*Desk thumping*] His group, Madam Speaker, has applied for state land under the NGO so that it can move more non-motorized sports, example, yoga, jogging, bird watching, hiking. It can be used for scouting groups, for camping, et cetera, and nobody is listening to them. Mr. Franklin Khan, as a Minister, when he heard about this person where he had gone to present at a local government consultation, he say, "Come and see me." Well, four years have gone and nothing has happened to that vision of this young person.

So do you not want to give the NGO the land, give it to the Couva/Tabaquite/Talparo Regional Corporation and let them go into a new relationship. You talking about the local government reform, well if you want local government reform you have to expand the thing. The regional corporations will have a responsibility for developing local tourism site, but this local tourism site can become an international site.

Madam Speaker, there is a lot I would like to say, but I think I have made my point about how this country can be diversified. I have made my point [*Desk thumping*] that what we have in the United National Congress is an alternative of development agenda for opportunities beyond hope. Hope is one thing, but hope must be translated into opportunities. I have talked about the need to develop an entrepreneurial class because not everybody could get a job in the state sector or in a private company, and we have the industrious people in this country willing to do it. We have the young people with ambition, we have the young people with the talent, we have the young people with the training, let us not by our self-interest frustrate them.

Madam Speaker, let us move away from the vitriolic language that took place in

this Parliament after the Opposition Leader spoke, and let us look to something that is more uplifting, more spiritually enhancing, and more beautiful for the nation that is Trinidad and Tobago. I thank you. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker: Hon. Members, I think now is a good time for us to take the suspension. We will be back at 6.35 p.m.

6.05 p.m.: *Sitting suspended.*

6.35 p.m.: *Sitting resumed.*

Madam Speaker: Member for Toco/Sangre Grande. [*Desk thumping*]

The Parliamentary Secretary in the Ministry of National Security (Mrs. Glenda Jennings-Smith): Thank you, Madam Speaker, for allowing me to join this debate at this hour this evening. Madam Speaker, as I join this debate, I cannot help but respond to some of the utterances of the last speaker, the Member for Tabaquite. Madam Speaker, disgusted as I am right now, I had to calm down myself because I was reminded that this is the “silly season” and you know what they say about the “silly season”? It is a time when people say anything, anything that comes from their mouth. I am young in this political field, but you know I have learned so much for the past four years sitting in this honourable House, that it is enough to tell me what is the “silly season” and to expect things like that to come from people’s mouth.

Madam Speaker, I want us to return to where we are at in this budget debate, and I want to ask your permission to quote from the budget statement.

“Madam Speaker, the assignment of the new Government that assumed office in”—September—“2015 was and is clear. We were and are required to stabilize a dangerously slipping country and provide the country with an honest, clean and transparent administration...”

Madam Speaker, I have to go on:

“revitalize an economy after several years of economic stagnation and repair the fiscal accounts which were seriously damaged by wasteful expenditure, even as revenues deteriorated as a result of adverse commodity price shocks. We were also mandated by the people of Trinidad and Tobago to re-establish confidence and trust in the management of the country’s business.”

[*Desk thumping*] Madam Speaker, I want to take us back there because I heard the Member for Tabaquite say they have nothing to debate and they talk about reconstructing the country, but I want to say this. As a young woman growing up, my father was a contractor—[*Interruption*]

Hon. Member: Long time ago.

Mrs. G. Jennings-Smith: Yeah, long time ago—and I had a little house and he told me, “Glenda, do not renovate that house. You need to break it and just build it over.” And, Madam Speaker, I sat here and I heard his voice this evening because I saw this Government come into office having to develop a new country, with new culture, with new behaviour, to deal with everything that we say to them, morass that this country was facing in 2015. [*Desk thumping*]

So, Madam Speaker, for four years this Government had to engage in prudent fiscal management to stabilize the country, to stay away from the IMF, and to help us stay on course and not to have to devalue our dollar. And for these things, I want to congratulate the Minister of Finance, the Member for Diego Martin North/East; [*Desk thumping*] I want to congratulate my friend and colleague in Parliament, Member for Arouca/Maloney, Minister of Planning and Development; and above all of that the leader of us all, I want to congratulate the Prime Minister of this country who has a very difficult task [*Desk thumping*] in dealing with the situation at hand and making difficult decisions all in favour and in support of this

country that we claim to love. So I will get into the business that I came here this evening to speak about, my stewardship as a Member of Parliament for Toco/Sangre Grande.

Madam Speaker, it was four years ago when I walked in my constituency. I walked the length and breadth of my constituency, and when I walked in that constituency that constituency was on the brink of collapse—and you know there was talk about money because at that time those on the other side were in governance—and every single home that I walked in they reminded me of the hopelessness they had, they reminded me of the high levels of unemployment in their community. I saw pockets of poverty; I saw poor infrastructure, roads and bridges to be fixed. My constituency was decaying from inside out, and as I talk about decaying from inside out I would speak straight to the hospital.

I went to the Sangre Grande Hospital and in that hospital the doctors, and nurses, all the workers in that hospital they seem to be some of the best workers in this land [*Desk thumping*] and there was talk about a lot of money by this Government—that government of the day which they now find themselves on the side where they are supposed to be for a very long time to come again—and what I noticed is that where we had really hard-working doctors and nurses, the hospital was made out of a lot of containers, building here, building there. I really went to see some colleagues of mine who were in an accident at that point in time, and they were telling me the first thing you should do when you get into office is to fix this hospital. And, Madam Speaker, two weeks ago I felt a joy, and a pride, and a satisfaction, when I stood alongside my Prime Minister, and my Minister of Health, to turn the sod for the opening of that hospital in Sangre Grande. [*Desk thumping*] Because you see, Madam Speaker, we could talk all we want to talk, and I expect those on the other side to say a lot of things this evening, and

tomorrow, and the following days because we are in the “silly season”.

Madam Speaker, on the other side it is no longer a debate. It is about electioneering, it is about the “silly season”, it is about saying anything you want to say. In my constituency the people there, they are very poor, they are very humble people, but they are very proud people and they are very hard-working people, and those people they deserve better than a Government who had turned their backs on them for four years, five years that they were in office and never come out and say, “Listen, Sangre Grande deserves better. We are going to give you a hospital”, and my Government, this PNM Government, delivered it for us. So I thank you for this PNM Government. [*Desk thumping*]

So, Madam Speaker, I heard a lot of talk about diversification and we cannot diversify, but you know one of the first things that happened in my constituency is the establishment of the Valencia to Toco roadway. [*Desk thumping*] Most people are not aware of the amount of travel that takes place between Toco to Sangre Grande, Toco to Matelot, and Arima and beyond. This situation led us to the point that the mere establishment of that roadway opened up a number of opportunities for my constituents. For example, the first thing that when they opened that roadway, 67 jobs were created. So, as I said before, when I walked my constituency many people were unemployed. This provided jobs, immediate jobs for the persons in my constituency.

Apart from that, it created connectivity from people from the east and the west. It will create less time in travel because—I heard it being mentioned that PNM talks, you know. PNM talks, but UNC would continue walking away from governance [*Desk thumping*] and PNM, this Government, will continue to engage in activities that will make sure that we engage the people’s business, and we are about dealing with the people’s business and satisfying the people of this country. [*Desk*

thumping] We are not about talking, because I can say, as I speak now, there are a lot of activities on the Valencia to Toco Main Road. Many bridges have been restored, and I want to say this. [*Interruption*]

Dr. Francis: Just say Singapore.

Mrs. G. Jennings-Smith: Singapore. But, Madam Speaker, I will bring him into the conversation. Madam Speaker, we heard the Minister of Housing and Urban Development speak about the Housing and Village Improvement Programme, and he spoke very eloquently about it. [*Desk thumping*]

So, Madam Speaker, in my constituency, as I said a while ago, we had limited housing, but in my constituency we were lucky enough to be part of this village programme. Madam Speaker, a few weeks ago we handed over the keys to 20 recipients, but you know what struck me? It was a fair and transparent system, and it so happened that one of the men who got a house, he belonged to the party on the other side. He came up to me and he kept on saying “Great is the PNM”, so you know he just reminded me of that person from Naparima. I do not know. [*Desk thumping and laughter*]

Dr. Francis: Great is the PNM.

Hon. Members: Great is the PNM.

Mrs. G. Jennings-Smith: I do not know if the Member for Naparima came up to my constituency and told the people in that Rampanalgas area, which is a known supportive area of him, to vote for the PNM too. So it is not only in this House he is talking about it. He is coming to my constituency and telling everybody to vote for the PNM. Great is the PNM. So this mantra of yours, I thank you for it.

But, Madam Speaker, that gentleman, he was so moved by the treatment—and I heard somebody speak about it. I think it was the Member for Cumuto/Manzanilla, my dear friend. You know she spoke about compassion, compassion, passion, and

all these words. When we dealt with those people, the people of my constituency who were recipients of these homes, some of them cried. They felt so moved by this Government giving them a house, that that same gentleman said, “My house is my castle”. Because this house brought for them something that they never thought they could have achieved. We all dream to have achieved a house. Most of us, we dream about having our home, and “doh” matter what your home looks like your home is your castle, and that gentleman expressed that sentiment that his home is his castle. So this Government has shown compassion. We show compassion to people. [*Desk thumping*] I continue in my constituency and I can say with pride, I can walk anywhere in my community because I show compassion to my members in my constituency. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker, the constituents know who I am. I hear about corruption and I will tell you, Madam Speaker, in my former employment I heard so much about corruption that when I had to make up my mind of serving this country again, you know it was not a difficult decision because I wanted to be part of the government that will deal with corrupt actions. They must never forget where they came from, because I find it strange that we came into office amidst all this talk about corruption and corrupt activities and today people talk as though they did not know where they came from. History is very important, and a man like Mr. Tabaquite, the Member of Parliament for Tabaquite, he should know where he came from. He was a member of this government.

As a matter of fact, the Member for Tabaquite is a friend of mine’s mother who is in politics for many, many years. They are experienced politicians, and I think that standing here and making some contribution that he made today I was very disappointed. He is one of the persons that I admired across the floor. I heard this contribution made today by him, and he told me in other words—and maybe it is

his last—and he showed me that I must never again have any confidence in him again. Madam Speaker, I am so disturbed that what he said today, he showed me what he is truly made of.

Hon. Member: What did he say?

Mrs. G. Jennings-Smith: Madam Speaker, I will go on. So, Madam Speaker, I spoke about diversification and the upgrade of the Valencia to Toco roadway is part of my Government's overall vision to generate increased economic activities in the north east region stimulating residential, industrial and commercial activities, and this is what we call transformative growth because it is something that you can feel, something you could see, something that will have long longevity.

So, Madam Speaker, when we sit and we speak about diversification, it not only happened in a product, but it happens in a government's action; how a government treats with an issue. It would create that kind of transformation in an area that could lead to diversification because now we had transport between these areas, easy transport, and we talk about the Toco port. Madam Speaker, I have been engaged and very closely engaged with the stakeholders, the directors, the consultant for the Toco port, and I feel very proud to stand here this evening and let those on the other side know, through you, Madam Speaker, that the PNM Government not only talk, we act. This is the year of action.

You see, we started this journey in 2015. In 2018, we were talking about changing the paradigm, putting the economy on a sustainable path. In 2019 now, we talk about "Stability | Strength | Growth". Every single activity in this budget statement, it speaks about growth, it speaks about an economy that stood the test of time through the shrewd management of the Minister of Finance, and we are ready to deliver a growth. I am asking the people of this country to listen to sensible talk,

because I want to refer again to that speech that was given by the Member for Tabaquite when he spoke about you know you cannot fool all the people. He spoke about never underestimate the intelligence of a population. Very true. Never underestimate the intelligence of a population, Sir. Never! Because the population knows what you all are up to; the population knows what happened in this country five years ago, from 2010 to 2015; the population knows they have to make a bit of sacrifice; the population knows that at this point we are moving forward.

You know, there is a song by—there is a song and I want to say it now. I want to tell you it now.

Hon. Member: Yeah. Sing it, sing it.

Mrs. G. Jennings-Smith: I will not sing it. I will leave it for you to sing it tonight. It is important I say it now because I want to establish—it is from Sam Cook, “A Change is Gonna Come”. You know it has been a long time because when wrong things are happening the time seems to be long. It has been a long time you all have been in office, but this PNM Government, I am saying a change is going to come. Yes, it will, and this PNM Government will bring that change, and we are bringing that change right as I speak here now.

I can tell you, Madam Speaker, this change—you can listen to your song tonight, [*Laughter*] “A Change is Gonna Come”. Madam Speaker, I tell you PNM will bring that change to this country because that change involves cultural change, behavioural change, attitudinal change, and that is to tell you how hard the task has been. It has been a long time. We had 2015; we had 2016, we had some sacrifices to do; 2017; 2018; Madam Speaker, 2019 and beyond, 2020, that change is going to come, and I ask all citizens in this country, listen to the wise words of the Member of Parliament for Toco/Sangre Grande that the change is going to come.

Get on board and be part of this change movement. This PNM Government will restore dignity to this country that we love so much. We talk about patriotism, we talk about dignity, we talk about transparency, and this Government will give us what we require in this country. [*Desk thumping*]

So, Madam Speaker, I go back to the port. When we speak of the Toco port I imagine my constituents, because when I traverse the road and I head to Matelot, Grand Riviere, Cumana, Toco, I see no opportunities. For example, if a person from Toco has to get a job in Port of Spain, it is very difficult to travel home every day; if a person from Grand Riviere gets a job, that person has to get a place to rent in Port of Spain or wherever. They cannot travel every day.

And, Madam Speaker, when I look at the port of Toco I think of the Port of Port of Spain, the Port of Point Lisas, I think of employment, I think of opportunity, and what better transformation we could get for our country, a place like Toco, Matelot, Grand Riviere and beyond, all those areas up there. I see opportunities for people in Toco linking with Tobago. Most people from Toco they have links from Tobago. I see economic changing of values and practices, and sales taking place between the two places. What about our leatherback turtle? I talked about the enhanced roadway. We have the leatherback turtle, this is something that could stimulate economic growth.

I have been speaking also to most of the business people who live and have business from Valencia into Toco, and they are all excited about getting on to that ship to establish some kind of a business activity. Land is very much in demand because many people are thinking about building homes, renting homes, hotels to come on board, and, Madam Speaker, you could think about many, many issues that could diversify this country. We think about the fishermen and the north coast. The fishermen are very, very pleased with this development because now

they have their own fishing place where they could berth their vessels. Even the building where we talk about the port, we have hopes of horticulture, trade, shops, beauty culture, a host of different things. And I would tell you, Madam Speaker, I have spoken to my constituents and they are all getting ready to be on board in 2020 when this development comes on board. The construction, it will take in people from up there; the artisans for trade, I have asked them to go to trade schools, steel bending and stuff like that.

Madam Speaker, there are a lot of opportunities for my people in the north-eastern coast, and I want to say I feel proud to be part of this Government because it is the thinking of this Government to open up that part of Trinidad to Tobago and the rest of the world. I remember when the hon. Prime Minister drove up to Toco and he saw the beautiful place, the drive to Toco it was so promising, the flora and the fauna, the calmness, the cleanness of the air, he was moved, and he said we had to do something for this place and he actually made that promise to the people of Toco/Sangre Grande. [*Desk thumping*] And today, that promise is not only talk. That promise is being rolled out because we have the highway being built right now, we have consultation on the port, and I dare say that port would have been started already you know. But you know in this country we have a lot of people who disturb the smooth pathway of things.

You know there are people who are friends and family, and sometimes friends of fishermen—you know there are some groups and stuff like that—they just come out to disturb anything that is seemingly good for this country, and we have had a lot of difficulties with our stakeholders. They were the main stakeholders and they are all out of the region, but somehow or the other they managed to enter that area and create problems, problems that had taken us some additional months to sort out, but I am certain that with these clearances we are well on track for 2020 to put

out the contracts to be awarded for the building of that port and, Madam Speaker, that is a game changer. [*Desk thumping*] That is a game changer.

It is a game changer because it creates opportunity, hope, direction, and it creates not only for people of the Toco area, but it creates a whole new life for the people of Trinidad, and Tobago. It creates a joining point; it creates market activity, economic activity, pleasure. I am aware that during the years 2010 to 2013 this country had a lot of—you know the Minister of Finance pointed out the type of funding that was available to this country, but you know they could not visualize those kind of things. You know, it was too tangible. They could not visualize putting something like that in place for the people of Toco/Sangre Grande because I think it does not come within the pathway. So that kind of vision that leads you to having some tangible thing that people could hold on to, and people could be helped not only in that area, but as a country as a whole, we have something that we could hold on to and build on, and feel proud about.

So that is what I want to speak about, when you speak about transformative growth.

7.00 p.m.

And before I forget, I want to respond to a statement that was made by the Member for Tabaquite when he spoke about the cocoa industry and the Rose Hill Cocoa Estate. Only this morning, the Minister of Agriculture spoke about the success of the cocoa industry in Trinidad and Tobago and I want to highlight and I want to show you, Madam Speaker, how deliberate they could be in their words to mislead this country of Trinidad and Tobago. When we sit in this august House which we have so much respect for, that we say anything because, again, we are in the “silly season”. And, Madam Speaker, I want to bring to your attention that in 2012, 2013, 2014, the Trinidad and Tobago Cocoa Estate and Rose Hill Cocoa

Estate at the International Chocolate Awards, got the best prize for the greatest tasting cocoa. In 2017, they received two awards for the International Chocolate Awards Gold and the European Gold Award. In 2018, they received an International Chocolate Award, they were the winner, and in 2019, they got the gold, silver and bronze. [*Desk thumping*] So, Madam Speaker, I am just trying to tell you how misleading people in this House could be. You see, some people set out to deceive.

And you know, I sit here in this House, Madam Speaker, and I see deception and I think I would have gathered that experience from where I came, and you know, I feel a bit of discomfort in saying certain things in this House because I know a lot about how people think, especially those on the other side, I had dealings with them. You know, I always remember that day when they came to Police Headquarters and they looked at all of us and they did not see somebody in a particular role, a particular hair type and a statement was made [*Crosstalk*] and this is the deceptive thing. [*Crosstalk*] No, it is a deceptive thing to say because you see, in this country, we are a country of all, and I stand for a person of all, [*Desk thumping*] and I belong to both races. Right. And I belong to all races and sometimes I cannot deal with the deceptive attitude of others and in this House especially.

When we sit and we talk here, I speak to a lot of my constituents. I am a Member of Parliament and I spend most of my time dealing with my constituents and they are never satisfied with what goes on in this House, because, Madam Speaker, we need to sit here and debate, and if a person could stand up and say this evening, “Why debate? There is nothing to debate.” “Is ah disrespect”, it is a disrespect and we need to sit down and really internalize what is going on. People expect an Opposition or another side of this House to bring forward some proper

suggestions.

We are in a country and we know it very well where we came from, we know how difficult it was. We know that when we came into office, we had only three days of money to fund salaries and we know what we are facing. So when they try to sit here in a budget debate and not come with some solid points, it appears with the minds of the people out there, we are not fooling anyone because we have intelligent people out there, people are not so easily fooled. We have language, yes, you may have language because you may be a doctor or whatever it is, so you have a monopoly over language, so we use the language to influence other people or to move other people. You know, it is not a good thing, Madam Speaker, and I sit here in this House for the past four years. This may very well be the end of this term, we do not know what could happen, we are all in God's hands. We do not know what the future will have for us in the future.

But, Madam Speaker, whilst we are here, we need to show more decorum, we need to show more honesty, we need to show more patriotism for this country that we love so much. [*Desk thumping*] We came here to debate a budget and we sit here and listen to lies, innuendos and deliberate—[*Crosstalk*] Okay, I am sorry Madam Speaker, I retract. We listened to statements that seemingly do not carry the full truth. So that is why I had to come here with all pains, I did the research and I showed you that this issue that was spoken about a while ago, it is totally kind of misleading and as I go on here.

So, Madam Speaker, as I go back to the Toco port, I need to speak more about the Toco port and what it will do for the country, some of the benefits. I expect that in 2020, we would see the beginning of a new Toco, we would see the beginning of new initiatives, we would see the beginning of new trading, we would see transformational growth in my constituency.

Madam Speaker, I go over to squatter regularization and I want to personally thank the Minister of Housing. Over the past year, we have had squatter regularization in Picton, Sangre Grande with 119 lots, KP Lands with 420 lots, Pine Settlement with 384 lots. In total, we have had 923 lots given to people in my constituency. [*Desk thumping*] We would have heard that Toco/Sangre Grande, we have the greatest amount of squatting settlements and the level of poverty that exists in those settlements is really a story to be seen, not even to be told; you have to be there to see the level of poverty. And any Government that indulges in making the quality of life better for these people, that Government has compassion [*Desk thumping*] and this PNM Government, we have been interfacing with those people.

Madam Speaker, I saw a lady got a grant to fix her home and she came crying. She could not even believe that she was given this grant to fix her home because she said if she did not have this, she would never have had a home, and when you see people reach to those levels, you know, you have to remark that this Government is doing something good because they are the ones that we engage. You know we look at them and we look at them as being helpless and hopeless and we must engage in some kind of a programme to meet with their expectations and that was not all.

Infrastructure works are now going on at Bois Bande, Sangre Grande area and we have 500 households being affected and what we are doing there is that we are building roads, drains in an effort to regularize because all of these people, they live in this area with tracks. They do not have roads, they do not have water, they do not drains to take to their homes. So this particular project is another project which is happening in my constituency and there are many other projects. In the Sahadeen site, work is supposed to commence in 2020, similar arrangements with

roads and drains. They are all squatter settlements which the Government has decided to engage in developmental work so that it will impact on the quality of their lives. Madam Speaker, in early 2020, emergency infrastructure work would be done in Blake Avenue where we have about 500 households. And again, all of these people fall into the same bracket where the LSA department has made that intervention in trying to regularize those areas that could benefit the families in this area.

So, Madam Speaker, this really is the story of my constituency. What we have had and I want to really highlight and thank the Minister of Finance for, is the fact that in Toco/Sangre Grande, most people are employed at the Ministry of Works, regional corporation and these types of Government offices and they are employed as daily-rated workers. The Minister of Finance's decision or this Government's decision to settle or to solve the longstanding problem and seek to give them a pension upon leaving, it has impacted on many people within my constituency. As a matter of fact, there is a gentleman named Rawle, he called me last night and told me make sure "ah tell" the Minister of Finance thanks very much because he has been suffering and he is thinking about going home without money and things like that. *[Interruption]* And yes, you identified the problem. When he leaves, he has to wait for five years before he gets his pension at that 65 years. So Minister of Finance, I want to thank you on behalf of Mr. Rawle. *[Desk thumping]* He sends to say thanks very much.

And all of these things have happened, Madam Speaker, in an environment where we had limited funding. All that has happened in an environment where we had to pay to back debts, right. All of this has happened because of the shrewd management of our leadership and when we have a country looking on, we need to educate the public. We need to educate the public on what is really happening.

Why these decisions were made? But you know what, Madam Speaker? Change is coming, change is “gonna” come and as the morning meets after tonight, “yuh could listen”, those on the other side. Madam Speaker, when you go home, you could listen to this song. It is a very beautiful, encouraging song that would tell you, listen, a change is coming into Trinidad and Tobago, a wind is blowing and this is the change that the PNM has brought. [*Desk thumping*] This PNM Government has brought that wind of change.

Madam Speaker, in crime, you could see what is happening in crime. We have had a Commissioner of Police and we see now, all the strategies and the initiatives, people are beginning to fear just committing crime and, Madam Speaker, we are going to see much more changes but I will leave that for the Minister of National Security. He will speak at length of it.

But I am going to speak, Madam Speaker, about the National Crime Prevention Programme. When I came on board as the Parliamentary Secretary in the Ministry of National Security, I was given a task to deal with social intervention. And my background and knowledge of crime, I know that there are two sides to crime. There is the law enforcement and there is the citizen intervention. So it is law enforcement and the citizen participation. After a year of going around and seeking stakeholders’ comments and stakeholders’ advice, we came with this programme, National Crime Prevention Programme. We chose three areas and we tried to be very transparent because coming from my background, I know that you cannot really be too political. You have to look at what is happening in the district and give intervention that is required for a particular district. So we looked at the areas that required intervention and the three areas that we looked at were Diego Martin, Tobago and Chaguanas. Madam Speaker, we launched in these three areas and I must commend the Member for Chaguanas East. [*Desk thumping*] He has

always shown interest in that programme, he has come to many of the meetings and he has supported the intervention and we have seen some level of success with that programme.

Madam Speaker, so we have had the launch of the National Crime Prevention in 2018 and since that to now, we have trained 107 moderators and rapporteurs. We have been having interventions at all of these locations. Madam Speaker, we have had eight community outreach engagements, we collaborated with many of the stakeholders out there and during the summer vacation, we engaged in the first children's community crime prevention programme and that too was successful. As a matter of fact, Tobago had the most successful session where we had about over 100 children participating and telling us what crime is and how you could prevent crime. So I want to compliment the Members for Tobago East and Tobago West. [*Desk thumping*] They both were very much involved in activities and the activities are there. They are geared to have the Members of Parliament of every area involved. So that we plan to roll out these programmes in all the other districts and I expect to see—you see, we hear it in the Parliament, people complaining about crime and crime but we have to be involved in the whole preventive activities. We must be educated as to what we can do, how we can make an improvement in our communities and that in itself will set communities alive that they would look out for each other.

We know that a lot of this is happening throughout Trinidad and Tobago but the National Crime Prevention Programme is a programme that is geared to give you quick action, feedback, because within the programme, we have a level which is an inter-ministerial team where problems are brought up and dealt with expeditiously. So that it gives the community crime prevention council that opportunity to be empowered and to deal with issues that they face within their community. So these

are some of the issues and I can say that come December, November, we will be rolling out caravans to all the other eight districts in Trinidad and Tobago [*Desk thumping*] and I expect to see—

As a matter of fact, we are going to be advertising for a national volunteer system where we would be asking people to come on board and be part of this programme to make a difference in our country. We all love this country, the both of us on the both sides, you on that side, we on this side, you claim to love this country. I expect to see your participation in reducing crime. But I must say that while I give kudos to the Chaguanas East MP, the Mayor of Chaguanas was unable to give us the support. I cannot say what is the reason, I may not be privileged to say the reason but the reasons were disturbing. Because you see, sometimes people put political affiliations and political directives in front of country and it is sad to know that when a Government of the day engages in an activity and they expect to see the participation of the people that really manage an area do not come out because of some directive, that was very disturbing to me, Madam Speaker.

I would like to encourage those on the other side, you speak about crime prevention, you speak about having a plan for this country, you speak about caring for this country, show it. You talk about action, you talk about we have talk and you have what? Walk. Show it, Madam Speaker, I think they need to show it. [*Interruption*] Yes, walk it. Do not only just come in Parliament and say things. When we are out of Parliament, support the programmes that are put out by the Government. Yes, that will affect your constituency.

So, Madam Speaker, I want to also mention the fact that a lot of repairs to roadways occurred during the past year and we had rehabilitation of over six kilometres of road services along the eastern area from Turure into Sangre Grande as well as construction of 2.4 kilometres of sidewalk pavement. So I want to lay

some praise to the Minister of Works for all his interest in ensuring that the road service were repaired and they were repaired well.

But, Madam Speaker, I want to come to the Ministry of Housing and LSA, this Village Improvement Programme because I want to really highlight it because I think it is a programme that could be utilized by many more constituents, by many more areas within the country. For example, the houses that are being built are being built by young contractors and some of them never really ventured into building an entire home but they were guided by the directors and the engineers at LSA as to how they could put their forces together, put their talents together to create this house. And you know what is so interesting about it is the fact that the house cost only \$120,000 and they were able to deliver those houses within the budget. [*Desk thumping*] And from what I saw, Madam Speaker, a number of young men were engaged in this activity. Young men from the area where the houses were built. So for example, if I was a recipient of a house and a contractor came to my house to build my house, I would give assistance with my brother, my sister, my cousin and they all came into this village attitude, what we know about long ago and they actually got skills. And I have seen now that when one would have built one or two houses, now they can build five houses and you know, it created employment, it created hope and it created an avenue where people could think about engaging in a bigger venture.

So that now that the Government has given the \$500,000 opportunity for a young contractor to build a house, I can see where they can graduate from this particular programme into that other programme with success because if they knew the whole concept of building a house, that is something that could be transferred into another bigger venture. I think, you know, this is what is really lacking in this country. Sometimes, you have to have a Government that understands the

philosophy of when “yuh scrunting, when things bad, when yuh do not know where yuh gehing get the dollar from, when yuh cyah get ah loan from the bank”. When you have a Government that understands these principles, that Government and that Minister of Finance, he understands because he really surprised me with a number of initiatives, especially those initiatives. He must be complimented.

[Desk thumping]

Because you know, I have been looking at how a young entrepreneur starts off. A young entrepreneur starts off sometimes because of a godfather or somebody decides they are going to fund him and when a person could start off with Government’s assistance, it is a different concept altogether. It shows—that is compassion, Cumuto/Manzanilla. When you talk about compassion, that is what we talk about. That is what is meant by compassion because you see, when you reach to a stage in life, you forget what it is about. You know when they talk about sufferers, “sufferers doh not care about most people, they just care about making ah dollar to live and to eat”. I live among my constituents and their lifestyle is like this. When they get up in the morning—

Madam Speaker: Member for Toco/Sangre Grande, your original time is now spent. You have 10 more minutes to wrap up. Please continue.

Mrs. G. Jennings-Smith: Yes, Madam Speaker. When they get up in the morning, they think about cooking fish and rice. “Dey go and ketch ah fish and dey cook ah fish and rice.” Right? The next day, they do something else. They live for today. So what I am trying to say here is that getting money is almost impossible just like the impossible dream to get a house. So that this Government must be complimented. You see that Village Improvement Programme, that programme is a magical programme. That programme touches the very nerve of this country because when you have a constituency where you have over 30,000

people as squatters, you think they really want to be squatters? Let us all think about that. Do you think they really want to be squatters? Living is hard. So this Government, reaching out to those people, helping them, even when they are living in communities, building roads, bridges, giving them lights, water. And as I say lights, I have to compliment the Minister of Public Utilities—[*Crosstalk*] Not only light bulbs, not only the LED bulbs but, Madam Speaker, he has been working assiduously with my constituency. We have given lights in Valencia, Toco, Matura, Cumana, many areas in my area. We have received lights on the grounds which is so very important for the young people in developing.

And before I leave, Madam Speaker, I want to remind my constituents. There are two issues which we are burning to get completed. That is the Ojoe Road Recreational Ground and the multipurpose centre. Those two areas, we are working on it and you are going to see—[*Interruption*] Madam Speaker, I am talking to you and I want my constituents to listen to this, that they are going to see development work starting very soon on those two areas. These are things that I promised my constituency and I will deliver because I belong to a government that not only talks but we deliver and this is the year of delivery.

And, Madam Speaker, I want to remind those on other side that with “Stability | Strength | Growth”, it is only success we can see. Success! So this is the time, we will deliver. And Naparima, thank you very much. Great is the PNM. [*Desk thumping and laughter*]

Mr. Rushton Paray (*Mayaro*): Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. I join this debate this evening after listening to several Members opposite, and I think it is an honour to stand and speak on this particular debate for one particular reason. It is the first time in the history of this Parliament that we have seen a Government on the back foot responding to an Opposition after a budget debate. [*Desk*

thumping and crosstalk] Madam Speaker, I want to commend all my colleagues on this side and I will speak through you, Madam Speaker. I want to commend all my colleagues who have spoken on this time over the last two days and they have been excellent, they have been clinical. [*Desk thumping*] They have shown the support for the transformation plan that was spoken by our political leader on Friday.

Madam Speaker, coming into this debate, the Leader of the Opposition [*Crosstalk*] had called on this Government—

Madam Speaker: Order, order.

Mr. R. Paray:—has called on the Prime Minister to call an election and during her initial debate, an election was called. That is leadership. [*Desk thumping*] That is leadership when you can call a government for an election and it happens before “yuh finish speak”. [*Crosstalk*] Yes, an election was called. It was called. It was called. [*Crosstalk and laughter*]

Madam Speaker, since Friday, anywhere I go, I was home over this weekend, people from all walks of life, fishermen to businessmen, have been stopping to tell me how much they enjoyed our leader’s contribution. [*Desk thumping and crosstalk*] They are expressing how much hope that they feel, that the—

Madam Speaker: I know it is getting a little late and maybe Members might need “ah lil exercise” to be able to exercise the proper type of decorum.

Mr. R. Paray: Thank you, Madam Speaker. As I was saying, they were expressing how much hope that they now feel as an actual plan for the restoration and the reformation of our economy that was presented on Friday and they are also happy that the misery that had been inflicted on this country by this Government will soon come to an end. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker, the Member for Siparia delivered a masterclass in forward-

thinking policy proposals [*Desk thumping*] and innovative solutions to the challenges that face Trinidad and Tobago today. It was a presentation full of substance and thought. [*Desk thumping*] You could tell that she had spent her time working and listening to stakeholders, economists, as well as most importantly, the people of this nation. We on this side, Madam Speaker, we do not “bouf up” everyone who makes an alternative opinion to us. [*Desk thumping*] We listen, we analyze and we plan. Madam Speaker, you see, unlike some other people who spend their time quarrelling and doing all kind of playful stuff, the Member for Siparia has never stopped working for the people of Trinidad and Tobago. Madam Speaker, I can also tell that my colleagues across the Bench were a bit rattled by the Opposition Leader’s presentation [*Desk thumping*] and I understand why.

You see, Madam Speaker, last Friday, they saw what the entire country saw, that the Member for Siparia, in just three and a half short hours, had more innovative plans for our nation than this Government has put forward in four years. [*Desk thumping*] That is what had rattled them, Madam Speaker. But I want to say to them, do not be alarmed, what they should do is try and do something with the little time that you have left remaining in governance in Trinidad and Tobago. Madam Speaker, when their time comes to the end in a few months when a general election is called, all this Government will be remembered for is fake oil and ferries, rentals and rantings, romping and roaming, while taking a balcony seat to the collapse of an entire economy. [*Desk thumping*] Madam Speaker, that is what my colleagues, honourable men and women across from me, will be remembered for.

Madam Speaker, before I go into the substance of my contribution, I have to respond to a few comments that were made by Members opposite. And my

colleague for Toco/Sangre Grande opened her debate by speaking about this morass that we left, so I want to explain to the national community exactly what that morass was. That morass was, on them coming into Government, by the end of the fourth quarter of 2015, the morass would have had \$6.5 billion in taxes in the Treasury. [*Desk thumping*] The morass would have had \$1.5 billion coming in from an IPO. [*Desk thumping*] The morass would have had a TGU payment of \$4 billion. [*Desk thumping*] The morass would have had a loan repayment by T&TEC for \$1 billion. [*Desk thumping*] Madam Speaker, that morass which the hon. Member speaks about was worth \$13 billion. [*Desk thumping and crosstalk*] That is the morass that hon. Member speaks about.

But you see, in four years, Madam Speaker, those on that side have squandered away, not only what was there in the Treasury but they have squandered the good faith and the goodwill of the people of this country. In four years, they squandered \$4 billion of our foreign reserves and I will talk about a bit more of that in my contribution. They have squandered \$600 million from Heritage and Stabilisation Fund. And the reason why I used a strong word like squandered, Madam Speaker, is what have we to see for it? [*Desk thumping*] That is the question. Using the money, borrowing money. “Borrowing is not ah bad thing.” As young men and women, we start life, we borrow money from the bank, “we buy car, we buy house and we grow” so debt is not a bad thing but you must see something. After that, we have seen nothing from that money.

Madam Speaker, this Government, this Finance Minister has moved the Exchequer Account, the Current Account to \$40 billion, [*Crosstalk*] \$40 billion.

7.30p.m.

So they complain that we were overspending and we spent for craziness, and whatever. What have they done? In four years they have moved that same

overdraft that they complained about in 2015. It has moved to \$40billion. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker, my colleague from Toco/Sangre Grande really did offer a song about a change is going to come, and I think she is prophetic that a change is coming. [*Desk thumping*] But there is also a change that has happened. Since 2015, we have been shortchanged as a country. [*Desk thumping*] This administration, Madam Speaker, has shortchanged the people of this country for four years. The Minister of Finance, budget after budget, keeps falling short year after year.

Madam Speaker, my colleague from Toco/Sangre Grande spoke about the people who are against the Toco port, and she had some nice things to say about them. But there was one person who had something very disturbing to say about that Toco port. And with your permission I would like to read what that person said. And it is from the *Hansard* of July 28, 2000, and it is by a Member of Parliament by the name of Dr. Keith Rowley. And this is what he said about that very same Toco port, and I read from *Hansard*, Madam Speaker.

“The basis for this port is some Tobago to Toco Ferry. Nobody in Tobago wants it; nobody in...Tobago or Toco appreciates it; but that is the grease to have the product created. Do you know who is doing this? The Cabinet. By saying that it is a Tobago to Toco Ferry, the Government is giving the impression that it is a public purpose and, under that category, the Government is now going to proceed to take away people's home to create this port...”

Madam Speaker, Dr. Keith Rowley, Member of Parliament on the 28th of July, 2000. So, I feel Dr. Rowley is on to something, and you should talk to him, and he would advise you appropriately on why it may be a problem.

Madam Speaker, I also want to respond to a couple of items that my absolutely good colleague from Moruga/Tableland—we are schoolmates and—

Hon. Member: What?

Mr. R. Paray: Yes, yes, yes. We share an alma mater; a very, very good school. So I know—*[Interruption]* Yes, yes, yes. I was hoping, in the Minister's contribution, the hon. Minister spoke for 55 minutes. And as the Minister with the responsibility for tertiary education, I would have thought that the Minister would have used his time to outlay how his Government would tie in the sector to the jobs of the future, the tertiary-educated people in this country. How is his Government going to tie that in? I would have thought that the Minister would have said how his Government would put those students into productive sustainable work over the next five years. *[Desk thumping]* I would have thought that the Minister would have done these things, plus respond to certain issues in the education sector, but only to realize that I was just expecting too much, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker—

Dr. Francis: “Hear what, gih meh 10 minutes, nah?”

Mr. R. Paray: You will have another chance.

Dr. Francis: Give me 10 “ah” yours.

Mr. R. Paray: Our Opposition Leader visited Gomez Trace, as the hon. Member spoke about it, and I was glad to hear that the issues are being resolved, issues around the buildings, the drainage, no fire escape, no back step in the house. And on top of that, even on Saturday during the College Fair, a young lady from his constituency met me and she was complaining about the houses, the 425 or \$450,000 that they were told that they had to pay for the house, when going to sign the contract she was told she has to pay \$625,000. And then, when she complained, the people who were there said, “Is either yuh take it or yuh leave it”.

Madam Speaker, I am glad. I am hoping, the hon. MP said that the matter is being dealt with. But the point that I want to make, they are ridiculing that we walk and "dem" talk. But if the Opposition Leader did not walk, he would never talk. And as the hon. Member spoke, action is being taken. So I am glad for that.

Madam Speaker, the hon. Minister, he too clearly has a prophetic vision as well. As he started his contribution, he too said that this will be his last budget contribution and I believe him. I believe him.

Madam Speaker, and I just want to respond lastly to my colleague from San Fernando East, who made two comments concerning Sandals. The hon. Minister said that it was our fault on this side that Sandals left, and he was afraid, or he was hoping that we would not chase Apple Leisure Group away either. So I want to answer both, and I will do the last one first. We will not chase anybody else who is going to be working towards the development of Trinidad and Tobago. We are not chasing anyone. [*Desk thumping*] But let me tell you, Madam Speaker, why Sandals left. The air bridge was failing and it continues to fail. Sandals had a problem with that. The sea bridge, well, that is a story by itself. That is a whole episode, and that collapsed. That too is what Sandals took into consideration.

Madam Speaker, the ANR Airport has to have a massive upgrade. That is what Sandals took into consideration. [*Crosstalk*] And lastly, the hon. Prime Minister said that no hairy leg crab is going to stop that project. But you know what, Madam Speaker? I think the hairy leg crab won at the end of the day. [*Desk thumping*] So let us put that to rest. We on this side looked at the issues. We brought it to the public. The public was aware of what happened, and let us rest at that. We had nothing to do with Sandals leaving. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker, the issue around trade and investment is so important for us in this country now. You see, it is all well and fine for Ministers of Government to

run about all over the country every day and cut ribbons, shovel soil, chase/knock glasses, and so on, to turn projects, but there is a fundamental issue that we must address, and not a budget in four years has addressed that. How are we going to protect the foreign reserve, and two, how are we going to grow it? [*Crosstalk*] Because with all of that, without that—

Madam Speaker: MP for Mayaro, I have to say, I never thought of you as one who created all this disturbance. So I have to lay the blame at your feet. I just ask hon. Members, I know we have been here for some time but we are accustomed to this. So we are going to maintain our decorum and allow me to hear the Member for Mayaro. Anybody whose hearing right now is being impaired is invited to take a lil walk and they could come back when they are able to control it.

Mr. R. Paray: [*Desk thumping*] Thank you, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, “people doh pelt green mango, dey pelt ripe mango”. [*Desk thumping*] So as I was saying, Madam Speaker, it is all well and fine to run around opening projects, turning soil, and so on, but it is how do we earn revenue in this country? Our foreign reserves, our US reserves, this is what is going to be the determining factor for the quality of life. Me, my children, my grandchildren, your grandchildren; that will determine the quality of life going forward. And it is my respectful view that not a budget in the last four years has dealt with that.

Madam Speaker, during my contribution as well, I am going to identify a few areas that I feel the Government, through bad policy and bad decision-making, has put us in a worse off position over the last four years. I would also like to relate it back to a bit of the presentation that was made by our hon. political leader, the Leader of the Opposition, in dealing with fiscal and monetary policy, to answer those questions. And lastly, being someone who works in the IT sector, Madam Speaker, I do feel the ICT sector has the greatest contribution to GDP, if done in

the right way. And if time permits, I would like to speak a bit on that. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker, the mid-year review, the Minister of Finance came here and told us that the economy had turned around. He said that the clouds have gone and he could see clearly now. Madam Speaker, this year in this debate, the Minister changed his tune. He comes to this House and he says, “It get back a little cloudy because of geopolitical conflicts, Brexit, high oil price and that is the reason why things have gotten a little gloomy”. But Madam Speaker, none of those three things happened overnight. It has been with us for a couple of years. None of those three items, Madam Speaker, is responsible for the serious policy errors that economists and the international agencies have been warning us about for the last four years. In fact, Madam Speaker, the data clearly shows that of all the oil-producing nations, out of all of them, Trinidad and Tobago had the worst economic growth in the past four years. And just to share that information, you had countries like Libya grow 15.4 per cent. You have Iraq, Iran, UAE, Algeria, Qatar, and this source is the IMF's Report. It is the average GDP growth, oil producers, 2015—2018. You have countries like Qatar, Gabon, Saudi Arabia, Nigeria, Ecuador, Kuwait, all having with the same conditions, positive growth.

Trinidad and Tobago declined by 1.3 per cent. And we are last at that table. So clearly, the conditions that are existing, it is not only for us alone. But why is it we are the only country that had negative growth? It is because of bad policy decisions. [*Desk thumping*] Madam Speaker, it is economic mismanagement, and I dare say that this Government, because of policy decisions, is stifling the economic growth of this country.

Madam Speaker, I believe that Trinidad and Tobago is, not that we are suffering from too little energy, I think we are suffering from too much of this current

Government. It is too much of missteps, mishandling, bad policy decisions.

Madam Speaker, because of that, because of these poor policy decisions over the last four years, the Government and our economy has been downgraded, not once but twice. So, first, Moody's downgraded Trinidad and Tobago to what you call the non-investment or junk, Ba1, and then not shortly afterwards, Standard & Poor's downgraded us to BBB minus, which is just one notch above junk status. But you know, Madam Speaker, what that means is that how the international lending community sees us is in a poor state. It means that when they have to lend us money we pay higher prices, higher rates. So, as a country we do not want to be there. We want to be in a better position.

So Madam Speaker, I was disheartened to hear the hon. Prime Minister say well, "Nothing big with that, we only lost a plus". But, Madam Speaker, the reality is that that plus took us about 10 years to get there. And I suspect it may take us another 10 years to get it back.

Downgrades, Madam Speaker, speak to the complete lack of confidence international investors have in the ability of our Government to service its debt. It strikes to the foundation of our economy. And unfortunately the Government continues to recklessly borrow more money, continues to run budget deficits, and they are piling on more debt that they cannot service. And then the Minister of Finance comes and says that, you know, he preaches; the hon. Minister preaches about fiscal responsibility. But Madam Speaker, I want to say that this Government is the most fiscally irresponsible Government in the history of Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker, we must compare our positioning economically to our neighbours in the Caribbean. How are we doing in relation to what they are doing? Because they are in the same sea. They are in the same ocean. They are being bombarded

with the same global issues, but something they are doing is right.

So let us look at Jamaica, Jamaica is booming in certain areas. And there was a report from the foreign direct investment of Latin America. It is a Caribbean 2019 report. And in that report, Madam Speaker, would you believe Trinidad and Tobago is the only country in the entire Latin American and Caribbean region that has had negative foreign direct investment in the last three years; negative, nobody. Now, this is what the data is saying. In 2014, we peaked at the highest at US \$651 million of FDI. Do you know what is the issue now, in 2018? It is minus \$118 million. What that tells the person who is interpreting the data is that there is a measure of capital flight. People have taken out, investors have taken out their money and they have gone somewhere else. That is not the position that we as a developing state want to have ourselves in, and these things speak to bad policy, Madam Speaker. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker, over the years we have grown accustomed to seeing people from Jamaica and Guyana come to this country to look for a better way of life. I am concerned that if the current trends that we are on, the roles may be reversed. Some of us may be seeking a better life in Guyana and Jamaica, Madam Speaker. That is how serious the people who are interpreting the numbers at a macro level, we are seeing some serious, serious issues down the road.

Madam Speaker, I want to talk very quickly about how we are performing as a country at the global competitive status. So there is the Global Competitiveness Report. Now, as I mentioned in my opening, I want to indicate a few areas where we have fallen over the last four years, hence the reason why we have a section in our national transformation plan to speak specifically to those areas. So, Madam Speaker, unlike those on the other side, we like to look at numbers. I like to look at numbers. I like to plan, based around numbers. I like to read what the experts

are saying, do my own measurements, see what the rest of the region is doing, what the rest of the world is doing and come to a consensus. That is how you learn what needs to be done. This is why, Madam Speaker, I doubt very much that the Government may have even read that Global Competitiveness Report.

Madam Speaker, this is a yearly report that is produced by the World Economic Forum. It measures key indicators in our economy. These indicators would be like the performance of institutions, government agencies, appropriate infrastructure, stable macroeconomic framework, good health, primary education, efficient goods market, labour markets, and so on.

Madam Speaker, would you believe when we demitted office in 2015, we were at one of the highest global competitive rankings—of 79—in years, and within four years, Madam Speaker, we are down to 144.

Madam Speaker, should a budget not be aligned to fix these issues? If we are planning policy, policy must be framed on fixing certain things that are going to reengineer/restructure where we go as a country. And the report went on to say, Madam Speaker, and I want to quote this part of the report:

“Economic growth does not happen in a vacuum.”

There is nothing in this budget—which is referred to the 2019/2020 Budget given by the Minister, there is nothing in the budget that speaks to real policies designed to improve the fundamentals of our economy.

Madam Speaker, how can the Government expect to seriously address the needs of the country if they are not using indicators to drive policy decisions?

Madam Speaker, I know my colleague from Tabaquite spoke in some detail about the ease of doing business and the indicators that set your rating. And we are in a bad place as well. Madam Speaker, we had a very good ranking in the ease of doing business in 2012. We were at 66 and sadly today, Madam Speaker, we have

slipped to 105. Now, if you look at the economies in the Caribbean that have had positive growth, you would see that their ease of doing business is better than ours. So what it tells me is that companies' investors want to send their money where there is no headache. I always say capitalist coward. It does not like risk. It is going to go where I am sure I am going to get power, water, clearance, whatever, with the easiest, easiest way to put my money. So Madam Speaker, what it means is that whatever we had done from 2010 to 2015 was working, and when this Government came in they have reversed all of these things to allow all these indices to drop so poorly.

Madam Speaker, what it tells me is that Trinidad and Tobago is now among the worst countries in the world to do business, and that is not where we want to be, especially in a world economy of low energy prices where we are struggling for markets, where we are competing against the US shale. We want to make sure that our foreign capital can walk in, do its work, earn them some money, earn us revenue and get out safely at the end of the day. Madam Speaker, I want to believe it is a bit of negligence, bordering on incompetence at times, and that is why we are where we are today.

So, following through from your ease of doing business and our investors do not want to come here, it leads to forex shortages. Forex shortages have been plaguing us for the last couple of years, Madam Speaker. The hon. political leader spoke about going to the bank and lining up for hours to get \$100, \$200, \$300. As a businessman myself sometimes I have to wait weeks before I can get a thousand US dollars to pay for my programmers at the end of the day.

But, Madam Speaker, I noticed in the Minister's delivery, he did pat himself a bit on the back talking about there was foreign exchange stabilization. So, I do not know what stabilization that was, but I am puzzled, because when you listen to

every economist who speaks, and I noticed one of the more senior ones got a “bouffing” just two days ago. So I “doh” know if these fellas may stop talking in the public domain. But most of them would tell you that there is a currency issue, in terms of its valuation. So how do you test that, Madam Speaker? How do you test if your currency is overvalued? It is easy. Is there a black market trade for the currency? I can tell you, Madam Speaker, there is a black market trade for US currency and in some areas it is going at TT \$9 to US \$1. And I will tell you, businessmen in this country have to make up the shortfall from the \$200 they will get in the bank, they have to make up the shortfall by buying US currency at the black market rate. So in effect there is a devaluation. It is just not formalized by the Central Bank. But the fact that one exists tells you that the money has devalued. So, you have this parallel exchange rate, which is not good.

Madam Speaker, the Minister of Finance said that he has injected more and more of our foreign reserves into the economy. While that fixed the immediate problem, nothing in the budget, nothing in the last four budgets has spoken to transformation that is going to open ourselves up for more foreign direct investment, for more investment. As a matter of fact, the report of the minus \$181 million, that is capital flight. So the money is going away. But you know what is interesting? I notice a lot of these big banks and conglomerates, they are posting billion dollar after tax profits. So, clearly they are not having problems getting foreign reserves.

I see franchises opening up all over the country. I see Hard Rock Cafe, which is a good thing. I have been to it a few times in the US on vacation. But these franchises cost a hundred thousand US a month, whether you sell \$1 or not. Where are they going to get forex from? If we want them to continue the investment here, where are they going to get the forex from? And I am saying the policy decisions of this Government have not allowed for that, the strengthening of our FDI

capacity.

Madam Speaker, I want to touch on an issue concerning the NIB, and the NIB is connected to this in a very peculiar way. A lot of the money that the NIB gets sits in pension funds. These are pension funds for citizens of the country. But because of the deflated way our economy is running, their investments in other companies, because they invest our insurance money, is very, very weak. And there was a report in 2013, that says that, or it claimed that if there was no strengthening in the fund, in the strengthening of the fund's ability to sustain itself, then 2019 may be a year that the NIB may have had to start selling assets. Now, I do not think that has happened but the risk is still there.

Madam Speaker, the report says, and I mean, if this is a 2013 report, I could imagine what it is today in 2019. So, interest rates is an issue that we need to address in this country, because your pension fund is very critical for retirees, even for us who are contributing. And if we do not address the issue of the NIB—and clearly this year 2019, there was nothing said about it in the budget presentation.

So, Madam Speaker, just as with the forex crisis, the Government seems very contented to knock this issue down the road, one colleague of mine says, you know, it is a political strategy when you know you are going out of government, you set landmines for the next one. So when the next one comes in, you will deal with that, whatever is the consequences and I have a problem with that. We should be fixing these things now rather than later. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker, the issue of the VAT refund bonds is something that has made quite a stir amongst the business community. And there has been mixed reactions, but when combined with forex, NIS, the cost of doing business and now your VAT return is going to be given to you in a bond at 1.5 per cent interest, businesses are pushing back. Because the conversation that you can take your bond to the bank

and take a loan on it, well, that is fine. But this is your money. This is your money, and now you have to go to the bank to get cash to put back into my working capital. It is going to cost me 6 per cent more. “So, yuh give meh back meh own money and now I have tuh pay 6 per cent tuh put it back into my working capital.” [*Desk thumping*] And when you pile that on, the issues of NIS, forex, it makes business harder.

Madam Speaker, I want to just quote what the President of the Manufacturers’ Association, Ms. Franka Costelloe, told the *Trinidad Newsday* about this issue about the VAT bond, and I quote—what is this bond? It:

“...might do is appease the big, international companies”—and they may—
“...take the 1.5 per cent (annual interest rate), but the people this is going to hurt are the small and medium-sized enterprises.”

This is not me saying this. This is not the Member for Siparia. This is the President of the Manufacturers’ Association. And I go on. I quote Ms. Costelloe again:

“What I’m saying is this is going to intensify the problem even more, this collateral bond is an asset that you can go and borrow on, now you’re adding a six per cent so this address to VAT refunds...”—and it is going to increase—“...our cost of doing business.”

Madam Speaker, all businesses, most of them, we are in an era of low margins to stay afloat. Businesses have been cutting. They have been edging. They have been trying not to let go staff, a lot of small businesses, because they understand the few staff members that you have, they have families, they have families that depend on them, and as business they try to cut, cut, cut, cut in all different areas. And now the businesses that require this VAT, this is your working capital, it is now going to cost you 6 per cent just to get that cash back into the system, Ms.

Castelloe sees that this is an issue that has been resolved.

8.00p.m.

Madam Speaker, funny enough the TTMA had put forward a suggestion to the Minister of Finance and perhaps I can remind him or what that suggestion was, where they recommended this in solving the issue of the VAT refunds without having to put cash out. On Wednesday 26th of September, 2018 on a CNC3 report, Mr. Alcazar, he suggested to the Government that if you remove the VAT on imported goods, on imported raw material, anything that is coming in for the manufacturers you can offset the VAT against that VAT coming in. So in that way it eases up the cash flow for the manufacturers to work. They also suggested that there be no property tax as well on plant and capital machinery. I do not know if the Minister had responded or if there was any type of conversation on that.

Madam Speaker, so we have this issue there with your forex, your NIB, your VAT refunds. I want to talk very quickly about something called the Caribbean Basin Trade Partnership Act. Now it is a little boring, but you know what it does, it allows \$500 million worth of goods and services preferential access to the United States. But, you know, Madam Speaker, that has withered down to about \$50 million and we are at risk right now, but that agreement is coming up for renewal in 2020. But what is worrying, Madam Speaker, is that there is this positioning of Port of Spain against Washington in the conversation that happens in the public domain sometimes and if anything happens to that trade agreement that will be a serious body blow to the manufacturers of this country, Madam Speaker. I have not heard the Minister of Trade and Industry speak anything about that and I hope if the Minister speaks at some point in time in this debate, the hon. Minister can give us an update of what is the status with that CBI Agreement.

Madam Speaker, the president of AMCHAM, Patricia Ghany, had a comment

on that as well and I quote:

We—“must make a greater effort to become investor-friendly and improve its ease of doing business if it is to capitalise on the strategy set out by the United States, its largest trade partner, to promote investment in the western hemisphere.”

What she is telling us, Madam Speaker, is that if we do not get our house in order to capitalize on that preferential market then we will be in for a lot of problem.

Madam Speaker, there is a 2019/2023 trade policy document that has been published by the Ministry of Trade and Industry, and I had a good read of it over the weekend. And again, the technocrats in the Ministry did a fantastic job in outlining what needs to be done, and I know although this is a 2019 document, the research for this has to be two or three years old. So somewhere along the line I am of the view that these technical officers would have been having conversations with the Minister in terms of assisting the hon. Minister in determining what is the Government's policy to address some of the issues of trade. But would you believe, Madam Speaker, nothing in this document is reflective of any of the last three budgets that we have had. So I am amazed that this document is out and even this 2019/2020 budget has nothing reflective of this document.

Madam Speaker, let me just share a couple numbers to prove that nothing has happened in the three years. They has spoken about an economic turnaround, Minister of Trade and Industry at a meeting the other day said that, you know, the economy has turned around. But listen to this, Madam Speaker, exports have dropped from our 2015 numbers of \$68 billion down to 63. But, you know what is interesting in that number, Madam Speaker, the non-energy exports have remained flat. In 2015 it was \$38 billion, in 2016 it is 33, in 2017 it is 30, in 2018 it is projected, well the timing of this report—as a matter fact this report, this document

is from the 2020 *Review of the Economy* by the way, Madam Speaker.

So if we have to increase our foreign reserves in a real way, it has to be in the non-energy sector, because our energy products is what is unstable so we cannot go to the bank with revenue from our energy products. It has to come out of our non-energy market. So the data, which is not my data, it is the data that the Government has produced showing for the last three years that non-energy manufacturing has remained flat. So it means that nothing in this document which I am sure would have been the conversation at a ministerial level has made anything happen

Madam Speaker, what was even more surprising in my research over this weekend, is how are we performing in terms of our export country by country? And my colleague from Tabaquite mentioned about the underutilization of our export market and I want to read a couple lines here for you. Madam Speaker, under our Trinidad and Tobago Panama Partial Scope Agreement, Trinidad and Tobago's merchandise trade with Panama it is .03 total imports, but it is .07 of total exports, not even 1 per cent is exported to Panama. Madam Speaker, Trinidad and Tobago merchandise trade with Guatemala, it is 0.3 per cent total imports, 0.1 per cent total exports. So what are we doing with these trade agreements? If we are not sending anything to these global partners that we have something is wrong, something in the policy is wrong.

Madam Speaker, we go on. Trinidad and Tobago's merchandise trade with the Dominican Republic, 1.1 per cent total imports, .4 per cent total exports.

Madam Speaker: Member for Mayaro, your original speaking time is now spent. You are entitled to ten more minutes to wind up.

Mr. R. Paray: Thank you, Madam Speaker. [*Desk thumping*] Very quickly those were the Latin American partners just very, very quickly with Columbia again 1.6

per cent total exports, with Cuba .1 per cent, Costa Rica .1 per cent exports. So we cannot be having these numbers and we are serious with our trade policy. So something in the system has failed, it is Government policy that has failed we have been reduced to less than 1 per cent with these partners that we have.

Madam Speaker, this World Trade Organization report has a simple reason for that and it say under business environment among the major concerns reported by the WEF are: a poor work ethic in the national labour force, inefficient Government bureaucracy, corruption, and crime, and theft. Trinidad and Tobago scored poorly in the World Bank categories of enforcing contracts, paying taxes and registering property. Concerns that have been expressed by major trading partners about foreign exchange shortages that delay payments to foreign firms. Lack of transparency in the public procurement, time consuming resolution of legal conflicts and shortage of skilled and unskilled labour.

So, Madam Speaker, if we are writing a budget and putting policy in place, we must address these things. Nothing in budget of '15, '16, '17, '18 has addressed these issues, and I am saying, Madam Speaker, we are going nowhere, very, very fast with these matters. I want to run through again, you know, to address these issues the hon. Member for Siparia stood here on Friday and articulated a position that details the economic transformation for us as a country going forward, and, you know, there is always the conversation "Well why allyuh did not do it before?" Madam Speaker, the circumstances have changed and I agree with some of colleagues across there, that circumstances have changed and it has. And, you know, whatever would have been done it has changed.

Madam Speaker, the hon. political leader did not get up one morning and decide to pen this document. It was a result of thousands of man-hours that have been put in place by every Member of the Opposition—[*Desk thumping*]*]*—leading

committees—[*Crosstalk*—working with several experts in the economy, experts who have an idea, a vision of how to take Trinidad and Tobago forward. We do not “bouff up” people on the papers—[*Desk thumping*]—and tell them “we ent want to hear from yuh”. We listen to them and we have come up with a strategy. And you know—[*Crosstalk*]—when the plan was put together it has come together in a very good way. Madam Speaker, there is room for fiscal and monetary changes in terms of the regime of how we operate our economy. And, I want to make sure that when there is a change in government—and I must also say that what is important about what was read out on Friday, it is our commitment, United National Congress’ commitment to the strengthening and developing of our country. And it is on *Hansard*. It was read in this Parliament and every Member seated here will stand by that, and will ensure that we deliver what we have promised [*Desk thumping*] in *Hansard* to the people of Trinidad and Tobago.

Madam Speaker, very quickly, let me just talk about some issues in my constituency of which I am absolutely proud. I know several Members opposite they have special people for me waiting in Mayaro, but the “onliest” man that could beat me in Mayaro, Madam Speaker, is the Member for Laventille West. So, I ask him to come Mayaro and give me a good challenge, because he always tells me, the honourable man that he is, that he has a good challenger for me in Mayaro. Madam Speaker, I welcome them all, I have worked hard—[*Crosstalk*]

Ms. Ramdial: “Yuh run Rambharat”.

Mr. R. Paray: Madam Speaker, I would not say that, you know, I did not run anybody. You know, the man just saw the lamb, he has not seen the lion in me and he left before. [*Laughter and desk thumping*]

Ms. Ramdial: Well said, well said.

Mr. R. Paray: Madam Speaker, we continue to have several [*Crosstalk*] issues

with our social services in the constituency. I find too many people—[*Continuous crosstalk*]

Madam Speaker: Member for Mayaro, I do not know what it is today. [*Laughter*]
But I will ask you all to keep order so I can hear. Thank you.

Mr. R. Paray: Thank you, Madam Speaker. [*Member for Laventille West stands*]
You had your turn, you had your turn.

Ms. Ramdial: Just a few minutes again.

Mr. R. Paray: But Mayaro will welcome you. Madam Speaker, yes, social services, I find there has been an upswing in the amount of people that are coming to my office with the complaint that they are being tossed out of the social services system because of this new means test of \$1439. What I think that is happening is that it is based on a measurement of the entire family, just not one person. And there are instances where you have people with disabled children, you know, one spouse unable to work, children in school. And when they got their grants shut down because one person is working. In one particular case I have a lady who has cancer, she had half of her tongue removed and she was getting a grant in terms of a nutrition grant and some assistance, but because the husband drives the cesspool truck for the regional corporation the grants were stopped, and her medication alone, you know, costs quite a bit.

So I do not know if there is some policy in place. There is one who came and said that she was on disability grant for a few years and she has started to get, she is entitled to get old age pension very soon that grand has stopped, but what is strange is that they are asking her to pay it back. I do not know why, I do not know the specifics, I have written the social welfare office asking for specifics why this person is being asked and instead of getting the \$3,000 she is getting \$2,000 and they plan to take back \$1,000 a month. So I do not know why, I have asked

for that, I hope that is not government policy. That would be a bad policy.

Madam Speaker, I have some public facilities in Rio Claro that I consistently have to be begging for help for to cut simple things like the grasses. The other day I had to make a national appeal to have the grass in the Manzanilla route cut, grass will grow, grass will grow, but it is proven to be a danger for the motoring public, especially coconut in this rainy season. I would ask that the Minister put things in place to continuously cut and have it in a safe way. My public libraries in Mayaro, in Rio Claro especially, I have had to pay personally to have the grass cut at one point in time at the Rio Claro public library because I was afraid, I was invited to a function, I was afraid to turn up with that grass and then they would blame me for it. So I send somebody to cut it.

Hon. Member: Talk to Ram.

Mr. R. Paray: Madam Speaker, our sports facility, indoor sporting facility in Mayaro, again it is turning into the Mayaro zoo. Grass is growing all over it at the side. Again, lack of maintenance, we keep asking and—[*Crosstalk*]

Madam Speaker: Order.

Mr. R. Paray: You know there must be systems in place to manage these facilities. Mayaro is a sporting community heavily involved in cricket, in football, now we have gymnastics, we have a whole suite of sporting activities. And because the ground and so on is not in a good state, it is causing some problems for our constituents, Madam Speaker.

Well the life long, age long issue of agricultural access roads. I pray that one day we will be blessed like the THA and get 20, 30, \$40 million every year for access roads, all right. But nothing is happening in Mayaro in terms of access roads. Our farmers are quarreling every day. And the biggest item, Madam Speaker, our water issues. We are still having tremendous water issues right here

in this House today, I got a message from a lady that there is two weeks no water in Union Village. I have asked the Minister, understanding the issues with Navet Dam and so on, can we get some more trucks. If we can facilitate our consumers with trucks that would help. All I would say on that matter is that between 2010 and 2015 we literally banished barrels from the side of the road in Mayaro, today barrels have returned.

Madam Speaker, I want to thank you for the opportunity and for allowing me to share my view ideas on this budget. Thank you very much. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Esmond Forde (*Tunapuna*): [*Desk thumping*] Thank you, Madam Speaker, for allowing me to enter this debate today. And Member for Mayaro “y’all doh have a corporation in Mayaro?”

Mr. Paray: Yeah. But they are not responsible for the—

Madam Speaker: Member, Member the discourse is with—

Mr. E. Forde: Sorry, Madam, just needed to ask that question. Okay, before I start my points, Madam Speaker, I just want to refer to a couple comments made by my colleague on the other side for Mayaro, you know, where he started off his discourse stating that “the Government is now on the back foot”. And you know he just made the statement out of nothing. He did not go on to give any explanation and all I would say is that there is no relevance, right. “What foot are you all standing on at this time?” What foot?

Hon. Member: They are on their knees.

Mr. E. Forde: What foot are you all standing on, probably as you say on their knees.

Mr. Lee: Change is coming.

Mr. E. Forde: He spoke about our hon. Prime Minister calling the local government elections, keep in mind it is constitutionally due, and it is

constitutionally due, and he has the right to call the local government elections. He is an honourable man; he has kept his word. “I does always mention it”.

Hon. Member: Nothing important is happening.

Mr. E. Forde: Three months, how much they had?—how much extension.

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: Yeah, three months, 14 days and about 15 hours.

Mr. E. Forde: Three months and 14 days. So we have called it constitutionally due. You also made mention of the Opposition Leader, Member for Siparia, having some innovative ideas in her budget presentation, but they are unrealistic plans. A \$20 minimum wage? Did you all analysis what it will cost for a \$20 minimum wage.

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: They just saying that.

Mr. E. Forde: You just saying it, you know what I mean, she just saying it. And to come to say, and that is the support you all want to give, waste of time. The Treasury cannot entertain a \$20 minimum wage at this time. He spoke about the Heritage and Stabilisation Fund and we heard our hon. Minister of Finance saying it is in a better position today at how much, \$6 billion, Mr. Minister?

Mr. Imbert: 6.25.

Mr. E. Forde: Madam Speaker, 6.25 billion even after taking two drawdowns, with that astute leadership, astute leadership. [*Desk thumping*] The main point, Toco port in 2000, I think that is 19 years ago, 19 years ago. So all I would ask the Member for Mayaro, oh he left, “shocks, he gone”. No, but the question I wanted to ask him is that was a port needed then? And the other question is, is the port needed now?

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: Yes.

Mr. E. Forde: Is the port needed now? Right. So whether on 20th of July, 2000, our hon. Prime Minister would have made that statement he fully well knew what

he was saying then and if he has changed his mind now, he fully knows why he has changed his mind. The port is needed now in 2019.

He also spoke about poor policy decisions by our Minister of Finance and our Government. And I just want to highlight quickly, all right. Poor policy decisions; one, we have not gone to the IMF, we continue to govern ourselves here in Trinidad and Tobago. There has been no TT to US devaluation. Expenditure has been cut by \$10billion, \$10 billion. The Government is operating in a high degree of fiscal responsibility and accountability and our Gross Domestic Product, GDP, stands at 3 per cent. That is good management. [*Desk thumping*] Additionally, we are on stream without sustainable development goals and our Vision 2030 strategic plan.

The Member for Mayaro also mentioned, what?—set land mines for the incoming Government. Confession for the soul is good.

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: Yes.

Mr. E. Forde: Confession for the soul is good. [*Desk thumping*] “How much it take you all, how much year?—four years”.

Hon. Member: Yes man, yes.

Mr. E. Forde: Set land mines for the incoming Government. Confession is good for the soul. If that is what your Member for Siparia did for the incoming Government in 2015 I say no more. We on this side govern with integrity. There is no need to set any mines for any government. [*Desk thumping*] And added to that we will be here for the next how much, 15 years?

Hon. Member: Fifty more.

Mr. E. Forde: So much? All right 50 years, 50 years. Oh gosh after all. Right. So those were just some points I wanted to just rebut with regard to the Member for Mayaro and before I now get into my discourse.

We talk about “Stability | Strength | Growth” which represents another step in our *Vision 2030* and our strategic vision of the development of Trinidad and Tobago as a modern, progressive, advancing nation. It was also heartened to hear the Minister mention that our sustainable development goals with a focus on attempting to alleviate poverty, provide housing and quality education, reduce gender inequality, and provide clean energy, and moving towards decent work for all. Madam Speaker, the 2020 Budget highlights and give further light to putting people at the centre of our development here in Trinidad and Tobago. It also speaks about improving the life of each individual, the quality of life of each individual. It speaks and also supports to such pertinent areas, and we quote from the Budget Statement:

The—“united, resilient, productive, innovative”—and disciplined—“and prosperous nation;

The family as the foundation of the society contributes to its growth, development and stability;”

A—“fun-loving society comprising healthy, happy and well-educated people...

Every Citizen in Trinidad and Tobago is valued and has equal opportunities to achieve his/her fullest potential;”

It speaks about—“self-reliance, respect, tolerance, equality, inclusion”—most important—“integrity”—as the bed rock of our society, integrity as the bed rock of our society.

“Our economy supports decent work for all and is conducive to entrepreneurship and innovation;

All citizens”—must—“enjoy a high quality of life...quality health care is available to all...”

Just this morning we would have heard the Minister of Health expounding on what has been done with regard to his Ministry at the Ministry of Health.

We talk about a—“safe, peaceful and environmentally friendly communities...”—and that:

“All citizens are assured of a sound, relevant education system tailored to meet the human resource needs of a modern, progressive...advancing nation;”

We talk about the—“optimum use is made of all the resources of the nation, with due regard to environmental sustainability and making greater use of renewable resources while ensuring that we enjoy water, food and energy security;

...respect for the rule of law and human rights...promotion of the principles of democracy...confidence in our public institutions;”—and most important—“diversity and creativity of all its people are valued and nurtured.”

Madam Speaker, this budget, as any other, is a proposal for spending based on one's income to achieve rational attainment and goals. In this regard, I want to applaud the hon. Minister of Finance in his pursuit of the implementation of the property tax and the Revenue Authority Act of Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*] Madam Speaker, in the case of the property tax, the Minister has already, through imperial evidence, shown that the vast majority of the population stand ready and willing to accept and partake in this implementation. Most countries of the world participate in a property tax of some sort in order to ensure some sort of revenue for the economy.

They have already noted the tremendous benefits to be derived by this implementation apart from the revenue generation of a considerable sum ranging

between TT .5 to TT \$.75billion as revenue that can be derived from the property tax. These benefits range from land tenure and tenancy, security for the individual, easier and less costly transfers when coming to ownership, a better and more transparent Land Registry, and real estate market, as well as for a more efficient and effective land usage, just to name a few.

Madam Speaker, the implementation of this Act is an upgrade of the legal framework which have been presented to assist in the financing of cities, boroughs, and regional corporations. Again with the coming of the local government reform Bill we know of the funding that will be allocated for the various cities, municipalities, and corporations in order to assist with development programmes within the various corporations. It will allow our nation to keep pace with developed countries and achieve our goal of a strong sustainable economy.

Madam Speaker, the history of this property tax and its legacy afford parents—our foreparents always spoke for the usage of the funds generated by the local communities to be applied locally. The Act and its application does not deviate from this principle. Madam Speaker, here again is another aspect of this Government being people centred, community driven, enabling activity. [*Desk thumping*] The proper and timely implementation of this Act would allow us to remove infrequent, but still annoying spectacle of the local government bodies complaining of no available funds for critical and urgent works. So in a nutshell the property tax will be utilized for the funding of programmes within the various municipalities throughout our country.

A similar point that can be made with regard to the property tax is the fact that in every country in the world has some form of property tax. This is how municipal agencies like our regional corporations get a sturdy source of income. To say that we do not want property tax is to say that we do not want our corporation to work

for us.

No property tax, the corporations will not be able to facilitate, because not all funding can be provided by central government [*Desk thumping*] in order for the 14 municipals to operate on a daily basis. [*Desk thumping*]

8.30 p.m.

Coming out from the local government network, being a councillor for five years, I can tell you distinctly, there is need for improvement. The reform, as we all know, is before Parliament. It is before a joint select committee, a special joint select committee, and it will be forthcoming very soon. What is more, is that the percentage of the tax is usually also small. It is not to say that individuals will have to pay exorbitant fees as the Minister of Finance would have explained, and we do not need to ensure that, you know, we will be pressured in order to comply with this particular aspect.

Madam Speaker, every housewife prior to 2000 knew that you should not patch or as we use the word—you know, our mom used to say “darn”. You know, like when you have a tear, a tear on your pants—or used garment with new fabric. So you do not use—you have an old patch, but you are using a new piece of cloth in order to do the darn, since it will quickly fray at the point of patching.

Madam Speaker, the focus of this Government on the implementation of the Revenue Authority Act is well directed and appears to be based on three main pillars. One, it is based on common sense. And, as I just mentioned with regard to that particular illustration, in the case just identified, that you do not put—let say, for instance, if we go to the *Bible*, you do not put new wine in old wine skins. It does not work. It definitely will not work.

We could look at, secondly, the empirical data. Data have shown that the present operational setup presents multiple opportunities for leakages which have been

estimated between \$8 billion to \$15 billion per year, a lot of much needed money for our economy. As said by the Finance Minister, leakages continue to exist, so we need to ensure that we put things in place to ensure that the Revenue Authority takes shape, take form, and we act accordingly to ensure that the moneys that we deserve continue to come to our economy. And, thirdly, the technical rationale involved.

The current operating structures continue to do the best that they can but, regrettably, was configured to operate in a different economic and trade environment. Moreover, it appears to lack critical, responsive mechanisms. Madam Speaker, the current environment, with its daily economic mutations, both locally and internationally, is rendering adequate responsiveness and there is need for a fit-for-purpose structure with better responsiveness now and in the future. The Revenue Authority, as mentioned by our Minister of Finance is needed and, again, we are going forward with regard to the implementation. The Property Tax and Revenue Authority Acts will certainly redound to the benefit, not only of our nation, but it will encompass all constituencies within Trinidad and Tobago.

Madam Speaker, in the evolution of our environment, together with the impact of climate change, the content of our vocabulary is growing by leaps and bounds. Having previously dealt with revenue generation and collection, I now turn my focus on the area of usage, desilting and related activities—yes, desilting, a critical term in our vocabulary in Trinidad and Tobago these days. Madam Speaker, the residents of the Tunapuna constituency congratulate the Minister and the Ministry of Works and Transport on their desilting programme [*Desk thumping*] which though not complete and continuing, has resulted in reduced flooding in the area, as well as the fast run off in areas where it did occur.

In the Tunapuna constituency, the three main rivers and watercourses continue to

be desilted on a yearly basis in order to minimize flooding within the particular areas. The Maracas/St. Joseph and Tacarigua are among the areas earmarked for continued work. Madam Speaker, we recognized that there are some areas with structural contributors to the problem. In such cases, these have been identified and brought to the relevant agencies for remedial action.

With regard to flood alleviation, we have to point out the great success in the flood preparations for the year so far. The Minister of Finance referred to the extensive desilting work that was carried out. While we will never be able to stave off all flooding that comes our way, we can certainly do our best to control any potential greater flooding. This is what the desilting programme is about, doing our best to minimize flooding within our country. It is for us, as individuals, to make matters worse by our littering behaviour. Dumping debris, waste, garbage and what else ever into our rivers and watercourses should be a thing of the past, and this is greatly anticipated.

The Government must, therefore, be highly commended for the decision about abolishing Styrofoam and single-use plastics in 2020. [*Desk thumping*] Styrofoam and single-use plastics, a thing of the past, come 2020. I must commend the Government for that initiative—our Government for that initiative. [*Desk thumping*] The protection of our environment is everybody's business and the leadership shown by our hon. Prime Minister, Dr. Keith Rowley, is good for our country. That is the start that we need to further stave off to safe our environment. Madam Speaker, this brings us to the vexing issue faced by the community of the Caura Valley. Madam Speaker, this is an area which generates potable water for some 25,000 persons in Tunapuna and its environs. The Caura Valley also allows persons to enjoy the river lime experience in a generally safe, secure and eco-friendly environment. However, reports show that many of our visitors display

poor waste and litter management practices and responsibilities. The Tunapuna/Piarco Regional Corporation and the CEPEP company have attempted, to the best of their ability, to respond to the extensive littering in our pristine Caura Valley, along with other various non-governmental organizations, NGOs, who offer great assistance in order to ensure that the valley remains clean.

Therefore, Madam Speaker, I am certain that residents of Caura Valley and some of the areas where regular visitors would join with me in applauding the Government's decision, again, as I said just now, abolishing Styrofoam and single-use plastics, which are the main little culprits at this location. Madam Speaker, the protection of the environment is everybody's business and the leadership shown by the Government is good for the country and should be applauded. [*Desk thumping*]

In the case of Tunapuna and environs, with its large and diverse population, the acquisition—one second. Madam Speaker, the Ministry of Works and Transport appears to be seeing the whole big picture and their bold thrust to improve the national transportation system by way of the already completed purchase of some 43 buses over the 2018/2019 period, and an anticipated further purchase of some 300 buses more to augment and strengthen our public transportation network; 300 buses in the 2020 period. In the case of Tunapuna and environs, with its large and diverse population, the acquisition of these buses will certainly improve the population's mobility, while reducing transport cost of these communities. These include large numbers of students, both residents and transient, differently-abled persons, the elderly and the employed. This would also engender better and more community and family unit building and productivity enhancement.

As we are fully aware, Madam Speaker, a large percentage of our young people utilize the Public Transport Service Corporation, more in particular, school

children. The large population share the table with the elderly. A right to education to a child is of paramount importance, which the Government treats as a priority. This is a step forward as the nation's future will be easily accommodated on these buses to and from school.

Another group within the young community that faces great challenges, separate and apart from traversing, is the special needs group which is heavily populated with young children and adolescents. They were singled out and specially catered for within this budget. This initiative will see a significant decrease in difficulties of commuting from home to school and even to social gatherings for the special needs children. The allocation of 20-plus buses will see major benefits in the transportation network, and not only for the youth and school children, but among the whole public transportation users in Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker, the fact that the budget is people centred, community driven, is time and time again demonstrated by the initiatives and activities outlined in this document. The increase in the minimum wage to \$17.50 per hour, translates into \$100 per 40-hour work week, \$17.50 minimum wage increase from 2020. This is a fantastic development and one that should give relief to many people. The increase will help the workers and it is not too much of a burden for the businesses that have to make the payment. [*Desk thumping*] Additionally, it is known and a generally accepted fact that many workers in this category, their income is used mainly as disposal income. It is almost a win-win arrangement and situation, Madam Speaker.

Another initiative of this Government, the decision to institute a pension for the Government daily-paid workers. This has been on the books for many years, a Government daily-paid pension. It is really a brilliant idea. This is something these workers have been requesting for a very long time and, Madam Speaker, I

am sure this will be warmly welcomed, keeping in mind that there is life after retirement as a Government daily-paid worker in Trinidad and Tobago. I must thank our hon. Prime Minister and the Minister of Finance for the implementation of this aspect in our budget. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker, while dealing with some of the workers' issues and initiatives of this budget, it will be remiss of me if the opportunity is not taken to congratulate Patriotic OWTU [*Desk thumping*] on their selection as the preferred bidder for the Petrotrin Pointe-a-Pierre refinery assets. [*Desk thumping*] Madam Speaker, when the refinery was acquired by the Government of Trinidad and Tobago from Texaco, I was a little fellow or a little boy, as they would say. However, it was an initiative of Mr. George Weekes, whose approach to an agreement with Dr. Eric Williams for the Trinidad and Tobago Government to acquire these assets. One thing I recall is that of President General Weekes speaking and I quote:

The workers must control the commanding heights of the economy.

You remember that, Minister?

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: Yeah.

Mr. E. Forde: Lovely. I was a little boy then. [*Laughter*]

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: I was a little boy—[*Laughter*] I was a little girl. [*Laughter*]

Mr. E. Forde: This development is surely a giant step for the OWTU achieving the vision of its leadership. Here we have one of the most important assets of our country at stake, and the OWTU has no support from those on the other side, and even some of our local businesses and chambers of our country. It is interesting to know the reason or reasons.

Madam Speaker, while there are many areas for congratulations and comment in this budget, I wish only to comment on a few other areas due to their

overwhelming impact on the constituency of Tunapuna. Madam Speaker, Tunapuna and a small adjacent area of the St. Augustine and St. Joseph constituencies are regarded as the university city of Trinidad and Tobago. Madam Speaker, the constituency of Tunapuna is the home of some 52 and counting academic institutions, ranging from Early Childhood Care Centres, primary schools and secondary schools to tertiary institutions, such as The University of the West Indies in St. Augustine and the Caribbean Union College in the Maracas/St. Joseph area.

Madam Speaker, this Government has always seen education as pivotal to the people-centred development and an improved quality of life. This Government, Madam Speaker, in keeping with its 2030 Vision and constituent teams have continued to provide adequate resource to this this sector with it receiving over \$6 billion—the Ministry of Education—in the fiscal year 2020. Tunapuna recognizes the opportunities to be gained by the large footprint of this sector, and welcome the initiative and expansion of training in the areas of entrepreneurship and innovation. Ingredients necessary are needed to ensure that our 2030 vision of a modern, progressive, technologically-advancing nation is achieved.

Investing holistically into the education system, apart from opening more buildings is crucial. We are now about to see the completion and commission of 27 schools to cater for the growing population of learners in Trinidad and Tobago. Education for all secures the future of any nation. As a people, we are privileged enough to have free education when compared with the remainder of the world. The ability, Madam Speaker, to study without financial burdens. This Government also extends world class and quality infrastructure and teachers and lecturers to facilitate the classes and courses in our education system.

Madam Speaker, linked to the initiative, the proposed implantation of child day

care facilities is a clear statement of support by this Government to the young working mothers of this nation—child day care facilities [*Desk thumping*]*—*and it is a clear recognition of the value, their reproduction and productive roles in moving our society forward. Mothers can now work in more relaxed environments knowing their young children are catered for.

Madam Speaker, Tunapuna has experienced every possible cycle of the housing sector. Madam Speaker, we were one of the first areas on the East-West Corridor if not, the nation, to experience sustained large-scale housing development by private developers. These private developments include: Mountain View Gardens, Poolside I and Poolside II. We have the Trincity area and also the Paradise Gardens which caters for over 17,000 residents, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker, there is little residential building space available within the Tunapuna constituency for HDC housing. However, the demand for housing is growing. This demand is fuelled by the attainment of adulthood by the children of the previous mentioned developments and others. Their counterparts of the traditional housing areas of this district and the general attractiveness of the area. Given the previously described scenario, many of my Tunapuna constituents, appreciate this Government's statement of intent to deliver 3,000 homes annually through the Housing Development Corporation coupled with the anticipated start up and completion of the HDC Curepe and Bon Air South housing projects which are close within proximity to my Tunapuna constituents.

Madam Speaker, this budget speaks to and deals with the issues and constraints for the provision of low to middle-income housing units, not only by the HDC, but also those of the private sector. The solutions and remedies being offered include the following measures, Madam Speaker:

1. Resumption of previously stalled housing projects as identified by the

Minister of Housing and Urban Development. [*Desk thumping*]

2. An accelerated housing bonds programme that will continue to generate a consistent flow of new housing units. [*Desk thumping*]
Bonds are now being provided to assist. [*Desk thumping*]
3. Aided self-help housing programmes currently underway with qualified individuals now preparing to construct their own homes on residential serviced lots developed by HDC. And the housing Minister would have expounded on that earlier.
4. Housing and village improvement programmes and affordable and high-quality housing initiative is ongoing with the programme being extended to over 100 families to date, residing in Sangre Grande, Mourga, St. Joseph, and Marabella and soon to come in Tunapuna.

Because as MP for the area, I am in communication with the Land Settlement Agency in order to ensure that Tunapuna constituents benefit from this proposal.

We can also speak about private/public partnership, attracting both local and foreign investors to achieve our housing mandate and bringing to the industry expertise, technology and finance. Construction is actively in progress at five housing sites as I speak. [*Desk thumping*]

The proposal to have small builders and contractors to construct houses has identified. This is a laudable move by our Government of Trinidad and Tobago. Again, small builders and contractors now can be given the opportunity to construct houses in order to ensure that we can meet the demands, and also to ensure that business continue to operate within the community. Madam Speaker, this Government has also prepared funding initiatives to assist persons in saving towards the acquisition of their homes, whether it be private or public sector arrangements, thereby ensuring pathways that are available to achieve affordable

housing for all in Trinidad and Tobago.

Madam Speaker, I will touch on the Ministry of Sport. For many years, if a young person wanted to be recognized in his or her particular sporting discipline, he or she would most likely have to be playing football, cricket, boxing or running. Now, as the Government sturdily injects resources over the years, young people came forward showing off diverse sets of sporting activities. For example, we have individuals now in swimming, javelin, shot put, volley ball, sailing and even aquatic sports. This just goes to show that Trinidad and Tobago has a diverse group of young people that is not talented in any one popular sporting discipline only, but other ranges of Olympic and recognized sports. As the Member of Parliament for Tunapuna, I look forward to our sport Minister's initiatives and incentives to develop our sporting and athletic talents in Tunapuna and also Trinidad and Tobago.

Madam Speaker, as a Member of this honourable House, I have no reservation in stating that this Government has shown that for the past four years, it was acting with a high degree of fiscal accountability and responsibility. Madam Speaker, given the massive collapse in the country's revenues at its inception of office, the Government was able to cut expenditure by close to TT \$10 billion. I must compliment the Minister of Finance for his astute management [*Desk thumping*] without putting the economy in a tailspin or going to the International Monetary Fund, the IMF.

Now, although this is the last budget before elections, this Government has managed to keep the fiscal deficit within manageable proportions—approximately 3 per cent of the gross domestic product, GDP—this is something this Government should be given a lot of credit for over the period 2015 to 2019. I must say congratulations to our Minister of Finance, [*Desk thumping*] our Minister of

Planning and Development and also our hon. Prime Minister, Dr. Keith Christopher Rowley.

Madam Speaker, at this time, I would like to pay particular attention to some of the benefits that my Tunapuna constituency would have gained within the last year with regard to the Ministry of Work and Transport in drainage. The desilting of the three major rivers and watercourses in the constituency of Tunapuna. We can identify new major drainage infrastructure at Smart Street in St. Augustine; at McCarthy Street in St. Augustine; at Bamboo Trace Tunapuna; St. John Road, St. Augustine; Acono Junction, Maracas; Richard Street in Tacarigua; Maracas Royal Road, at La Seiva Village and the Eastern Main Road in Tunapuna by Macoya Road.

Additionally, for the Ministry of Works and Transport, we can refer to URP employment opportunities in the Tunapuna constituency which continues to be ongoing with small construction services and maintenance. And as mentioned by the Minister of Finance, URP will be benefiting with a 15 per cent salary increase from December 01, 2019. [*Desk thumping*] Thank you, Mr. Minister. [*Desk thumping*] URP, 15 per cent, salary increase from December 01, 2019.

Under the Ministry of Works and Transport, again, we can identify the work of the Traffic Wardens within the Tunapuna constituency, a very highly trafficked and congested area. So we have Traffic Wardens along with the Trinidad and Tobago Police Service on a daily basis assisting with the traffic regulations along the Eastern Main Road and at major intersections throughout the Tunapuna constituency to ensure smoother traffic flow and to minimize traffic congestion. Again, more employment opportunities for low-income earners within the Tunapuna constituency.

I now turn to agriculture. The removal of all taxes on all inputs within the

agricultural sector. So farmers within my area—farmers of the Caura Valley, farmers in the Maracas Valley and also Farmers from the Upper Maingot Road Tunapuna area will benefit greatly from these tax exemptions. So, again, hats off to the Minister of Finance and the Minister of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries for these proposals. However, the Minister of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries will need to monitor and keep track of the impact of output growth now in this particular sector.

We can go to the Ministry of Community Development, Culture and the Arts, the benefits, numerous. And when I say “numerous”, numerous funding applications from the Self Help Commission for materials for families, for house upkeep, refurbishment and renovations. Again, thank you, from the members of my Tunapuna constituency to the Self Help Commission. Looking forward for the two community centres within my area that need refurbishing and renovation. And, again, we are looking at the Caura Road, Lower El Dorado Community Centre and the La Seiva Village, Maracas Centre in order to seek refurbishment. I already have two other community centres which are new, which is the Upper El Dorado Community Centre and the Tunapuna Community Centre which was renovated two years ago.

We can now look to the Ministry of Sport sponsorship of the Tunapuna Community Football for the 2019 season, for all the residents of the Tunapuna community, and it includes teams from the Maracas to the Tacarigua area—a Tunapuna community league in order to ensure that we cater for the youths of the community—likewise, individual funding for sporting teams and individuals within the community in order to aid sporting personalities and clubs and teams within the Tunapuna constituency.

I now go to the Ministry of Rural Development and Local Government, pavilion to be constructed in the Tunapuna community for 2020. Look forward, again, to the continued work being done by the Tunapuna/Piarco Regional Corporation under the chairmanship of Councillor Paul Leacock as they continue to perform yeoman's work and service in all aspects of the community in Tunapuna and the region.

9.00p.m.

Thanks to the councillors, technical staff and administrative teams for the continued work within the region of Tunapuna. Again, congratulations to the CEPEP teams that operate within the Tunapuna constituency. [*Desk thumping*] You all also will be getting an increase in salary, an increase of 15 per cent, come December 01, 2019. They continue to do great service to all within the Tunapuna constituency. The Ministry of Education, not forgetting them also, OJT benefits, 10 per cent increase in the stipend to all OJTs and an additional 8,000. And I am hoping that the Tunapuna constituency will get its fair share of that 8,000 additional OJTs from among our young school and university leavers in Trinidad and Tobago.

Employment opportunities for all. [*Interruption*] But we are right here with the St. Mary's home. You are taking care of the St. Mary's home for me, Minister of Gender. Sorry, Madam Speaker. Experience will be gained for the World of Work in desired fields and professions. Social and economic needs to be derived among these young people, OJTs for the future. And as I am on the Minister of Gender and Child Affairs, thank you for the continued service and development of the St. Mary's Children Home in Tacarigua. You continue to provide that service, financially and otherwise, to ensure that the children are taken care at this St. Mary's home in Tacarigua, which is in the heart of the Tunapuna constituency.

To the Minister of Public Utilities, again, the Tunapuna constituency is looking forward to receiving their bulb replacement. [*Desk thumping*] They are looking forward—[*Interruption*] No, we are looking forward, you know. This is an MP that is in contact with its constituents, and we are looking forward to our bulbs. A couple of them have identified to me that prior to the Minister coming up with the brilliant idea, and the Minister of Public Utilities, some persons have already, prior to it being announced, made their changes and they have seen a reduction in their electricity bill. [*Desk thumping*] So again, we look forward to our bulbs. [*Crosstalk*]

Hon. Member: A bright idea.

Mr. E. Forde: You all could refuse “y’all one”, right? Bright idea.

Hon. Member: A bright idea.

Mr. E. Forde: And as we are on T&TEC, again, numerous first-time new installations of street lights in certain areas that were needed of street lighting for the first time. So again, from a safety point of view and from a point of view of ensuring that the community is well serviced, we have some street lights in certain areas like Achong Trace in Tunapuna, Ragbir Street in St. Augustine, Upper Balthazar Street, Second Trace, First Trace, and those are things that are being put in place to ensure that Tunapuna continues to play its role in the development of Trinidad and Tobago.

Madam Speaker, on this note once again, my congratulations are extended to the Minister of Finance and his team at the Ministry, and all other contributing agencies in the preparation and delivery of this budget 2020. To the Minister of Planning and Development, and to our beloved hon. Prime Minister, Dr. Keith Rowley, who has sought to continue us along the path to—

Madam Speaker: Member, your original time is now spent. You are entitled to

Appropriation (Financial Year 2020 Bill, 2019 (cont'd)
Mr. E. Forde (cont'd)

2019.10.14

10 more minutes to wrap up.

Mr. E. Forde: Thank you.

Madam Speaker: Okay, you may proceed.

Mr. E. Forde: Thank you. [*Desk thumping*] And our hon. Prime Minister, Dr. Keith Rowley, who has sought to continue us along the path to sustainable development guided by our *Vision 2030* strategic plan.

Madam Speaker, I would like to thank you for the opportunity provided to have participated in this budget 2020 debate. Special thanks to all my 27,000-plus Tunapuna constituents and may God continue to bless our nation and our hon. Prime Minister. I thank you. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker: Leader of the House.

ADJOURNMENT

The Minister of Planning and Development (Hon. Camille Robinson-Regis):

Thank you, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, I beg to move that the House do now adjourn to Tuesday, the 15th day of October, 2019, at 10.00a.m.

Question put and agreed to.

House adjourned accordingly.

Adjourned at 9.04 p.m.