

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES*Wednesday, October 14, 2020*

The House met at 1.30 p.m.

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

1. Land Acquisition (Requisition) Order, 2018. [*The Attorney General (Hon. Faris Al-Rawi)*]
2. Land Acquisition (Requisition) Order, 2018. [*Hon. F. Al-Rawi*]
3. Tobacco Control (Amdt.) Regulations, 2019. [*The Minister of Health (Hon. Terrence Deyalsingh)*]

CANNABIS CONTROL BILL, 2020

Bill to provide for the regulatory control of the handling of cannabis for certain purposes, the establishment of the Trinidad and Tobago Cannabis Licensing Authority and connected matters [*The Attorney General*]; read the first time.

The Attorney General (Hon. Faris Al-Rawi): Madam Speaker, I beg to that in accordance with Standing Order 64(1)(c), the Cannabis Control Bill, 2020, be referred to the Joint Select Committee hereby established for its consideration and report by the 31st of December, 2020.

Question put and agreed to.

CONSTITUTION (AMDT.) (TOBAGO SELF-GOVERNMENT) BILL, 2020

Bill to amend the Constitution of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago to accord self-government to Tobago, to repeal the Tobago House of Assembly Act, Chap. 25:03 and for related matters [*The Prime Minister*]; read the first time.

The Prime Minister (Hon. Dr. Keith Rowley): Madam Speaker, I beg to move that in accordance with Standing Order 64(1)(c), the Constitution (Amdt.) (Tobago

Self-Government) Bill, 2020, be referred to the Joint Select Committee hereby established for its consideration and report by December 31, 2020.

Question put and agreed to.

**MISCELLANEOUS PROVISIONS
(LOCAL GOVERNMENT REFORM) BILL, 2020**

Bill to amend the Municipal Corporations Act, Chap. 25:04, the Burial Grounds Act, Chap. 30:50, the Cremation Act, Chap 30:51, the Advertisements Regulation Act, Chap. 30:53, the Recreation Grounds and Pastures Act, Chap. 41:01, the Highways Act, Chap. 48:01, the Dogs Act, Chap. 67:54, the Property Taxes Act, Chap. 76:04 and the Planning and Facilitation of Development Act, No. 10 of 2014 [*The Minister of Planning and Development*]; read the first time.

The Minister of Planning and Development (Hon. Camille Robinson-Regis): Madam Speaker, I beg to move that in accordance with Standing Order 64(1)(c), the Miscellaneous Provisions (Local Government Reform) Bill, 2020, be referred to the Joint Select Committee hereby established for its consideration and report by December 31, 2020.

Question put and agreed to.

REPRESENTATION OF THE PEOPLE (AMDT.) (NO. 2) BILL, 2020

Bill to amend the Representation of the People Act, Chap. 2:01 [*The Prime Minister*]; read the first time.

The Prime Minister (Hon. Dr. Keith Rowley): Thank you, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, I beg to move that in accordance with Standing Order 64(1)(c), the Representation of the People (Amdt.) (No. 2), Bill, 2020, be referred to the Joint Select Committee hereby established for its consideration and report by December 31, 2020.

Question put and agreed to.

APPROPRIATION (FINANCIAL YEAR 2021) BILL, 2020

[Fifth Day]

Order read for resuming adjourned debate on question [October 09, 2020]:

That the Bill be now read a second time.

Question again proposed.

Dr. Roodal Moonilal (*Oropouche East*): [*Desk thumping*] Thank you. Thank you very much, Madam Speaker, for the kind opportunity to join the debate on the Appropriation Bill for fiscal 2021 on what we widely believe to be, at least, the final day of debate. So, Madam Speaker, I am in an advantageous position of having heard several of my colleagues on both sides of the House articulate issues, policies and programmes and indeed critique of this fiscal package.

May I begin by congratulating all Members of this House on their recent election to the Twelfth Parliament of Republic of Trinidad and Tobago, and particularly congratulate and welcome the several MPs who are gracing these hallowed halls for the very first time, and who I can indicate have all made an excellent start to their innings in this Parliament.

May I also, Madam Speaker, take the opportunity as well and extend congratulations and commendation once again to the Leader of the Opposition for her delivery of a comprehensive reply to budget 2021, [*Desk thumping*] and to indicate that, as the Leader of the Opposition had promised on that day, speakers such as myself will indeed seek to amplify some of the policy issues raised which the leader indicated that her speakers on this side of the House would indeed detail. So that would be my perspective to do it that way but, of course, to acknowledge that this is indeed early days for the Government.

The Government of Trinidad and Tobago returning to this House with one seat less than in their previous innings, and I think that is Moruga/Tableland,

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coming back to the House with one seat less, coming back in a condition where they have to retake their guard but retake their guard to continue really an innings that they started sometime ago. That being what it is, it means therefore that several of us can raise issues and we do raise issues of governance that entail, not only in the last few weeks—the last few years, sorry, in terms of policy developments.

Several of the issues raised in the budget, as we all recognize, seek to continue certain programmes, certain policies and so on that started many years ago, in some cases many, many years ago, whether it is the waterfront project in San Fernando, the national statistical institute, hospitals in Point Fortin, Arima, the ferry—I think it is the ferry port in Toco, although I heard the Member was boasting about a ferry port but that must have been a fairy tale but those are policies and programmes that continue and this is why we will engage some discussion on that.

Madam Speaker, there are two developments of the night one must say to begin with. I want to begin with the developments of the day. One is, of course, an editorial in the *Express* newspaper of today that speaks to the Government's COVID test. And without reading at length and certainly not reading in depth all of the issues raised, the editorial of today's *Express* conclude that a lot of money has been spent, and I think the Member for Oropouche West indicated \$253 billion spent and several billion dollars spent particularly during this COVID period.

And the *Express* indicated that there is need for an audit. In fact, the *Express* editorial echoed the views of the Leader of the Opposition [*Desk thumping*] and those on this side that there is need for an audit as to where exactly this money has gone. Because when we say we spend money on COVID, what do we mean? Did

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we spend on the grants, did we spend on relief for the poor or were we just using borrowed money under the guise of COVID to really continue recurrent expenditure which we always knew was a crisis in this country for several years? Because we have argued on this side vehemently that the crisis did not start with COVID. This Government crashed the economy before COVID. [*Desk thumping*] They crashed the construction sector before COVID. They crashed the transportation sector before COVID, so it is not for us to be blaming COVID for all the ills that we see before us unfolding, some very dramatic.

Madam Speaker, in this debate yesterday I sat and listened well and my good friend, the new Minister of Public Utilities came to this House and before delivering a gallon of water more to the population, he started with a tone of arrogance about the former People's Partnership administration, and all he did so far was to deliver speech, not water.

We heard from other Ministers speaking, and I do not want to get in detail to waste my time too much, you know, on the arrogance and the sheer enormity of that arrogance but what I can tell you is arrogance also has a sell-by date, [*Desk thumping*] and that will not satisfy Trinidad and Tobago.

So, Madam Speaker, while they were boasting about WASA doing a good job, and the works doing a job, I think a road collapsed in Arouca. While the Member for Point Fortin was on his legs, poor fellow, a market blew away in Point Fortin. So I think we should end the debate quickly to prevent further disaster. This is the state of Trinidad and Tobago today. It the state of Trinidad and Tobago today.

So my colleagues on our side of the House spoke at length about matters of agriculture, spoke at length about matters of transportation, of works, of local

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government discrimination and so on, and so forth, I will not want to dwell into that.

Madam Speaker, because I have a special interest—because really myself and, I think, the Member for Naparima, we are both Members who shadow the national security portfolio, and of course, I also shadow the housing portfolio, necessarily I would make some remarks on those areas.

In terms of national security, Madam Speaker, you know, we heard the Minister of National Security who doubles up as the Minister of Energy and Energy Industries, so you know, he changes the hat quickly. And we can comment on energy for a minute but all I would say on that for this minute is that, this Government presided over and oversaw the collapse of all energy industries between [*Desk thumping*] Couva and San Fernando. Today, we have a scrap iron belt between Couva and San Fernando that this Government presided over.

While they were boasting of negotiating the best prices for natural gas in Houston, what they did was price Trinidad and Tobago's gas out of the market. [*Desk thumping*] Ian Walcott reflecting on the closure of Nutrien, I think, said that we cannot compete because the price of gas is too high in Trinidad and Tobago, and they negotiated high prices. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker, without being an energy expert, this is like a man who has a car to sell and the car is valued 40,000 but somebody decides that the car is really 80,000 and they say we are not selling unless we get 80,000, and they remain with a \$40,000 car rotting and it becomes scrap iron and useless. So we have gas but we cannot sell gas because somebody negotiated a price way above what the industry wanted. So they accuse us of selling gas at a lower cost but we had industries going, we had employment being generated, we had income being circulated, we

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had prosperity when we were in office 2010 to 2015. [*Desk thumping*]

So, Madam Speaker, on the national security bit, time goes by enormously in here, fast. The Opposition Leader indicated in her address and I wanted to dwell on that for a minute that what we have now is a police service on the verge of collapse. This Government has slashed the budget of the police service, Madam Speaker, by a whopping \$181 million. Now at a time when crime is again rearing its head in certain areas of home invasion, burglary, violence to women and so on, you slash \$181 million from the police budget. So police are complaining, when they reflect on the budget, it is easy for anybody to see, that they will not be able to maintain vehicles, they will not be able to buy new vehicles, they will not be able to buy new uniforms. In fact, they promised us a year ago new uniforms. They provided an amount of money in this budget only for the old uniforms for recruits, not a single dollar more. So there will be no new uniforms. And those uniforms, Madam Speaker, they were meant to be equipped with all type of radio frequency, high-tech materials so that we can trace uniforms anywhere. So if the criminal's hands got on uniforms, they could not use it because you could have detected where it is and who is using it and so on. That was squashed because there is no money, they slashed the budget.

We talk about vessels, Madam Speaker. The police established a marine unit, they got enough money to buy a raft from this budget. There will no marine equipment for the police, so having a police marine unit means nothing. We were proud when they announced that the police established a special victim unit, unit for sexual violence and so on. And doing that we felt good, this was a good sign that the police was meeting and treating with that critical issue that affects, particularly, women in Trinidad and Tobago. In the budget, not a cent more for that

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programme.

So we are told that the women who are victims will have to go to wherever they continue to go and sit in front of everyone being victims of domestic abuse and sexual violence. And if they have to take a bath and so on, they cannot because they do not have the equipment, they do not have the facility and so on, so you continue to demonstrate this inhumane callous approach to such an important problem because you did not budget for it.

You see, what the Minister of Finance did, and we know what he did. In the last year, it is a little trick. Many Ministries and departments were asking for money and they did not get the money, they squeezed them. And at the end of the year, they looked to the Ministry and the department and said, "That is all the money you spend? Okay, we are not giving you anymore because it looks like you could use that. That is all you could spend." But there were requests for more funds and more funds, and they did not get it. So when the Minister looked, he said, "Well, you cannot spend money, we are not giving you." But you never gave in the first place in fiscal 2020. [*Desk thumping*] That was, Madam Speaker, the lil accounting trick that they used in doing this business.

So, Madam Speaker, no boat for the police, no equipment for that unit, special victims unit and so on, no technology. All the talk over the years about drones, body camera, Tasers, all types of things, absolutely nothing. Madam Speaker, the police station between Guapo and Point Fortin in the south-west peninsular, when a man is charged in one area, if he has to take a shower, police have to put on siren and carry him to a next police station to bathe; that is Trinidad and Tobago. And you continue to squeeze the TTPS. They do not have money for photocopiers, for staples, for ink, for paper, that is the situation we face.

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I am told, Madam Speaker, that when that when these vessels go out on sea for the coast guard, the sailors themselves have to “chip up” money to buy food for themselves, they do not have money for gas, for food, and we talk about border patrol and international technology, and doing this and doing that, and what?—digitalization and so on, when the sailors have to take money from their pocket to buy food. When policemen ask businessmen, “Could you donate some water, could you donate a photocopier machine, could you donate paper and ink to the police station? We do not have”, and slashing the budget in this way destroys it. But you see, there is a reason for slashing the budget, Madam Speaker. They have to spend money, they need money. You see, Madam Speaker, we are in a debate, our national debate about foreign exchange, that is the big in-word, you know, the buzzword now, foreign exchange. The Government must save foreign exchange, so we have to look at who eating apple, grapes and corn flakes because we have to save foreign exchange. But where is the foreign exchange going, Madam Speaker?

Madam Speaker, I want to raise a matter related to the use of foreign exchange and the police and crime and justice. We were warned a few days ago from no other than the Chief Justice that the criminal justice system was on the verge of collapse. The Chief Justice said that, eh. That was not a lawyer somewhere in a Magistrates’ Court saying that, you know, and was the Chief Justice, and he made, of course, his argument and told us about that.

But you see, Madam Speaker, something else is happening and there is a pattern, this thing is—there is a global pattern in some areas of the world where governments deliberately disinvest in public policing to bring in private policing. What they are do is privatizing justice. [*Desk thumping*] What we are witnessing now is private justice and private prosecution. You see, Madam Speaker, I have a

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Cabinet Note in my hand, it is national security 2089 dated July 24, 2020, the Note is in my hand, I will not display it or exhibit it, I do not have permission to do as much.

But, Madam Speaker, what is phenomenal about this Note is that it is a Note to ratify an approval, to ratify an approval. An approval was given by the hon. Prime Minister to spend money. So they go to Cabinet for what is called “covering approval”, to okay what the Prime Minister did before, but that was money to expend foreign exchange to the tune of \$66 million that the Prime Minister, of course, okayed, and then they went to Cabinet later to okay this for a company in England, Edmond Marshall McMahon Limited and PriceWaterhouseCoopers to conduct investigations and so on.

Now, Madam Speaker, let me make the point absolutely clear because I know what the next speaker or speakers will say. We are raising this matter because we have cocoa in the sun. Madam Speaker, I am no cocoa farmer. I have no cocoa in the sun. Madam Speaker, nothing is wrong with an independent police service and an independent DPP recruiting, engaging, paying and managing the task of external professionals to help in investigations. This happens every part of the world, it happens, so nothing is wrong with that. You know what is wrong? What is wrong is when the politician okayes money for private prosecution of their political opponents. [*Desk thumping*] In the famous Endell Thomas case, I think Lord Diplock reflected on this, when he said it was wrong in law and ethics that politicians pay taxpayers' money for private prosecutions.

So you people from England here, Madam Speaker, six persons became SRPs. Do you know last year, those six persons, got from the police budget—nothing is budgeted to the police for this. The police took money which would

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have gone to photocopy paper, ink and so on, \$15 million to pay a foreign SRP group of six persons from the United Kingdom.

We have in this country, super SRPs being paid \$1 million per month while the ordinary police cannot get ink and paper. [*Desk thumping*] So \$1 million a month or more, \$15 million had to go from the police budget to pay, and now you have \$66 million coming to pay, again, more and there is no budget in the TTPS for this. This is what they passed, the politicians.

So when persons are investigated, Madam Speaker, they know that listen, it is politician who is approving this money, let us do the politician's bidding; that is the danger. And, Madam Speaker, our information is the foreign UK-based SRPs, six of them indicated in writing, indicated in writing to the Office of the DPP that their priority is former Ministers of the People's Partnership. That created a scandal. They said that was their priority, it was not investigating wrongdoing where other people commit wrong and so on, they did not too much care about that, it was not the priority. The priority was Ministers of the former administration, because who paid the pounds called the rounds. Who pay piper calls the tune.

So when they know that one person is approving \$66 million, they said, "Well what can we do for you, Sir? We need that money." Like Max Senhouse, we need the money. This is where we are today with private prosecution. That is the most dangerous development to our democracy. [*Desk thumping*] And again, I reiterate, Madam Speaker. We believe that if the police needs help and the DPP needs help, they should source it themselves, oversee the task and duties themselves, pay themselves and do not depend on politicians paying money for that.

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You see, Madam Speaker, a gentleman by the name Edward Jenkins QC at the DPP office was very concerned that before the election, there were leaks from that special white collar mongoose gang. They leaked in the papers, charges coming, former Ministers, former officials, charges coming, and Edward Jenkins was mad like that because that was undermining their work, and they were leaking to the press to say, charges coming because that was part of a political campaign, [*Desk thumping*] and that happens when you do this. But you see, Madam Speaker, the police cannot get money because 100 million-plus has to go the special SRPs for private prosecution of political opponents. And the Prime Minister, he did it, we have it in black and white here, black and white. How can a Prime Minister give covering approval for \$66 million?

Madam Speaker, so I raise this matter to indicate that all will not be well. In the coming days, they will take police off the streets, cars will fall apart, people will believe that you can commit crime and get away because there is no police outside there. The police do not have resources, We are going back to the days where when you call the police station, they call for a taxi to come home by you, and the police is on the verge of collapse in Trinidad and Tobago because they took the foreign exchange to pay a white collar mongoose gang to chase down political opponents. And we have the evidence here, tell us it is not true.

In other decent countries of the world, I checked. You know, when they are investigating Donald Trump, the American President, it is done from an independent office. Those investigators are independently paid, it has nothing to do with the White House and Donald Trump. [*Desk thumping*] This is probably why they can go at all presidents the way they do. But, Madam Speaker, here, if you investigate political opponents, the politician directorate pays.

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Another crisis we have in national security, Madam Speaker, I have the information but I will not call it, I will not say it. I am aware and I will not say where, I am aware. Madam Speaker, do you know it was under the Patrick Manning administration that they introduced a widespread CCTV camera system in this country? It really came about because in that year, I believe we had the Summit of the Americas 2008 thereabout and we went on to that. Our Government increased spending and coverage, established three more regional centres, 1,800 more cameras we put out there. We had a total of 3,000 cameras. Do you know 900 cameras are not working? Nine hundred cameras are not working. And why you cannot fix it because you are involved all types of, you know, uncanny type of developments. In this Parliament, I have raised on two or three occasions this matter. We were told on 27 January, 2020, that is this year, the Minister of National Security responding to the Member for Oropouche East. He said and I quote:

“The contract is currently being negotiated and to be signed I am told this week.”

But, Madam Speaker, I am told nothing has been signed, nothing has been agreed to. And to this day, they are on a month by month with TSTT that they vilify throughout this country that TSTT's prices were so high and they cannot to this day put a contract in place. They owe TSTT \$750 million. TSTT is not a private organization; that is majority state. They will not pay. They said the People's Partnership negotiated a price higher. Okay. You negotiated a price higher, who was benefiting from that? The State as well, [*Desk thumping*] that is money being paid to the State.

Madam Speaker, today the camera system has collapsed because they have

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not set in train this matter. Do you know CCTV cameras are manned in the main by the Strategic Services Agency? An organization that is called I-Spy, a spying agency, not the police. I-Spy is responsible for the operational command of CCTV camera, not the police. This is one of the few countries on the planet where police do not have operational command over CCTV cameras.

2.00 p.m.

Madam Speaker, the CCTV camera, they had a contract, a tender in September 2019, thereabout. Madam Speaker, do you know—I related it already so I will not go in detail—when that time came for the bidding, the deadline for bids, a mysterious email appeared, saying the bidding time would be expanded by 14 days, September 2019. Mysteriously. When we checked through the email trail and so on, it said this was from national security. You know, when the bidders got back their package, all the packages were opened. They got back packages that were opened, and were told that national security said we are extending the bid at the moment at which the deadline came, as if somebody was supposed to send in a bid and could not make it. To this day when we raise that matter there is no investigation into that. You would think there would be an investigation. This thing is worth \$300 million-plus. Madam Speaker, there is no investigation, no outcome, no findings as to who authorized the extension of that bid and on what grounds.

Mrs. Persad-Bissessar SC: And who opened them.

Dr. R. Moonilal: And who opened them. They should have dusted for fingerprints to see who opened those bids. How can you open a bid and send it back to the bidder and say, look, you have 14 days again? What kind of thing is that? And then accuse us of bid-rigging and all sights of foolishness in the world. So, Madam Speaker, where we are today, is that TSTT is going under. They had to retrench

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over 700 people, they cannot pay their bills. They are being owed hundreds of millions by the Government of Trinidad and Tobago because they believe that the Partnership—they maliciously believe that the Partnership administration did that.

Madam Speaker, another matter of national security I touch on quickly. You will recall as well, in this crisis, we have been speaking time and time again about the stranded nationals. It is a shame, it is a disgrace that citizens of Trinidad and Tobago must cry blood on foreign soil to return to the country of their birth. [*Desk thumping*] Madam Speaker, all, all that was required on those of us on this side of the House one day had a discussion, all we said is that we would create a multipartite committee of national security, of health, of advocacy groups, in some cases relatives, representatives, and work out a coherent, transparent policy on bringing nationals home. [*Desk thumping*] So clearly, we would have dealt with the elderly, those persons who are sick; single mothers with small children and so on. Do we have to read—Mother Speaker, I have a pile of about 50 letters in my hand. I cannot read it now, of mothers crying tears that they are away from their children, of parents who said their house in Trinidad could be sold away because they are not there. There are persons who are crying that their houses have been burglarized because they are not in Trinidad.

The Minister has a policy that he alone knows, and you write, you beg, you grovel, and maybe you get through. Businessmen I notice have been getting through, I think they are important people as well. But there is no coherent policy. Madam Speaker, hours ago I had the opportunity to interact with a British Member of Parliament, Mr. Steve Baker. Forty eight hours ago in the British Parliament he rose on behalf of the people of Trinidad and Tobago to [*Desk thumping*] raise their matter in the British Parliament, representing the constituency, I believe, of

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Wycombe. He raised this issue on behalf of Trinidadian nationals in the British Parliament. An hour ago I expressed thanks to him and I told him I am speaking here, and on this floor I will thank Mr. Steve Baker, British Member of Parliament, for his humanitarian concern for the people. [*Desk thumping*] It is a shame and disgrace when a foreign parliamentarian must raise their voice to defend Trinidad and Tobago nationals, under humanitarian principles, and those here are callous, are cold, are brutal. That, Madam Speaker, is a shame. And he expressed thanks to me and to our political leader and our party for the work we have been doing in advocacy for those persons. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker, I thank him on behalf of the people of Trinidad and Tobago for raising this matter, and call on the Minister of National Security, do not allow yourself to be humiliated further, devise a coherent policy, work with the nationals and their relatives and advocacy groups now, and ensure that our nationals come back. Because you say they have COVID. What has happened in this country with COVID before the election? On August 10th, 132 cases, eight deaths; one month later 2,000 cases and 42 deaths; and today I think it is 90. What have you done? That is a completely different matter. But, Madam Speaker, I wanted to raise the plight of those persons who are stranded abroad and need our help, our compassion. And it is not enough to say we have grants. As the *Express* editorial today said, you spent all the money in grants and you are claiming how much you do, and every single day people go to the media, they go to the MP office, they write, they cry, they beg. A lady, I will not call her name, she went to the media house, then she contacted me. You know what she needed was some food; food, with two small children. And you cannot satisfy that, but you boast of how much billions you borrow. It is a shame and disgrace, Madam Speaker. Shame

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and disgrace.

But, Madam Speaker, they are, and let me remind you, they are about foreign exchange. They are about foreign exchange. That is what they are about. So, in foreign exchange now they have to save money, save foreign exchange. Foreign exchange of course is foreign dollars and so on. Madam Speaker, the Leader of the Opposition in this Parliament, a few days ago, issued a call to the Government, a passionate call, that the Government should consider a 5 per cent wage cut, consider some type of vivid manifestation of their commitment to the poor, to the suffering, to the underprivileged. Madam Speaker, there has been a conspiracy of silence. It is as if somebody passed a note, “don’t talk about dat”. Even now it is silent. Madam Speaker, they ignored that call while other progressive countries in the world have responded. Not that if you give a 5 per cent of your salary you will balance the budget, but you will demonstrate from leadership at the very top, as the Member for Siparia was suggesting. [*Desk thumping*] You demonstrate that you will make a sacrifice of some kind. And that is what led to another bacchanal in the public domain over Mustangs, and Mercedes Maybachs I think they call it, and those types of things that the Ministers favour. You see, that led to it, and the Minister of Finance is aware. The Minister of Finance is aware, I think he has about three or four, and well deserved, I think with the yacht, so he will know of that. But you have to, Minister of Finance, understand the plight of the poor, the suffering, the underprivileged, while your hair blows back in that convertible Mercedes Benz Maybach that you sport around. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker, but this is not, they are saving money to do something else. You see this foreign exchange thing is a curious thing. While they attack apples,

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grapes and corn flakes, I have in my hand here a circular, dated March 17—let me be careful—March 17, 2017. It is called:

Minister of Finance Circular No. 2 to Permanent Secretaries, Heads of Department—et cetera, et cetera.

You know what this Government did, Madam Speaker? They went and changed, made fundamental changes for all the benefits associated with foreign travel of government officials. At a time when they cry out the last government left them what? Fumes? They cried they had nothing, energy prices collapsed. The last government went with this, went with that. I mean, if you listen to them you would think we picked up stoves and fridges and carried it on “we” back. Madam Speaker, they were crying in 2016 and '17, they had nothing, and they had to sacrifice. Anybody remember the Prime Minister telling Ministers not to take loans for luxury cars? What that led to? About 25 more luxury cars.

Madam Speaker, they went by this circular—I have it in my hand—and look at the one that to me, honestly, the one that to me that I would take objection to, even if I am in Government, I would take objection. Since Eric Williams to today, Prime Ministers are travelling, and every 10 to 15 years a Cabinet will change that and put a few hundred dollars here, a few hundred dollars there and so on. That is normal. When we were in government, unless I am mistaken, stand corrected, we never changed per diem and allowance for anybody, Prime Minister, Minister, nobody we changed. [*Desk thumping*] It was a 2007 figure, I think, from a 2007 Mr. Manning Cabinet, and we worked with that. We said no problem, we will work with that. Do you know in 2017, they introduced by way of a finance circular something called a special executive grant. Special executive grant.

Mrs. Robison-Regis: What document?

Dr. R. Moonilal: Now, I am reading from a document. Madam Speaker, I do not think I have to share this with the Government. They should have been sharing this with me.

The Prime Minister while on official travel abroad is now entitled to the full payment of actual hotel rates for accommodation—that always happened—plus a special executive grant to cover the cost of meals and other related expenses as follows: £450 per day for travel in Europe, US \$450 per day for travel in all other countries. What is that about? So it has always been the case, the Prime Minister would get money for hotel, for food, for warm clothes. I had a concern with warm clothes, eh. People travelling five times in the year and every time they travel they get warm clothes. Travelling in the summer and collecting warm clothes. Madam Speaker, all Ministers, Cabinet Ministers and so on had this problem. Had the same thing, accommodation and so on. In fact I had the honour of being chairman, I think, of the travel committee of our Cabinet, so we are aware of this. They introduced with the Prime Minister and Prime Minister alone, special executive grant. Grant, eh. Grant! And hear this one:

The special executive grant for the Prime Minister for travel related expenses referred to above is with effect from July 01, 2016. They backdate it. So the memo is March 17, 2017, and backdate it. Now, it could be that the innocent Prime Minister does not know about this. He does not really check all this money he collects when he travels and so on. He does not check stipends and so on. It could be that. A Prime Minister is a busy person, and you can tell us whether you have been using this or not. But imagine the effrontery—is the word, I think—imagine the gall of going and passing measures like this to give the Prime Minister a special executive grant, backdating it. When we checked now, the travel of the

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Prime Minister, which is a matter of public record, do you know in the time they backdated from, included trips, trips to the United States of America, Jamaica, Ghana, United Kingdom, Miami and other countries?

So, if that is effected, because I am not casting aspersions, I am not saying anything. All I am saying is that if that is effected, a Prime Minister, whichever Prime Minister they would have been dealing with, the Prime Minister would get back pay from travel. So you sleep in a hotel in New York and one year later they give you some more money for that sleeping in New York. Effectively that is what it is. This is scandalous! This is a shame! And you were doing this before COVID. COVID did not do this. You were on this jaunt—I do not want to use unparliamentary terms, Madam Speaker. I have not caused you to rise yet, but I do not want to do that. Madam Speaker, that they could have the obscene courage to go and pass a measure like this while crying down that the economy is bad, and the Treasury empty, and the former administration left nothing; that they could have done this, is a spectacular example of inefficiency, incompetence, waste and mismanagement. [*Desk thumping*]

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: Madam Speaker.

Dr. R. Moonilal: It is spectacular in the least.

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: Madam Speaker, sorry, may I just ask the Member to identify the document, please. I did not hear.

Dr. R. Moonilal: She is not hearing me properly?

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: If you could identify the document?

Madam Speaker: The Member is asking for you to identify the document.

Dr. R. Moonilal: Oh sure, yes, Ma'am. The document is called:

FM32 200 Minister of Finance Circular No. 2—dated March 17, 2017.

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And of course, the Government could feel free to tell us, look this document that I am holding in my hand, which I am prepared to share, is a fake document. It could be, because it may be a fake document, I do not know. It does not look fake to me, but this speaks about this special executive grant. Therefore, Madam Speaker, I raise this matter to tell you that this Government is not interested one bit in demonstrating at all, leadership during this difficult period when they called upon all citizens to sacrifice.

Madam Speaker, the housing sector: the Member for Arima became the sixth Minister of Housing and Urban Development in five years to address us. I must congratulate her, she lasted more than one weekend, I think, than her predecessor lasted. But the Member for Arima, of course, who I believe is a returning resident to this House was at pains to go through again and tell us all the promises in the housing sector. And I like how every time they talk they increase building houses by a few thousand. So every time you talk it is 5,000, 2,000, 25,000 and so on. Madam Speaker, under his breath in the budget the Minister of Finance told us in one year they constructed 250 homes. They have in five years not started and completed one estate. There is an estate in Harmony Hall, off the highway, around the Brian Lara, that started in 2016; to this day you cannot put anybody to live there because there are more and more problems. They have gone back to the old bad days and the old bad ways. This Government is going to continue a policy that the pre-2010 Government did. All of this talk about bringing in small contractors and medium contractors, that sounds nice. That is nice talk because you want people to feel that you are helping small business.

Madam Speaker, from our research and which we know in the industry as well, do you know when a large contractor gets a housing contract or a bridge or a

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highway, they employ 75 small contractors. It is the large contractors who employ small and medium-sized contractors. There are large contractors who do not own equipment, some may not even have a shovel, but when they get and they move, because of economies of scale, they bring in contractors for infrastructure, for design. Of course all people who do design, it is by contract. They bring in for engineering, they bring in a team for outfitting, they bring in a team for roadways, they bring in a team for waste water treatment plants. Small contractors get work when big contractors get work. But they have been criminalizing and demonizing large scale construction. When we got into power in 2010, I remembered we were at the Diplomatic Centre. Madam Speaker, before some of us knew what Ministry we—what the office looked like, we were summoned by the Prime Minister to the Diplomatic Centre. We went on a stage there. The contractors and the business community came there and they herded us into a room, and they started to hurl abuses. I did not even know these people. The former government left a bill of \$7 billion for us to pay. What did we do? Did we criminalize anybody? Demonize? We worked with the construction sector to keep the economy going, to keep work going, to keep business going, to keep industry going. [*Desk thumping*] They are not about that.

Their historic project is to stifle business, so that today people have packed up and gone. Throughout the Caribbean islands there are contractors from Trinidad and Tobago who have been welcomed on those islands building homes, building bridges, building highways. That is what they did. Do you know when we checked the list of small contractors, Member for Arima, the entire list, well, let us not say the entire list, 80 per cent of the list were members of the PNM General Council. Anybody who was anybody in the general council was building homes; five

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homes, two homes, three house—well, not a tree house—they were building. They were giving their party friends and faithfuls contracts to build five homes, but because persons did not have resources, did not have credit worthiness with the banks and so on, they crashed. It had one man, a friend of mine, incidentally, I think he built one and a half houses out of five and then begging for money every week, because they do not have money to go by. They are going back to do this. And I serve notice on this Government, I do not point out wrongdoing, I am serving notice. They know who they are. We are looking at them with an eagle's eye. There are contractors on the Government Benches who are involved in works and housing, and we are hoping that they will conduct their business because in the next administration coming here, it will be recusal, after recusal, after recusal, because you have businessmen MPs, and that is a risk that you take.

So, Madam Speaker, in the last five they could not build, they talked about private-public ownership building construction projects. Madam Speaker, the private sector did not respond. You know what is to me amusing? You know who responded to the private-public sector invitation by the Government? The largescale contractors. Because they are the ones who had resources and economies of scale. So their own policy over five years that spoke about private-public, and I do not have to name them, you all know who they are, was largescale contractors who responded, not small and medium. So when you introduce this policy, this will be a recipe for further squander, mismanagement and waste in the housing sector that we will see unfolding, Madam Speaker. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker, the Land for the Landless Programme, my friend went a few days before the reading of the budget, I think my friend gave out 11 leases. We had developed over 500 lots of land on the Land for the Landless Programme.

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They went sheepishly and gave out 11. You know they took five years to get statutory approval for 11 leases; 11. When we had a lottery that identified, I think, 300 persons with a public lottery. So, Madam Speaker, this housing plan and so on, it sounds nice, but we will have to wait and see. Their track record on housing is Las Alturas. Their track record on housing is the Chinese contract. That is their track record and that is what will happen again. Because once you do not engage the construction sector properly, and you continue to demonize, criminalize—their friends in the industry said I want to have nothing to do with you, you are not paying your bills. And that, Madam Speaker, is where we are with that.

Madam Speaker, in terms of my constituency, all I wanted to say is that I have written to the Minister of Finance and the new Minister of Education, indicating that we had a promise from Minister Garcia—well, I hope he enjoys his retirement. We had a promise from him that he would complete the Ramai Trace Hindu School. We look forward to that. I speak on behalf of the constituents, and on behalf of the parents who have suffered for five long years, that this Government will come to terms with that and do that. We are asking that you keep in mind The University of the West Indies. You opened the door to the Debe campus when you had a pandemic. If it had no pandemic, you would never open the door and put on the lights. We are hoping that you open it in this term, create the jobs, have the education for the children, for the young people, and work, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, I know I have about—how many minutes, Madam Speaker?

Madam Speaker: 22.30.

Dr. R. Moonilal: 2.22, yes. Madam Speaker, in the last minute or so I wanted to take the opportunity again to indicate that this Government has a lot to prove. They

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stand with a certain amount of arrogance, you know, and boast about, we win and we win and so on. And listen, we do not feel bad to tell you that the people of Trinidad voted for the United National Congress. We do not feel bad to tell you that. That is not something we are ashamed of. We are proud that the people of Trinidad and Tobago and the people of Trinidad supported the United National Congress. And yes, if we had two candidates in Tobago, we might “ah win dat” too.

But, Madam Speaker, the people of Trinidad, the people of this land here that the Parliament is based, voted for the United National Congress in majority. And I am happy that along with the Member for Siparia and myself, of 20 returning MPs, we got the most votes of all. [*Desk thumping*] As the former Petrotrin chairman said, of all, all, all, all. So we came back confident. We are here confident to do our business. We are here confident that we will keep the Government on their toes and account. And today the Prime Minister and others who will speak, will answer some of these questions, and they will attack us, and they will say all types of nasty things and so on. That is your political DNA. We are accustomed to that. But we will really like the Government to keep in mind that you cannot ask this population to sacrifice when you yourself are not prepared to give up a grain of rice to sacrifice for the people of Trinidad and Tobago. Madam Speaker, I thank you. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker: Member for Arouca/Maloney. [*Desk thumping*]

The Minister of Planning and Development (Hon. Camille Robinson-Regis):
Thank you very kindly, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, before I even get into my discourse today, let me say in relation to the Member for Oropouche East, it seems as though every time he stands in this Chamber he tries to use the

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opportunity to put up a defence for himself. [*Desk thumping*] So, Madam Speaker, sometime ago I had the privilege of being able to read a document from the police in relation to this Member. I think it was a search warrant, and he was able to put up a defence. And every single opportunity that he has in this House, he tries to put up a defence with the matters that are before the public in relation to him. So, Madam Speaker, he comes here today to talk about the Ministry of National Security, and is it curious that the Member for Oropouche East, of all the 19 Members on that side—

Mr. Charles: Standing Order 48(6).

Madam Speaker: Overruled. [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. C. Robinson-Regis: Yes, Madam Speaker. Of all the 19 Members on the Opposition Bench, it is the Member for Oropouche East who is the shadow for national security. That seems quite impossible for us to believe on our side. And, Madam Speaker, as usual he puts incorrect information into the public domain.

Madam Speaker, when those on the other side were in office, prior to that, when there was what we call an accountable allowance, when people travel they had to account for their travel. Under the Basdeo Panday administration they ended that system of accountable allowances. So, I do not know where he is getting this issue about allowances in relation to government travel. They ended the accountable allowances. In relation to warm clothing allowances, Madam Speaker, it is every two years if someone is travelling to a temperate climate they are allowed a warm clothing allowance. It is for anybody in the public service who is travelling, and it is every two years, and you have to be travelling at a time when you would need warm clothing. You do not just get it willy-nilly. Madam Speaker, I am in shock to hear the Member for Oropouche East prosecute a case against

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small contractors. Is it because during their administration their objective was to overprice everything so that they can benefit [*Desk thumping*] from the overpricing?

Madam Speaker, we of the PNM have a policy of ensuring that small contractors in any construction or other development must be given—at least 10 per cent of that development must go to small contractors. Madam Speaker, that has been our policy over the many years that we have had the administration of this country in our hands. In addition, Madam Speaker, I ask the question, how were they, under the Member for Oropouche East, when he served as Minister of Housing and Urban Development, able to move houses that would have cost \$350,000 at the time to be constructed, to a whopping \$1.3 million? In addition to that, we when we returned to office, we have been able to bring those same houses down to about \$600,000. So, Madam Speaker, the Member for Oropouche East as usual, has this penchant for saying “he going to drop a bomb, he going to drop a bomb”, and each bomb that he has tried to drop fizzles into obscurity. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker, if only because the Member for Siparia is the longest serving Opposition Leader this country has ever seen, and will continue to be Opposition Leader, perhaps, for the next five years, and if she has the temerity to stay on for another five years, because, Madam Speaker, when this country adjudicates upon us in 2025, we will again win the next election when it is called. [*Desk thumping*] But, Madam Speaker, there is an expectation because the Member for Siparia is the Opposition Leader, that her response to the budget would be one worthy of repetition, worthy of study by political students, worthy of commendation by political pundits. But, Madam Speaker, we saw nothing like that.

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Madam Speaker, alas and alack, I suppose that the country has grown, and I take this quote, “yawningly weary” of the stumbling, the fumbling and the sheer ineptitude and vacuity that annually characterizes the Member for Siparia’s response to every single budget. Madam Speaker, to listen to the Member for Siparia, one could easily get the impression that Trinidad and Tobago is the only country that suffered in this COVID-19 pandemic.

2.30 p.m.

Madam Speaker, the country—the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago have adjudicated and it seems as though those who are opposite to us cannot accept the fact that the People’s National Movement is the Government of Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*] They are behaving in their responses as though there is an election to come. The election has been held, you were found wanting and it is the PNM in governance. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker, apart from the Member for Oropouche East there are so many on the opposite side who by their very presentation took me back to the early years of my childhood when we were regaled with Anansi stories, stories designed either to scare us, to make us afraid of the dark and to make us afraid generally. But, Madam Speaker, try as they might the population made their choice [*Desk thumping*] and we will be here for the next five years under the astute leadership of the Member for Diego Martin West and political leader of the PNM.

Madam Speaker, the repeated attempts to tarnish the names and repetitions of the Members on this side will always fall flat. What the Opposition Leader should do is look on her own side, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, on the one hand we have one who was fired from TSTT under some very strange circumstances [*Desk thumping*] and whose reputation at the St. Augustine Campus

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of The University of the West Indies is neither for his academic prowess nor for his research capacity. Then there is another one whom we understand while he worked at the Office of the Prime Minister, during those dark days of the PP administration, was allowed to live at the Federation Park Villas or in some other Government housing without paying one cent to the people of Trinidad and Tobago, allowed to live there free.

Then, Madam Speaker, while we were led to believe that baggage handlers were only employed at the airports, recent revelations in the national media have also indicated why it was necessary for another Member to always be so strident in his defence of the Member for Siparia.

Dr. Moonilal: Standing Order 48(4). The Member is insulting other Members of the House.

Madam Speaker: Overruled.

Hon. C. Robinson-Regis: And, Madam Speaker, not to be outdone in this charade of Opposition bedfellows, there are those who have purchased vehicles for over \$2 million, Madam Speaker, and have been allowed the exemption in the order of over \$1 million. And there are others who having either nakedly exposed themselves to the lies, half-truths and innuendos or having drunk copiously from the pipe of deceit and mamaguy would now come to this House and lecture the PNM—

Mr. Charles: Madam Speaker, 48(4). Point of order. Because when I raised the issue about cars I was stopped.

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

Madam Speaker: My recollection having sat here for quite a number of days is that the issue of cars and exemption has been a very live issue in this House

coming from both sides. I overrule the objection. [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. C. Robinson-Regis: Madam Speaker, so when the Member for Siparia talks to us about gas brain, a headline that she took from one of the newspapers, I ask her to remember, I ask the Member for Siparia to remember the fact that during her tenure as Prime Minister she racked up 636 hours of flight time using the national helicopter as a taxi—

Mr. Charles: Standing Order 48(4). When I went into details of his car update I was stopped.

Madam Speaker: Standing Order 48(4):

“It shall be out of order to use offensive and insulting language about Members of either House or to threaten a Member.” I overrule. [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. C. Robinson-Regis: Madam Speaker, I repeat, when the Member for Siparia talked about gas brains on this side I ask her to remember the fact that during her tenure as Prime Minister she racked up 636 hours of flight time using the national helicopter as a taxi between the pink mansion in Philippine to Port of Spain. Those joyrides cost the taxpayers—

Ms. Ameen: Madam Speaker, Standing Order—

Hon. C. Robinson-Regis:—over \$6 million. [*Desk thumping*]

Ms. Ameen: Madam Speaker, Standing Order 48(6).

Madam Speaker: Member, Member, Member, another Member is on her legs. Yes.

Ms. Ameen: Thank you, Madam Speaker, Standing Order 48(6).

Madam Speaker: I overrule. [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. C. Robinson-Regis: Madam Speaker, the sheer hypocrisy of the Members

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on the other side, especially the new additions, is enough to warrant grave concern by the national community. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Charles: Madam Speaker, I rise on Standing Order 48(4), hypocrisy.

Madam Speaker: I am hearing Members sucking their teeth. I consider that unparliamentary. We all understand tolerance in this House. Member for Naparima while you are entitled to stand any number of times to raise an objection under the Standing Orders any sort of reckless use of the Standing Orders could also be a breach of the Standing Orders. I overrule once again that anything that has been said thus far qualifies under Standing Order 48(6). [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. C. Robinson-Regis: Madam Speaker, we on this side take our oath seriously and we thank God for the astute leadership and guidance of our own political leader whose moral compass continues to be our example and our guide and stands in sharp contrast to that which passes for leadership on the other side.

Madam Speaker, having left the economy in shambles when they were voted out of office in 2015, they on the other side did all in their power to obstruct us as we tried to bring this economy back to its legs. Madam Speaker, instead of working with us on issues such as the NSITT; on issues such as the Tobago legislation; on issues such as FATCA; on issues which would deem the people of Trinidad and Tobago to be in a position to move this country forward, all they did was object stridently to everything—

Mr. Hosein: Madam Speaker, I stand on a point of order, Standing Order 48(6). The Member is incorrect, there was no final report for the Tobago legislation—
 [*Crosstalk*]

Madam Speaker: Members, Members, if you want to challenge something on the facts you have an opportunity when you answer to say that, but that does not make

it a breach of Standing Order 48(6). You may not agree with what the Member says but that does not mean that it qualifies under 48(6) or 48(4). Continue.

Hon. C. Robinson-Regis: Madam Speaker, the Minister of Finance under the astute leadership of the Member of Parliament for Diego Martin West and with the support of every single Member of the administration between 2015 and 2020 manoeuvred the turbulent waters, we kept the ship of state afloat, sailing stubbornly and defiantly much to the delight of the stout-hearted and the believers but to the absolute disappointment, chagrin and despair of those opposite us, those obstructionists.

Madam Speaker, to ensure that we met our commitment to the people of Trinidad and Tobago, we developed our *Vision 2030*, but in our obligation to leave no one behind we have interconnected Trinidad and Tobago's National Development Initiatives to the Global Sustainable Development Goals through five thematic areas as stated in *Vision 2030*. These are:

- “1. Putting People First: Nurturing Our Greatest Asset;
2. Delivering Good Governance and Service Excellence;
3. Improving Productivity through Quality Infrastructure and Transportation;
4. Building Globally Competitive Businesses; and
5. Placing the Environment at the Centre of Social and Economic Development.”

Madam Speaker, in our recent successful participation at the High-Level Political Forum of the UN on Sustainable Development in July 2020, Trinidad and Tobago's presentation highlighted positive strides made under eight of the 17 SDGs. These were: Enhancements to infrastructure to support the universal health

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care system with parallel improvements in the number of physicians and nurses; passing of the Marriage Act, 2017 which abolished child marriages, and the National Workplace Policy on Sexual Harassment.

And let me make the point, Madam Speaker, in this Marriage Act those opposite to us were against us passing this piece of legislation, such a fundamental piece of legislation. The development of the National Social Mitigation Plan, the development of a national policy on persons with disabilities, the establishment of a Gender-based Violence Unit within the police service and the establishment of the Children Court system to support women and children.

Further to this, Madam Speaker, during fiscal 2020 Government and the Inter-American Development Bank, the IDB, signed a loan agreement to fund the Urban Upgrade and Revitalization Programmed executed by the Ministry of Housing and Urban Development. Additionally, in keeping with monitoring and addressing issues that affect the vulnerable, through the IDB during the lockdown period of the COVID-19 pandemic we were able to access US \$24.45 million under four loan operations currently in execution under the IDB. This money was redirected to be better utilized within the health and social sectors towards dealing with the pandemic.

Madam Speaker, this Government has as a matter of national record, determined that the CSO will become the National Statistical Institute of Trinidad and Tobago. We had indicated that we would collect data for certain surveys during this period. These were: the household budgetary survey and survey of living conditions, and the multiple indicator cluster survey which is a survey on the welfare and status of women and children. Both surveys have been delayed and now will be started in early 2021.

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Madam Speaker, you would know that the year 2020 was supposed to be the year to undertake the population and housing census. However, because of the COVID-19 restrictions the planning of the exercise had already been done but we will now undertake this exercise in 2022. And this is because at the just concluded 32nd Meeting of the Regional Census Coordinating Committee it was generally agreed that given the new technology and the dangers of COVID-19 that May 2020 is the recommended date to effectively plan the census.

Under the theme “Delivering Good Governance and Service Excellence”, the Ministry of Planning and Development facilitated the Government’s trust to build the public’s trust in government structures, promote strong and independent public institutions and ensure that democratic institutions operate on the principles of transparency, value for money, accountability, equity, morality and integrity in public life. Madam Speaker, in this regard under our national development planning initiative the Ministry has embarked upon a three-year policy cycle training plan, not only for the staff of the Ministry, but for other Ministries, Divisions and officers within other Ministries and Divisions. This training is expected to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of officers who have responsibility for the management of the Public Sector Investment Programme. Our objective, Madam Speaker, is to ensure that we get value for money for the programme that we have established for the public sector.

Over the last five years, Madam Speaker, the Town and Country Planning Division has been conducting a number of key activities to improve its efficiency. This was done by increasing timely access to services, bringing services closer to the people and improving the ease of doing business within the Division. What we have developed, Madam Speaker, is an automated construction permitting system

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aply called DevelopTT. Through this system there are over 30 spatial planning guidelines for planning professionals and we have also launched the pilot phase to allow for electronic submission and processing of applications for the City of Port of Spain, Diego Martin and part of the San Juan/Laventille Regional Corporation. Fifteen regulatory advisory agencies inclusive of the Town and Country Planning Division's North office, and the Port of Spain City Corporation have participated in this programme.

Madam Speaker, we have also ensure that through the UWI Seismic Research Centre the Ministry of Planning and Development continues to be engaged in the Seismic Microzonation Studies Programme which has produced a detailed map of the different levels of a specified geotechnical hazard that may be triggered by an earthquake. Madam Speaker, you have seen that there has been in recent times a number of earthquakes. And so, we are getting prepared.

Madam Speaker, I must bring to the attention of this honourable House and the national community that there is a key initiative and that is the development of Port of Spain. Our capital city will be reborn through integrated collaboration and implementation of policies and plans that would see the recognition of the historical district and also through the Urban Development Corporation and the Ministry of Planning and Development. The main objective of this project is the revitalization of the City of Port of Spain. And the issue will be to ensure that we improve local economic viability and provide a quality environment for tourists and residents. So we have the Memorial Plaza project, the Salvatori Building project, the Piccadilly Development project, the Foreshore Green Park development and the City Gate development and the Colville Street development on the PowerGen site.

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Madam Speaker, there are two things that I must bring to this House's attention. It is with a deep sense of satisfaction and pride that I report to this House and the national community that the long festering issue of the Chaguaramas farmers has been for all intents and purposes settled. You will recall, Madam Speaker, that in 2014 the last administration removed the Chaguaramas farmers at Guave Road, destroyed their crops and aimed to use their land for development for their friends and family. We of the PNM in Opposition stood with the farmers and marched from Port of Spain to Chaguaramas in solidarity with them. These farmers have been now paid for their crops in accordance with the Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries' assessment and the land at Guave Road has been surveyed so that each farmer will have his land and his deed. The farmers have been vindicated and returned to their rightful position.

Madam Speaker, as you know the Ministry of Planning and Development also encompasses the environmental issues. And, Madam Speaker, it is with pride that I announce that on October 27th Trinidad and Tobago is positioned to receive the globally sought after UNESCO Man and the Biosphere Programme designation which aims to improve livelihoods and to safeguard the ecosystem. This designation and associated activities are directly contributing to achieving Trinidad and Tobago's commitment to the UN Sustainable Development Goals and aligns with our *Vision 2030* plan. Once declared North/East Tobago's UNESCO site will be the largest UNESCO Man and the Biosphere site in the English speaking small Caribbean islands. This designation was made possible through careful collaboration between the Ministry of Planning and the Tobago House of Assembly and this fruitful collaboration will continue in the second quarter of fiscal 2021.

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Madam Speaker, the success of these initiatives would not have been possible without technical assistance under the EU Environment Programme, without technical assistance from the CDB, without technical assistance from the IDB, from CAF and from several other international agencies of this nature.

Madam Speaker, we on this side have said without let or hindrance that during our development we will ensure that the environment remains at the centre of the development. And as a consequence of this we are moving to ensure that persistent organic pollutants which are hazardous will not form part of the environment of Trinidad and Tobago and we have been working hard on ensuring that various landfills and in particular the Guanapo Landfill will soon be reorganized and eventually work to the benefit of the people of Trinidad and Tobago.

Madam Speaker, in all of this the Government and the private sector and the people have to work together. So this collaboration through the National Tripartite Advisory Council where labour, the private sector and the Government sector representatives have been collaborating on a number of critical priority issues, the results of which will be immeasurable benefits to all sectors of the national community. And, Madam Speaker, this NTAC has worked assiduously in moving to implement through the Cabinet the productivity and work ethic nationwide programme of activities which has been assigned to the Ministry of Planning and Development. The programme is expected to be launched in the first quarter of 2021. It is a programme in which all citizens will be expected to be involved.

Madam Speaker, NTAC has also advised and made recommendations to the Cabinet on amendments to the Industrial Relations Act, Chap. 88:01, the Retrenchment and Severance Benefits Act, Chap. 88:13 and we are currently

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working on recommendations for amendments to the Workmen's Compensation Act. Madam Speaker, the issues of income inequality, retrenchment and its impact on the socio-economic development of Trinidad and Tobago, the issue of Government bureaucracy and its impact on competitiveness are just some of the other issues that we will be working on.

Madam Speaker, we on this side say without fear of contradiction that the people of Trinidad and Tobago made the right choice when they elected 22 of us on this side to work in their favour. Madam Speaker, I am sure that during this budget debate they have looked at both sides, they have looked at the behaviour of those opposite to us and they have breathed a sigh of relief that they did in fact make the right choice in putting the PNM back in Government. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker, on behalf of us on this side we are thankful to those who elected us. I am particularly thankful to the people of Arouca/Maloney who again made the choice in favour of the People's National Movement. Madam Speaker, I want to make one announcement with regard to what has happened recently in Arouca/Maloney. There was a WASA main break there at Orange Grove and today, from last night we have been working on rectifying it and I want to thank the Minister of Public Utilities, the Minister of Works and Transport, the chairman of the Tunapuna/Piarco Regional Corporation and I also want to say that within two to three days this situation will be sorted out because we are getting two Bailey bridges from Chaguanas, from the Ministry of Works and Transport and that situation will be rectified.

So I thank the people of Arouca/Maloney for their support and, Madam Speaker, I thank the Members of this side of the House for contributing to this debate in the way that they have and for making sure that the people of Trinidad

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and Tobago understand that they have in fact done what was right and what was pleasing in God's sight by putting the PNM back in office. Thank you, Madam Speaker.

3.00 p.m.

Madam Speaker: The Minister of Energy and Energy Industries. [*Desk thumping*]

The Minister of Energy and Energy Industries (Sen. The Hon. Franklin Khan): Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. I must say it is indeed an honour and a privilege to make a contribution on this Appropriation Bill during its latter stages. Today, I want to start off by congratulating and thanking our esteemed political leader and Prime Minister for leading the People's National Movement once again to an election victory. [*Desk thumping*] We are the only true national party. It makes no sense saying you win election in Trinidad. There is one country, Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker, I have had the honour to serve as chairman of this great party for almost 10 years. I know its operation, I know how it functions, and I want to let this nation know that there is no other political institution in the Caribbean that can stand the scrutiny and the wisdom of the People's National Movement [*Desk thumping*] because we never—if you read the PNM constitution, we never deviate from our core founding principles. COVID, no COVID, through boom, through bust, through depression, we stand for the same fundamental principles in leading Trinidad and Tobago to a brighter future for all our children.

I also want to take this opportunity to thank the hon. Prime Minister for giving me the opportunity to serve once again as the Minister of Energy and Energy Industries. I gave him the assurance and I want to give the nation the assurance that I will continue to try my utmost to perform in a creditable way to

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make sure that the energy sector which continues to be mainstay of the national economy is kept on an even keel, and hopefully we can grow in the coming five-year period.

I also want to congratulate the two key Ministers in the preparation of the budget, the Minister of Finance and the Minister of Planning and Development. But, Madam Speaker, with regard to the Minister of Finance, I just want to quote—it is not often one quotes oneself, but I want to quote from my speech in the Senate on the first budget debate of the last term on Tuesday the 21st of October, 2015, contribution of the hon. Franklin Khan, Leader of Government Business, and I quote:

“I know there was some apprehension when an engineer, a former Minister of Works and Transport, was selected by the hon. Prime Minister to be the Minister of the Finance and not an accountant or an economist. But I want to say, Madam President, that an engineering mind is once steeped in logic, systems, cause and effect. It is data driven, situation driven and seeks logical and scientific outcomes to problems. As an engineer myself, I fully endorse this approach by the hon. Prime Minister and I have no doubt that the hon. Member of Parliament for Diego Martin North/East will prove to be one of the better Ministers of Finance this country has ever seen.”

Ladies and gentlemen, Madam Speaker, Members of this House, history will so record.

I now move on to the energy sector. Madam Speaker, the Minister of Finance in his budget statement stated that prior to the COVID pandemic and the price war amongst major oil producers, in their price war between Russia and Saudi Arabia among major oil producers, the economy was on a sustainable

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growth path. Inflation was at 1 per cent down from 5 per cent in 2015; Government revenue had increased by \$10 billion or 27 per cent over 2016 figures; oil and gas revenue increased from 7.6 per cent of total Government revenue in 2016 to 24 per cent in 2020; Government expenditure was brought down to the \$50 billion range representing a decrease of 20 per cent over 2014/2015 levels; the fiscal deficit was reduced to 2.5 per cent down from 9.5 per cent of GDP in 2016 and the story goes on and on.

Initial outlook for 2020 was promising. OPEC and other oil producers had committed to production cuts and there was improvement in trade relations between the USA and China. More so, in early 2020 the oil price was predicted to exceed US \$70 per barrel. In January 2020, benchmark WTI and Brent prices stood at 57.52 and 63.65 respectively, however natural gas prices were low at this time at \$2.02 per MMBtu.

Global economic turmoil. In early 2020 the global economy was adversely impacted by two major events. There was the price war between the major global oil producers which was followed by the COVID-19 pandemic. Both of these events, as in other economies, have been deleterious to the economy of Trinidad and Tobago particularly the energy sector. On April 20th of this year, West Texas Intermediate oil price collapsed to the negative for the first time in history. The price of negative 37.63 per barrel. In April 2020, WTI and Brent averaged 16.55 per barrel and 18.38 per barrel. Natural gas prices at the Henry Hub benchmark reached record lows. The average monthly Henry Hub spot price for the first six months of the year was \$1.81 per MMBtu. Monthly prices reached the low of 1.63 per MMBtu in June, the lowest monthly inflation adjusted real price since 1989. However, countries have been taking steps to get their economies back on track.

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As at October 12, 2020, WTI and Brent approximate \$40.00 and 42.28 per barrel respectively, and natural gas spot prices averaged 2.88 per MMBtu.

In the 2021 Budget the Minister of Finance, based on reputable industry information, set the budgeted oil price at \$45 per barrel and the budgeted gas price at US \$3 per MMBtu. In the context of the global environment, the budgeted price of oil and gas is quite rational. The US Energy Information Administration predicts that oil markets will become more balanced in 2021 and Brent will increase to \$47 per barrel, and our benchmark WTI would increase to \$45 per barrel. The EIA expects that rising demand for natural gas and demand for LNG export heading into winter combined with reduced production will cause Henry Hub spot prices to average \$3.38 per MMBtu in January of 2021.

These forecasts are in line with that of respected energy analysts and publications. On the revenue side, the resurgence of the oil and gas sector driven by the Government has resulted in significant improvement in the contribution of the sector to Government's revenue. For 2021 the sector is projected to contribute 23 per cent of Government total revenue compared to 7.6 per cent of total revenue in 2016. The main drivers for this improved performance in the energy contribution has been as follows: the increase in upstream production particularly natural gas; the rollback of over generous fiscal allowances and limitations of loss relief which serve to significantly reduced taxes to Government. That was a legacy of the UNC; the introduction in 2018 of a royalty rate of 12.5 per cent on gross income on energy companies. That is the royalties on natural gas. This measure resulted in royalty income increasing from \$400 million in 2016 to \$3.5 billion in 2019; the impact of the pandemic lowered royalty income to 2.5 billion in 2020, still much higher than it initially was of 400 in 2016.

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At the budgeted price royalties for 2021 are projected to be 4.4 billion. Improved marketing arrangements arising from negotiation with major upstream companies, BP and Shell, which emanated from Government's Spotlight on Energy in March 2018. These negotiations have resulted in payment to the State as follows: 1 billion in 2018 from BPTT; the sum of 1.9 billion from Shell in 2019; and the sum of 218 million in 2020; projected payments of 1.7 million by BPTT over the period 2021 to 2024.

Madam Speaker, in 2015 we met an upstream with several challenges namely gas shortages, expired contracts both upstream and downstream, and an NGC faced with litigation for gas supply shortfall to downstream operators. Led by our hon. Prime Minister, we set out to resolve these issues. Based on his direct interface with the leaders of the international oil companies, Shell, BP, BHP and EOG, an investment of over \$10 billion in the upstream was sanctioned. As at December 31, 2019, the upstream companies had invested a whopping US \$8.5 billion right here in Trinidad and Tobago. For 2020 the investment is estimated to be US \$2 billion and for 2021 an investment of US 2.2 billion is projected.

Madam Speaker, as we speak I just want to share some information with this honourable House. There are five offshore rigs operating in Trinidad as we speak. That has not happened for over a decade and a half. In spite of COVID, in spite of BP and Shell cutting their capital global expenditure by 30 per cent each—I am giving you the details, you know, because this is not no make believe. Despite serious challenges in bringing international crews into Trinidad for some of the key jobs on the offshore rigs which they alone handle because they are the operators, five rigs are in operation. Shell has a rig called the Transocean Developer III. It is currently drilling the Barracuda prospect. It is on its second well in Barracuda.

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BHP has most modern deep-water drill ship in the world, drilling right here in Trinidad, the deep-water Invictus. There was a press conference which the Prime Minister hosted about a month ago, that well is carded to cost approximately US \$100 million. That is rig number two. EOG, the Ralph Coffman. EOG continues to be drilling in Trinidad almost non-stop for the last several years. As we speak, BP is now drilling with the most discoverer. It is drilling the Matapal prospect. That was the Savannah discovery that was announced two years ago. And also if you look out in the Gulf of Paria you will see another rig there, it is called the Noble Regina, and that is another BHP rig that is coming to drill the Ruby prospect, which I will touch a little later.

Only today I got information that Touchstone drilling in onshore Trinidad, in what is called the St. Mary's block, has made a third successive gas discovery. [*Desk thumping*] The first well was called Coho-1, the second well was called Cascadura-1, and this third well, three successive gas discoveries in that area, is now called Chinook-1 and that will significantly increase our gas production on land because it is easier to develop gas discovery on land because the gestation period is not that long. Production from these discoveries is expected to come on stream early in 2021 and that will help alleviate the gas shortage. [*Desk thumping*]

So this is not an idle boast. This is because we have been doing all the planning, we have been doing all the bull work, we have been doing all the groundwork, and we have been dealing with all the negotiations, because these projects have a long gestation period. So if you do not deal with them early you would not see the returns. The work we are doing today we will benefit from it in 2024 and 2025, and the work we did in 2015 we will now start to see the benefits in 2020 and 2021.

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On the natural gas production side, natural gas production increased from 3.3 billion cubic feet per day in 2016 to a high of 3.9 billion cubic feet in 2019 before stabilizing at 3.6 bcf per day. The COVID-19 pandemic has adversely affected demand leading to lowering of gas production currently at 3.2 billion cubic feet per day, and I will deal with it on the demand side shortly because Point Lisas has some challenges that I want to share with the population.

The COVID demand now has resulted in the average gas production for 2020 would be approximately 2.2 to 2.3. Based on 2021's forecast, we are supposed to hold that 2.2, 2.3 into 2021; in 2022, we hope to go to 3.6; and 2023, 3.8; and by 2024, when some of the other fields come on stream, we plan to go back up to our required target of 4 billion cubic feet per day. There are a lot of new gas production prospects that I have just outlined. What has caused the gas to stabilize, is the extension of BPTT's TROC operations in 2020.

In 2021, production is expected to come on stream in Shell Barracuda which I just announced. BHP's Ruby, DeNovo Zandolie and Touchstone, Cascadura, Coho, and now as I just announced the Chinook well. In 2022, BPTT's Cassia C and the Matapal production should come on stream. As a matter of fact, we had spoken a lot about the Cassia C project last year. That was supposed come on stream in 2021, however there was significant delay in this project based on some fabrication work that was taking place in a yard in Mexico which has to be shut down and has been shut down for the last six to seven months because of COVID.

In 2023, we expect to see production from BPTT's Ginger development, and further in 2024 production is expected from BPTT's Sip and Jasmine development, as well as Shell's Manatee Field. As I mentioned Manatee, let me deal with Manatee one time because I had it down in the back of my notes, you know, but let

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me deal with it one time. The Leader of the Opposition in her contribution criticized Government's position now on Manatee. The Member for Port of Spain North/St. Ann's West rebutted that to some extent, but let me just add my two cents to that.

When under the leadership of our Prime Minister we brokered the Dragon deal, we were criticized left, right and centre by the Opposition. They said we were playing with fire, they said we were dealing with an illegal regime in Venezuela. They went into certain aspects of foreign policy that baffles me. They almost were in encouraging the United States Government to impose sanctions on Trinidad. Lo and behold when the US imposed sanctions on oil companies that were doing business with PDVSA, and Shell being an international oil company who was party to our agreement with the NGC decided that we could not proceed further because of the sanction. It is a reality we had to accept.

We said okay, we will wait it out. Trinidad's position on international diplomacy is that we respect the sovereign rights of each nation and we purport a policy of non-interference in the internal affairs of a sovereign state. But here we were with the Loran-Manatee field which was spoken about for years by the Opposition, and by the PNM Government. Madam Speaker, the Loran-Manatee field is the largest gas field that exists in Trinidad and Tobago and the eastern Venezuela. [*Desk thumping*] It has reserves of 10 trillion cubic feet of gas. The entire reserves of Trinidad—which I will deal with shortly once I have the time—is just 10.8 trillion cubic feet. So here is one gas field whose reserves is equivalent to almost the entire reserve in Trinidad.

Luckily for us we own 27 per cent of those reserves which approximates to 2.7 trillion cubic feet. However, where a gas field straddles an international

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boundary, there are development protocols in place, internationally accepted standards, a concept called unitization. So you cannot as a single country develop a gas field that straddles an international boundary on your own. So there is something called a framework treaty that was signed between Venezuela and Trinidad probably almost two decades ago, and then there is a unitization treaty which is a specific treaty that covers the Loran-Manatee field. If we were to wait on the situation to be solved in Venezuela, we may have to wait an extended period of time.

So having seen what has happened to Dragon, the Prime Minister, the Minister of Foreign Affairs, and other senior Cabinet Ministers spoke to the Venezuelan authorities and we were able to do a deal that delinked Manatee from Loran. So Trinidad and Tobago with the consent—you must have the consent of the Venezuelans to so do—of the Venezuelan Government decided to give us permission to develop Manatee on our own. That is a rare thing that is done in international treaties on unitization, you know. I would not say it is a first, but it is a rare instance.

So here we are now delinking Manatee from Loran, Trinidad and Tobago going out on its own. The same UNC was criticizing us for going into a deal with Venezuela on Dragon is now saying “You should not go on your own.” It defies logic, and that only shows a party that is intent on not supporting a Government in any time it is doing something in the interest of Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*]

I move on now to deep-water exploration. Madam Speaker, you could tell me what time I will be concluding?

Madam Speaker: 3.46.

Sen. The Hon. F. Khan: What?

Madam Speaker: 3.46.

Sen. The Hon. F. Khan: 3.46, okay. Madam President, there has been—Madam Speaker, my apologies, BHP has been on a deep-water exploration programme in Trinidad and Tobago for the last two and half years. They have drilled 10 wells so far. They are drilling the 11th well which is a deep well called broadside which we covered in several press conferences to date. Their acreage is divided basically in two areas: one of the south-east coast where broadside is being drilled now, and significant acreage of the north-east coast of Trinidad and the north-east coast of Tobago.

In the north exploration they have found—to use my words guardedly—significant gas resources. They estimate that their reserves could be as high as 5 tcf. I was just boasting about Manatee with 2.7. This is double, it could even triple the size of Manatee. As we speak, they have applied to the Ministry of Energy and Energy Industries to go into a new phase of development to prove commerciality. Once those studies indicate—because commerciality has to do with two things, one, the price of your commodity which is their forecasted price for natural gas and the cost of development. So if the cost of development linked with the price of your commodity makes the prospect effective and makes it commercial, they will be seeking to get FID which is Final Investment Decision, to proceed with that development.

We have a meeting carded with BHP, Minister Young and myself, and let me just recognize to this House publicly today that Minister Young has been working very closely with the Minister of Energy and Energy Industries under the astute guidance of the Prime Minister of Trinidad and Tobago [*Desk thumping*]

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and together we championed the energy cause in Trinidad. I make no apologies for that and we have been doing a reasonable job at it. Okay? And I want to publicly congratulate and thank Minister Young for his wisdom and his astute negotiation skills when he and I meet together as co-leaders of the empowered negotiating team when we meet with the international energy companies. [*Desk thumping*]

Once BHP determines that the reserves are commercially viable, we can be looking at significant gas production coming out of north-east Trinidad and north-east Tobago by the year 2025 to 2026. So when the new Minister of Energy and Energy Industries of the PNM stands here in 2025 he will be announcing we are about to get gas from the north-east part of Trinidad and Tobago. BHP has spent—one company—over US \$1 billion over this last two and half years. Madam Speaker, even for companies as big as BHP that is a staggering number to spend in one country. I can tell you now without fear of contradiction that there is no deep-water exploration going on in any part of the world to the extent that it is going on in Trinidad and Tobago right here. [*Desk thumping*]

So two things I would say, we must be doing something right, and as a Government we have been fair to the international majors because the Prime Minister has always told them, “You represent your shareholders, I represent my shareholders and my shareholders are the people of Trinidad and Tobago.” And when we meet with them around the boardrooms of the world, we meet as equals with mutual respect, and that is what has put Trinidad on the international energy map and that has been the legacy of the People’s National Movement since Dr. Williams.

3.30 p.m.

So on the upstream side, we are looking reasonably well. Drilling is taking

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place by all the majors in Trinidad: Shell, BP, BHP and AOG. Most of that drilling will continue into 2021 and 2022, and we should see a ramp up of production once demand remains stable by 2022.

Let me now deal with the petrochemical sector. Madam Speaker, a business can only survive if what it produces fetches a commercially viable price. No matter what you make, whether you make aluminium, whether you make steel, whether you make clothes, whether you make handbags, whether you make food, your business survives on commodity prices and your cost of production. COVID has hit the global economy a terrible blow. It impacted on raw material, oil and gas prices, and we suffered from that. But the bigger hit took place in the commodity prices for petrochemical; ammonia and methanol, in particular, which are mainstay exporting commodities coming out of Trinidad.

Ammonia prices which stood at US \$300 per metric tonne FOB Caribbean/US Gulf Coast in January 2018, fell to under \$200 by January 2020. You lost 100 per metric tonne, bearing in mind that Trinidad and Tobago's cost of production is slightly higher because our gas prices input are slightly higher than those countries with abundant gas supplies. Methanol prices suffered the same trend. Methanol prices stood at between US \$350 and \$400 per metric tonne in January 2018, and that has fallen to between US \$175 and \$200 per metric tonne in January and into March of 2020.

As a consequence, a number of plants had been temporarily taken out of operations, reducing the capacity in the ammonia plants to 72 per cent and methanol to 94 per cent, notwithstanding the outlook for both commodities, post-COVID, is positive with the ammonia market projected to grow by 3.7 per cent annually and the methanol market expected to grow by 4.8 per cent annually.

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What are we doing? And I want to explain in the next two or three minutes here an important concept. Everybody has been using the word very loosely. It is called the gas value chain. When gas was cheap and abundant, nobody studied the value chain. You had cheap gas, you had NGC which was the aggregator, buy gas at X and sell it at X plus three. The down-streamers would have found X plus three is quite reasonable. They would process, make methanol, make urea and sell it at very good market prices so everybody lived happy. But then, the global economy changed and then we found ourselves in a position where cheap gas no longer existed. We were finding gas in smaller and smaller quantities. The cost per unit of producing gas was increasing.

Oil companies have to take a lot of risks. They have to take geological risks, they have to take production risks. It is a very highly capital intensive industry. So for the upstream companies to survive, they needed a higher gas price. How high is too high? That is subject to negotiation. But the principle is they needed a higher gas price.

NGC, if now X is more than X used to be, X is now Y plus 2, NGC cannot have the same mark-up to sell to the down-streamers so NGC has to cut its margin and the down-streamers' profitability depends on commodity prices. So if commodity prices are low and what the down-streamers are purchasing the gas for cannot sustain their business, we are in a deep crisis and that is where the gas value chain concept comes in. So now, the whole chain has to sit together because if there is no upstream, there can be no downstream and if there is no downstream to provide a market for the upstream producers, what will you do with your gas? And that is the concept of the gas value chain. A chain is as strong as its weakest link. So that is the concept of which we now have the gas value chain committee, again,

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which is co-chaired by myself and Minister Young, and under the—well, not co-chaired, we are part of a team that is chaired by Mr. Wendell Mottley, former Minister of Finance, ORTT.

And I explained this gas value chain concept to debunk a piece of narrative that I have had the dishonour to listen to for the last three and a half years; a narrative emanating from the UNC that continuously, no matter how we rebut it, no matter how much we show the truth, that states the Prime Minister and Minister Young went to Houston and negotiated a high gas price for the upstream company.

Madam Speaker, citizens of Trinidad and Tobago, nothing could be further from the truth. The NGC and BP had locked horns in the negotiations. Nobody was willing to move. Nobody was looking at the entire value chain at that point in time. The Prime Minister made a strategic intervention and say “Hey guys, behave yuhself, we have to seek the survival of the entire industry because none can survive without the other. Swallow your pride and come back to the table and negotiate in good faith.” [*Desk thumping*] And it is because of those discussions, today we can sit comfortably by. Despite the challenges of Point Lisas, we still have an industry that continuously exports methanol and ammonia that provides foreign exchange that is dire needed in Trinidad and Tobago. We still have an LNG industry that is providing foreign exchange to the country and that is what strong leadership is all about.

Two more points I want to—what time again, Madam Speaker? I forgot. Ten more minutes, okay. I recently announced the audit of the crude oil reserves in Trinidad and Tobago and those figures are quite positive, both proven, probable and possible reserves are all on the upturn. The same can be said for the Ryder Scott gas audit. I recently announced the 2019 audit, which is we are up to date,

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and in the 2019 audit, we have replaced our reserves by 113 per cent and we are in fairly good stead.

Let me just make a point on the gas reserves. Trinidad and Tobago, based on its current production, produces 1.3 trillion cubic feet of gas per annum. Remember this is a non-replenishing reserve. It is a wasting asset. So to remain where we are, you have to find 1.3 trillion cubic feet of gas every year. It is called “walking up the down escalator” because just to stay where you are, you have to find 1.3 trillion cubic feet of gas. And the reason why our reserves appear to be static, it is not static, we are literally finding one trillion to one and a half trillion cubic feet of gas every single year since 2015 to today.

So I now move on to a quick word on Trinidad Petroleum Holdings. The story of Heritage is well told. The restructuring has taken place. Heritage is now making a profit. It has made \$1.4 billion in profit. It has paid \$800-plus million in taxes. It is servicing the loan of Petrotrin in US dollars from its current cash flow. And if that is not a success story, Madam Speaker, I do not know what is. [*Desk thumping*] Paria Fuel has been making profit and it has supplied a reliable source of liquid fluids to the country: gasoline, diesel and LPG, and the market has seen no disruption.

Regard the sale of the refinery, as the Prime Minister announced and the Minister of Finance announced, the Prime Minister has given a deadline of October 31st to close the deal and beyond that, if it is not closed successfully by both parties, we will look at alternatives. I say no more on that because we are in the middle of October and these are very, very, very sensitive, high-level commercial negotiations. These are things that you do not give ball by ball commentary on, you have to await a summary on the day's play. So on that matter, I say no more.

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And finally, Madam Speaker, I just want to explain a couple of things on the retail marketing sector. The Minister of Finance would have announced the liberalization of the retail marketing sector. For those of you who will recall his 2015 budget, he did indicate that it was the intent of the Government to totally liberalize the retail marketing sector. What we have done is that we have now implemented that policy decision of 2015 and the Minister of Finance did in fact articulate quite clearly how the system will operate. But let me just explain it in a little more detail.

There is something called the ex-terminal price which is the price that Paria will sell the fuel for to the wholesalers. So Paria's ex-terminal price is calculated as follows. It is the posted price which is calculated by the Ministry of Energy and Energy Industries which is based on a US Gulf Coast and a Platts Oilgram price for fuel in this part of the world, added to that is freight, added to that is import duty and excise duty which is currently at zero but it is just there in the equation. So it is posted price plus freight, plus a terminal fee. The terminal fee has been negotiated by the Ministry of Energy and Energy Industries and Paria, and the terminal fee guarantees Paria a fair return on its investment so that it can become profitable. And then, there is distribution cost to Paria which is to distribute from the storage to the gantry where the tank wagons are loaded.

That ex-terminal price is the price that will be sold to the wholesaler. The wholesaler now buys at that ex-terminal price but remember the wholesale margin is fixed. So the wholesale margin, it will be ex-terminal plus the wholesale margin which will be the wholesale price. That is the price that will be posted every month and then from that price, each gas station operator, which would have a retail marketing licence, can mark up his product to suit himself, to suit the competition

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in the market. We would not tell the retailer how to sell his gasoline but we will post the wholesale price and you will know who is trying to make more and on what basis they want to so do, bearing in mind there will be constraints. A rural gas station may have to charge two cents more than one with high volume traffic and all that— and all those things will be the details that will be revealed in due course. So it is not the end of the world. Because of low commodity prices now, there should be no increase in the price of gasoline, super nor premium, and I doubt whether there will be any increase at all in the price of diesel.

So, Madam Speaker, I have attempted to give a discourse of the energy sector. It is a challenging time, like in all sectors of the economy, but Trinidad and Tobago has done fairly well. We have done fairly well. Look I have an article here: Thousands of oil/gas jobs disappear in the United States; shale companies have gone bankrupt in the US. There is retrenchment in the energy sector all over the world and today, with five rigs operating that a Point Lisas Industrial Estate that is still largely operational with production just decreased by about 15 to 20 per cent—

Madam Speaker: Minister of Energy.

Sen. The Hon. F. Khan:—oil prices and gas prices are moving up. [*Inaudible*]— and I want to thank you, Madam Speaker, for the opportunity to contribute in this debate. [*Desk thumping*]

The Prime Minister (Hon. Dr. Keith Rowley): Thank you, Madam Speaker. Permit me the opportunity to congratulate you on your return to this Chamber, [*Desk thumping*] for agreeing to serve us in this House and this nation once again. We look forward to a productive period and we trust that you will continue, as you have always been, a servant of public service to the people of Trinidad and

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Tobago.

Madam Speaker, as the senior MP in the Parliament of Trinidad and Tobago by age and experience, it falls to me to take this opportunity at the start of a new term to welcome all our colleagues back to the House and to give a particular welcome to those new Members, the young Members, in particular, who have joined us in this Chamber to do public service. [*Desk thumping*] I think it is a good thing for the nation, on both sides of the House, to be able to have people who are willing to make the sacrifice that is involved in this kind of rigorous public service because the country's management requires no less.

Madam Speaker, having said that, I will just want to caution the youngsters on both sides that you need to get your rhythm first before you bowl to good batsmen, otherwise you will be hit all over the place. [*Desk thumping*] Do not just come in here and start to repeat what you have heard your failed seniors do or say. [*Desk thumping*] Take a good look. Take a good look, listen a while, read a lot and in time, you may become effective as a good Member of Parliament. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker, this is a time of trouble, it is a time of turmoil and it is not a time for the weak-kneed or the lily-livered. So those who have just joined us, let us not believe that all you have to do is to bad-mouth the Government, throw out personal invectives at Members of Parliament, mention the PNM as often as you can and that will get you there. Others have tried and have failed, and I am sure that you can do better than that.

Madam Speaker, I have listened to virtually all the contributions. I had to be away for half a day so I did not hear all but I listened to most of the contributions and I must say that in the eagerness of others to criticize the budget, one got the

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impression that there was a contract given on the other side to a speechwriter who wrote a speech for all of them. [*Desk thumping*] And while the syntax might have been changed from here and there, the language was pretty much the same and it was very much probably the most ineffective and boring budget debate I have been in, in all my years in this Parliament. [*Desk thumping*] And the reason for that is I do not think it is a reflection on the intellect of Members on the other side, I think it has do with just poor leadership. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker, this is a time that we all need to step forward and engage the issues, grasp the nettle and be counted. It is a time where change is required because success is our goal. And there is a statement I make from time to time that I learnt from an anonymous writer somewhere that success does not come without change and that change would bring conflict and how it is how you manage that conflict, that success will be had.

What my colleagues have done for the last how many days is simply try to point out all what they see are defects but fortunately, outside of this Chamber and maybe away from the forum for rum on a Monday night, the vast majority of people in Trinidad and Tobago have seen this budget what it is and they have approved of it. [*Desk thumping*] I cannot recall in all my years in this Parliament ever taking part in a budget debate that had such widespread acceptance and I must say, as Prime Minister, Madam Speaker, I am pleasantly surprised that this budget has been so well accepted in this difficult period. [*Desk thumping*]

And for that, I want to thank the Minister of Finance and his team, other Members of the Cabinet, and his ministerial staff for its buckling down of what was required to be done which is to pull the strands of difficult threads and weaving a fabric and giving us estimates that we can work with. Because, Madam

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Speaker, at the end of the day, this allocation process in here, this Appropriation Bill that we are going to pass is simply about estimates of revenue and estimates of expenditure. We are not printing money in here.

Interestingly enough, Madam Speaker, I listened very carefully to one point hoping that it would arrive somewhere but I did not hear a single one of those who were being critical of the budget in this Chamber say, okay, take a dollar from this side and put it on that side. The one thing that we have agreed upon is that we get a fixed amount of money available in the estimates. So if you want more and more and more and more and more from this, where is it going to come from? It has to come from somewhere but they were all very careful never to say to take a dollar from here or from this Head or from this Ministry and put it here. It is all magic according to them. Just say you did not get this and that did not go there and you did not see this, but does not advance the process. If you were able to say let us spend less on X and spend more on Y, then you are contributing to the process.

But, Madam Speaker, what we had were a number of instances of statements being made which require to be addressed and I think for the few minutes I have, I just want to keep the record straight and I am going to address a few of those things. Because you see, if I were to give—the Opposition Leader said—spent the whole day with a slogan: the country collapsed before COVID. That was not borne out on August 10th, the people did not say that. But let us accept that okay, that is how she labelled us, the country collapsed before COVID and PNM means “promises never materialize” sounds great. But those are old news, old things. The new one is the label for Opposition Leader’s response is, “Ah not moving, billboard or no billboard on top KFC, ah not moving”. [*Desk thumping*] So all of the responses were geared not to dealing with the budget but it was geared with the

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UNC's internal election, bedfellows in defence of holding their position in the party. This is not party business, this budget is the national business of the people of Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*]

And that is why they having approach it in the way they have approached it, they have not debated six main issues that will engage the people of Trinidad and Tobago for the next five years. [*Desk thumping*] Let me point them out one by one. They would dispense it by the Opposition, you know, one sentence, and that is that they resolve to prevent. Resolve to prevent. So all those who call upon us to work together and to work with the Opposition and “la, la, la, la, la, la”, we have got our answer. They have resolved to prevent the following six items.

One, resolve to prevent the revenue authority, meaning they want no improvement in the collection of taxes in Trinidad and Tobago. Resolve to prevent property tax, meaning that you could have property all over Trinidad and Tobago and expect all the services and you know that the Government and the people want local government reform and you know that that collection of that tax is to go to local government to fund local government. You come here and talk about local government not being funded, how much you did not see, how much you did not get but you have resolved to prevent property tax. But of course, “yuh paying yuh tax in Florida, yuh paying it in New York, yuh paying it all about”, but in Trinidad and Tobago, you resolve to prevent property tax.

Madam Speaker, they resolve to object to a gaming commission in Trinidad and Tobago so gambling could continue apace unregulated and we will be the only country in the world to have gambling in the way we have it, unregulated. They resolve to leave that just so, even though the Bill to do so is a Bill that they brought to this Parliament. They blocked it and obstructed it for five years, we have come

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back now in another Government, after another election, they resolve to prevent that gaming commission.

Madam Speaker, we want to make decision based on data. They accused the Minister of Finance of lying. It is so unbecoming of the Opposition Leader. The first response to this budget to the media about the Minister of Finance's work: "the Minister of Finance lie, the Minister of Finance lie".

Madam Speaker: That word is not considered parliamentary, even though it may have been said somewhere.

Hon. Dr. K. Rowley: No, she did not say that, that the Minister speaks untruth but the bottom line is the data is being queried. On what basis it is being queried? That you say so? We want to have a national statistical institute where the national database will be there that will not be criticized by any person with anybody speaking untruths about the data. We want the national data from a national statistical institute. They resolve to object to that.

4.00 p.m.

The Minister of Finance, in dealing with the country's difficult circumstance, pointed out that the National Insurance Board is facing bankruptcy. That is a major support for the people of Trinidad and Tobago, particularly lower-income people. It is their pension. It is their support in very many ways. And the Minister of Finance told us that the expenditure is higher than the revenue and they cannot go on like that without declaring bankruptcy. One suggestion and one intention to fix that and to prevent that disaster is the consideration of the raising of the retirement age to age 65. Not one of them engaged that issue. That was an issue that was worthy of debate in this Parliament in this budget; not one of them. I take that to mean they resolve to prevent that too.

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And of course, all kinds of misstatements about Tobago and calculating how the Government apportioned money by the Head and determining how many people they have in Tabaquite, as against in Tobago and therefore, the dollars spent in Tobago are too much. That is their position. But we do have, Madam Speaker, Item No. 6, which is internal self-government for Tobago, meaning further autonomy for Tobago, and they are also resolving to block that too, because they block it by intention.

Imagine we have a general election in Trinidad and Tobago, they put up no candidate in Tobago. They hire one in Tobago, and then they come and tell the country they win the popular vote because they win in Trinidad. And I am putting Tobagonians on notice now, to take note of that position of the UNC, and if the PNM is not around for any reason and the UNC gets half a chance they will follow some misguided Tobagonians and give Tobago independence, to go, “all yuh go, go, go, go”. Because as far as they are concerned, you are standing in their way.

You come and tell, as an Opposition Leader wanting to be the Prime Minister of Trinidad and Tobago, but telling the country that after you put up no candidate in Tobago, that you win the popular vote in Trinidad. [*Desk thumping*] There is no country called Trinidad. There is an island called Trinidad, but there is a country called Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*] And if you are not prepared to deal with the issues of Tobago and take Tobagonians on board on this ship, then you are not worthy of leading Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker, we are in a pandemic. You would not believe though, listening to my colleagues on the other side. The way they dismiss our difficulty, you would not believe that the rest of the world, not only the Caribbean or South America, you know, the rest of the world is having the same difficulty that we as a

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people are having here, we as a Government having here, and that Minister of Finance having there. Everywhere in the world countries and governments and Prime Ministers and Ministers of Finance are called upon to face this issue, unplanned for, but detrimental and dangerous to all our being. You would have thought that they would have at least acknowledged that. But even in a pandemic you cannot rely on the UNC; even in a pandemic. [*Desk thumping*]

So let me say something to the youngsters, right. There comes a time when you leave the politics behind and put the country in front. [*Desk thumping*] Because when you get responsibility for people's lives and their children's lives and the country's future, there comes a time when a man has to do what a man has to do and this man is going to do what has to be done. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker, they brought the political campaign of August into the Parliament and they continue with it. They win 19 seats and they have the strongest Opposition. Madam Speaker, if you want to talk about strong Opposition, ask the PNM how it is done. We were in the Opposition and I had the honour of being there with three seats in the House; three. You are coming and telling me 19 is strong Opposition. Well, if 19 is strong Opposition, since primary school, I know 22 was stronger than 19. So therefore, to make a point about how strong 19 is and how much you are going to block, just remember that 21 will govern the situation on the basis of what is available to 22. Because 21 under the Constitution gives you the Government. That was a waste of time in this Parliament, bringing the last shreds, the dying embers of an election where you were defeated. We are not concerned about elections now, you know. We are concerned about our livelihood going forward. [*Desk thumping*]

Big demands now for audit of the expenditure by the Minister of Finance.

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Audit, giving the impression that something is awry. This Minister of Finance, from day one, as soon as we realized that we had to confront a pandemic, the Minister of Finance addressed the nation as to how and where we are going to find money to fund the response at the beginning of this response to the pandemic. And every dollar was accounted for. Of course, you can go now and examine to make sure that where you say the money was spent, it was spent. But the UNC, our Opposition, Madam Speaker, they are taking the position that anything the Government says, they go the other way; anything including identifying who is the President of Venezuela.

Madam Speaker, how many times in this House you heard the Opposition, especially our friend from Naparima, jumping up and down like an animated toy, talking about “President Guaidó”. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Hosein: Madam Speaker, on a point of order, 48(4), please.

Madam Speaker: Overruled. [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. Dr. K. Rowley: How many times in the Parliament of Trinidad and Tobago did you hear the Opposition demand that the Government identify Guaidó as President of Venezuela and make all kind of accusations against this Government and this Prime Minister about supporting the Government of Venezuela and acknowledging the authority in Venezuela?

Madam Speaker, you know last week the Supreme Court of the United Kingdom ruled in a court matter, a court ruling, that Guaidó is not the President of Venezuela? [*Desk thumping*] And ruled definitively after judicial assessment that the President of Venezuela is Maduro. And that was the case in which other countries, other powers had seized Venezuela’s gold in London, had determined that it should be given to Guaidó, and the British Supreme Court ruled that Guaidó

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is not the President of Venezuela and Maduro is the President of Venezuela. [*Desk thumping*]

I have listened very carefully since then to hear the response of the UNC to this development; not a word. You know why? Because they attempted to mislead the people of Trinidad and Tobago and the Government of Trinidad and Tobago stood on the principles that we always stand on and we did not need any British ruling to come to that conclusion. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker, we work very hard and talk a lot about diversifying the economy. I think we found a golden fleece. The world would now be happy to know that Trinidad and Tobago has an export now; an export that I think can diversify our economy. I think we should export the Opposition Leader, [*Laughter*] as an anti-COVID product in this pandemic. Go out there and tell the world “sunshine does kill COVID”. Go out there and tell the world to drink bleach and to use hydroxychloroquine and to drink Puncheon rum. Go out there and tell the world that, because in Trinidad and Tobago you spent three days telling this country that our problem is not COVID, our problem is the PNM. Well, there is no PNM out there. So there must be something else causing the problem. And since you have the solution, as you have made it in Trinidad and Tobago, let us export that. Let us export that.

Madam Speaker, they think it is a joke; they think it is a joke. One of them, I cannot remember which of my colleagues, came here and talked about potholes with fish in the potholes. But again, if you have been here as long as I have been, you would know that that is their style; make a joke of everything. Sometimes they actually believe it. One of them came here once from Nariva and said a stone was growing in the road and blocked the road in Nariva and calling on the Government

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to come and move the stone. It was really a landslide that brought the stone into the road. This *Hansard* has in it a stone was growing. That is what, they come and make a joke of it.

Another one, Madam Speaker, the main point of his presentation was that we prevented the opening of Biche High School and they are always on that story, Biche High School, with a slight racial flavour on it. Madam Speaker, the fact of the matter for young people who are here, we are not blaming you all because you all were not here. So it falls to me to explain to you when you hear those statements that sound useful to you, go read, go find the facts, otherwise you too will fall into that trap. Biche High School was one of about four or five schools in an IDB programme. I think one was Rio Claro, one was—there were about four or five schools of which Biche was one, built in an IDB programme. By July of 2000, the Biche High School construction was completed. The IDB—the school could not have been opened because there were so many things wrong with the school, including its location on what was deemed to be on a fault where gas could have been leaking, or was or could have been leaking out would have been detrimental to the children going there.

The school had cost approximately about \$40 million. The IDB by its own expert hired, and a report produced in July 2000, deemed the school to be unusable and the money was wasted. There was a commission of enquiry into that matter and it gave a number of recommendations. And the person who was the Minister of Education then is the person who was the Prime Minister talking now and encouraging people to talk about Biche High School.

When they come back to office later on, after years of dealing with this issue where the EMA came in and you had to do an environmental impact assessment to

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determine whether over time the gas was leaking and whether the students could have gone back there, and by which time the school was deteriorated. And instead of accepting that the school was not usable, they spent money to fix it, another \$30 million. So that school is probably the most expensive school built in the country, because of that situation, starting with its improper location.

But they were afraid that if the school had stayed there, because of that, it would have been a political embarrassment because it happened under the UNC. And when they got back into Government they spent tens of millions to eventually make it useable. So what is wrong with telling that story? Come and say now it is the PNM who is spiting children. We were at one point spending \$30 million transporting students to school elsewhere. So we are spiting children by not using the physical school, but spending \$30 million a year to transport them to another school. That is what the UNC is telling us. And one of them, when they could not speak the untruth directly at me they would send it vicariously.

Princes Town, I was coming back to the Parliament, I heard the Member for Princes Town saying that the former Minister of Education told him that the Prime Minister said to the Cabinet that Princes Town Presbyterian School is not a priority. Madam Speaker, for the record, not for the first time, I want to say that the Member for Princes Town lives very far from the village of truth. [*Desk thumping*] I know of no issue concerning Princes Town Presbyterian School. No such issue has come before me at the Cabinet or anywhere for that matter, and I had no opportunity and I never made any such statement. I want the record to show that. The Member for Princes Town is a stranger to the truth. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker, the Minister of Finance's budget is not a fantasy. It is presented in a time when we have virtually used up much of what we never

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anticipated, much of what we never planned for, much of it threatening to be beyond our ability to sustain and certainly is outside of our control.

I want to just draw to the attention of my colleagues on the other side who behave as though this pandemic thing was something that they would have just dealt with in stride.

This book, Madam Speaker, is called *Ten Lessons for a Post-Pandemic World*, by Fareed Zakaria. And if I read from the cover, the outside cover of the book, with your permission, Madam Speaker, it says:

“One of the biggest threats facing the United States isn’t big at all. Actually, it’s tiny, microscopic, thousands of times smaller than the head of a pin. Deadly pathogens, either man-made or natural, could trigger a global health crisis, and the United States is wholly unprepared to deal with it...Densely packed cities, wars, natural disasters, and international air travel mean a deadly virus propagated in a small village in Africa can be transmitted almost anywhere in the world, including the United States, within 24 hours... Biosecurity and global pandemics cut across all national boundaries. Pathogens, viruses and diseases are equal-opportunity killers. When the crisis comes, we will wish we had more funding and more global cooperation. But then, it will be too late.”

This author is quoting himself writing a little time before the pandemic actually came to the world.

So it is quite nonsensical for our colleagues in this Parliament to behave as though dealing with a pandemic and its fallout is a failing on the part of the Government. What we expected is that we will come together as a people and do what is best for us in a very difficult circumstance. But what do we get instead?

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We get encouragement of bad behaviour. We get encouragement and misinformation. We get statements being made very vicariously to give the impression that something is wrong.

Madam Speaker, I heard my colleague from Pointe-a-Pierre talk about the Government's acquisition of a property in Chaguaramas—he just heard about it. That property has the potential for great positives for the country. He has no evidence or no facts to present but he alerts the public that something is fishy here.

I am part of the Cabinet, head of the Cabinet. I know for a fact that we went out for tender for a cargo ferry for Tobago, open public tender. And you know a number of companies tendered. I know their prices were known to us. I know that the port board—was it NIDCO?—it might have been NIDCO, dealt with the prices, dealt with the equipment offered, made a decision, chose a boat company that was not the one that is doing the business now. After that selection was made, that company that was selected by the board changed its terms and its price for the contracts. What then does the Government do? What does the Government agency do? The Government agency could not accept those terms and therefore, had to look elsewhere. They ended up looking elsewhere and selected the current provider at a cheaper cost. My friend from Pointe-a-Pierre finds something wrong with that. He smelled something there. At least that means that he does not have COVID because one of the symptoms of COVID, you lose your smell. He is smelling things all about.

But, Madam Speaker, one of the most shocking things that happened in this budget debate is the behaviour of the Member for Oropouche East who, every time he gets the opportunity to speak in the Parliament, tries to defame or to smear somebody on this side, especially your humble servant, but also uses the

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parliamentary time, either directly or indirectly to treat with his personal problem with the police.

Madam Speaker, the election was on the 10th of August. Approximately a week or two before that election day a High Court judge in this country spent three hours reading out a judgment to the nation from the court about claims being made about fraudulent conduct with grievous financial consequences to the people of Trinidad and Tobago involving misconduct, allegations of misconduct on the part of a number of persons, including a Member of Parliament. That Member of Parliament's name was called 113 times in that judgment; 113 times the Member's name was called in there and it was not in the context of badges of honour, Madam Speaker.

And for that Member to come in the Parliament, go behind the screen and stand here and take issue with the Government's handling and funding of anti-corruption investigations in this country is beyond comprehension. If there is one person in this Parliament who should not be doing that, it is the Member for Oropouche, because he is directly involved and he is using the Parliament floor to put a defence up for himself. Let him go in the court and do that.

He accuses the Prime Minister of Trinidad and Tobago of acting improperly by paying the legal fees to the police who have hired external quality legal assistance to pursue corruption. The figure he quoted was \$60 million. Well, Madam Speaker, let me tell you how that happens. There are some actions in the Government that, if the Prime Minister does not sign, it cannot take place. Just like that, as bald as that is.

When I became Prime Minister of this country I went into the Prime Minister's Office and there were about 500 pounds of documents on the desk,

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dating from two years prior to my coming into office that required the Prime Minister's signature, approving things that happened two years before I got into office. But people could not be paid without a signature of the Prime Minister. I had to sign those documents which should have been signed a year and a half before; six months before by the last Prime Minister. So the fact that I have signed it gives me no personal interest in the matter, Madam Speaker.

And the fact that I have signed the document to allow the British lawyers to be paid so they could pursue corruption in Trinidad and Tobago, I make no apology for that, Madam Speaker, none whatsoever. [*Desk thumping*]

And insofar as the Member for Oropouche is seeing it in dollars and cents, let me tell you how much money the public is saving on that already. Let us assume that the British lawyers cost £10 million, as they probably do, or £6 million, as they probably do, it was Karl Hudson Phillips who said, "you pay peanuts, you get monkeys". Right? Legal fees are expensive, especially if you are hiring external lawyers because the exchange rate makes it expensive.

But you know, Madam Speaker, where does 60 million come in, in the context of what the money we are spending? We exchanged our cotton notes, our \$100-bills for new ones, the polyester ones. That singular transaction, Madam Speaker, almost \$500 million did not come to be exchanged. Do you know what that means, Madam Speaker? It means that we have earned \$500 million, just like that. By virtue of that money not being exchanged, the new money, which stood to back the old money that did not come in to be exchanged, that \$500 million now stays in the Central Bank. So if we spend \$60 million of that pursuing the culture of corruption and those who would rip us off in this country, Madam Speaker, I make no apologies for that. [*Desk thumping*]

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What the Member for Oropouche did not tell you is that there are claims against the taxpayers of Trinidad and Tobago that run from a few hundred thousand dollars to a billion dollars. There is one claim made in the court for \$1.4 billion. And the Opposition who was saying to us all along, “Pay the contractor, pay the contractor, pay the contractor”. There are contractors who have certified claims certified by experts saying that the payment is due but the facts cannot wear it out. This Government is saying taxpayers are not paying those kinds of claims unless we are satisfied that the money is owed.

Madam Speaker, let me give you an example of one such instance so you could understand what this Government is dealing with. In the month of September, a claim was settled after a state agency fought claims, certified claims that were made to the agency. The claim that the contractor was pursuing, with certification, according to the contractor, was for \$125 million. Taxpayers owed that money. A state agency, backed by this Government, refused to accept that and we fought it. It went to arbitration. In September the claim was settled full and final for one and a half million dollars. What that means, Madam Speaker, is that if the UNC had got back into office when they wanted to come back in, that was a \$120-odd million that would have been paid to a contractor because the UNC’s position is: Just pay whatever the contractor says. That was their position.

There was one instance in here where there were claims being made against the Ministry of Works and Transport for hundreds of millions of dollars in the URP programme, with no documentation because contracts were awarded without documentation. And as the contractors came and made demands on this Government, in this very Parliament, UNC spokespersons, ex-Ministers were saying, “Pay the contractor, pay the contractor”. But why are we surprised, Madam

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Speaker? It is the same group of people, some of them still in the House here, who, on the last working day of the UNC in government, they removed a clause out of the contract for the highway to Point Fortin so that the OAS contractor could leave with \$921 million which belong to the Government and the people of Trinidad and Tobago. It is this Government that fought that in courts of law and won that back for the people of Trinidad and Tobago, \$921 million. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker, they talk about a child life fund as a badge of honour. What they did not tell you, even from sick children, people in this country were “thiefing” money. Thirteen counts of larceny from the Children’s Life Fund.

Mr. Hosein: Madam Speaker, on a point of order. I think that is unparliamentary language, 48(4), please.

Madam Speaker: The Member raised an objection. I have to rule. Overruled, please continue. [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. Dr. K. Rowley: So, Madam Speaker, I make that point to let the people of Trinidad and Tobago know that if there is ever a government that is looking out for them, and they are getting value for money and protecting them from the vipers in this country, it is this PNM Government.

And when my colleague, the Leader of the Opposition, gets up and opens her contribution by calling out to me and saying that she wants to get involved with this Government to come together for some decision over perks for Ministers and government expenditure and matters of motor cars. Madam Speaker, clearly the Opposition Leader does not agree that this Government has demonstrated its willingness to make personal sacrifices and at the same time to protect the people of Trinidad and Tobago.

Let me give a little example. From day one, we have had to deal with less

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resources and we did so admirably. Madam Speaker, let us take the expenditure on Entertainment. At Head 13, Sub-Head 02, Item 001, in the Office of the Prime Minister, Entertainment. For the period that my colleague from Siparia was Prime Minister, that Head burnt up \$48.6 million. Under this Government, under the same Head for the same five-year period, for the same period, five years under this Government, \$5.9 million.

4.30 p.m.

Under Sub-Item 66: Conferences, Seminars and Functions, under the last Prime Minister from Siparia, they spent \$19 million. Under this Prime Minister, we spent \$2.3 million.

In short, Madam Speaker, in short, under the heading Entertainment Conference Seminars and Functions, under my friend from Siparia, they spent \$67.948 million. Under this Government for the same expenditure items we spent, Madam Speaker, a total of—if you add up \$5.927 and \$2.359 you get approximately \$8 million. And that is how, Madam Speaker, we have managed to keep the ship afloat, by being prudent, not being extravagant. So we need no help from Siparia on this matter. [*Desk thumping*] And, Madam Speaker, I saw it being said that we should not accept our terms of engagement, our salaries. Nobody in the government payroll has been asked to makes cuts. We have not used cuts of terms of engagement for government employees. We have not gotten there and I hope we never get there.

But on the issue of exemptions for motor cars. I have heard at the Cabinet, let me just say that I do not need the *Express* or the UNC to tell me how to share my income, as I have been sharing with those I represent and even those I do not represent. Because, Madam Speaker, without prompting and without fanfare and

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without publication I spend between 15 and 20 per cent of my income giving to people who are not on the payroll. [*Desk thumping*] And in terms of exemptions for motor vehicles, Madam Speaker, I too am concerned. Because if those exceptions are being used for the purpose for which they are meant, I have no problem. But if they are being used to facilitate other people in the way that they have been, then they require to be looked at. [*Desk thumping*]

So when my colleague from Siparia invite me to join her, I would say, “Yes, I would join you”, because when your colleagues buy a vehicle for \$2 million and enjoys a million dollars of in tax exemption, and the vehicle is for the use of somebody else, then we need to look at exemptions. [*Desk thumping*]

And, Madam Speaker, I will propose to my colleagues at the Cabinet, because I am not going to unilaterally make a decision like this, I will propose to my colleagues at the Cabinet that the Cabinet take the position that the average exemption on motor vehicles be capped at \$350,000. Because, Madam Speaker, that will give you a fine car, and it is not a car that the Government is giving you, and it is not money that will come to the Treasury if you do not get it. But some people believe and would love to see MPs punished because if you do not get the exemption you do not buy the car. If you buy the car and you get the exemption, it does not go to the Treasury. You do not buy the car, the tax is not due.

But, Madam Speaker, those of us who genuinely serve the public and those us who genuinely share what we earn with those who we represent and those we do not represent, we have no problem. And I want to invite the *Express* to a discussion when we have time on the whole question on who has the moral authority to speak to the people of Trinidad and Tobago. But that is for another time, Madam Speaker. I thank you for the opportunity. [*Continuous desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker: Minister of Finance.

PARLIAMENTARY PRACTICE

(ADHERENCE TO)

The Minister of Planning and Development (Hon Camille Robinson-Regis):

Madam Speaker, I rise an issue of privilege. May I proceed? Madam Speaker, on Monday of this week I raised an issue as it pertained to the Member of Parliament for St. Augustine. Madam Speaker, on that occasion I indicated that that Member was persisting in sending out puerile and juvenile remarks to Facebook [*Desk thumping*] and casting aspersions on Members of the House and even more so, Madam Speaker, on the Chair itself.

Madam Speaker, at that time, if I recall, you made a pronouncement and indicated that that should not continue or that should not be done at all. Madam Speaker, I regret that today that same Member continues in that same puerile, juvenile, disrespectful, disgraceful manner to continue to cast aspersions on Members, and even more so on the Chair.

Madam Speaker, the Chair of this Parliament is not anybody's friend or enemy. The Chair, the Speaker, conducts what takes place in this Parliament. And, Madam Speaker, if one of our own can cast aspersions on the Chair and fellow Members, what is left for members of the public to say about us in this august House? Madam Speaker, we call each other "honourable". We cannot even call each other "her" or "him". We have to say "the Member". But, Madam Speaker, the Member for St. Augustine is by her very conduct bringing this House into disrepute.

And, Madam Speaker, I said on the last occasion that I did not want to reach the position where I had to invoke the Standing Orders and invoke a motion of privilege. But, Madam Speaker, it has definitely going too far. And, Madam

Speaker, I bring this to your attention at this time.

Madam Speaker: It is unfortunate I have to so soon rise on this type of matter, and I guess Members have to distinguish between what is robust discussion in here—it might be a very fine line—and crossing the line with respect to being—committing contempt and acting in a manner that amounts to a breach of privilege.

I ask Members to familiarize themselves with the Standing Orders because Standing Order 48(8) is extremely clear. And I think it will do all Members well to also familiarize themselves with—and there is a particular rule we say here against display—but Erskine May's *Parliamentary Practice*, I think all Members need to familiarize themselves with respect to the aspects that amount to breach of privilege and also contempt.

It is no excuse that it is a new Parliament or that people are new to this House. There are rules. Everything has rules. And while you have freedom of expression in here, it is within a certain context. As far as social media, it may really be the in-way of communicating, but Members have to respect each other, they have to respect the Chair, and they also have to safeguard, as I said on Monday, the dignity of this House. And it is unfortunate that the Member of St. Augustine has not heeded the caution last week. This in itself is flying in the face of the caution.

There are many senior Members on your side and there are many other senior resources available to you and to all Members of this House. I hope they would take the opportunity to avail themselves of good sound advice. In certain aspects I think a former Speaker used to say, “Three strikes and out” and many of you all may be familiar with that former Speaker. I just advise the Member for St. Augustine, this is strike two. Minister of Finance. [*Desk thumping*]

APPROPRIATION (FINANCIAL YEAR 2021) BILL, 2020

The Minister of Finance (Hon. Colm Imbert): Thank you, Madam Speaker. Before I conclude my winding-up of this debate, first allow me to congratulate again the very hard-working staff at the Ministry of Finance who have made this budget the success that it is.

Madam Speaker, I have listened to Members opposite for the last four days, and one thing has come across that has clearly been lost on members opposite. That is, Madam Speaker, that this budget debate is not an election campaign. That came to an end on the 10th of August when this PNM Government was returned for a second term. I observed, Madam Speaker, that Members opposite wasted virtually all of their speaking time engaging in a futile attempt to revisit irrelevant issues that they had raised during the 2020 general election which they lost. It should have been obvious to them that all of those issues that they raised had already been discounted by the population. So what was the point? What was the point?

Madam Speaker, members opposite seem not to appreciate that the electorate had already pronounced on these matters, and that they had failed to convince the population that they had a better plan or that they were a better alternative to the PNM. In fact, Madam Speaker, I was quite astonished some Members were so misguided that they went as far back as the 2015 election campaign, and even before that; which they also lost. Not one Member of the other side proposed any meaningful alternative to our fiscal measures, nor did they speak to what they thought the level of government expenditure should be or should not be in 2021. Or what the measures for fiscal 2021 should be.

For example, not a single Member on that side rendered an opinion as to whether we as a country should run a fiscal deficit in 2021 to stimulate the

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economy, or not, as the case may be; whether in the face of COVID-19 we should engage in demand side economics as a country based on the principle espoused by the economist John Maynard Keynes in response to the great depression of the 1930s, which is, that the demand for goods and services is the primary driver of economic activity. Or, whether we should following a supply side economic model popularized in the 1980s as Reaganomics, where it was believed that tax cuts for business provide incentives to produce economic benefits that somehow trickle down into the overall economy. Or, whether we should follow a classic economic model promoted by Adam Smith who proposed the idea of an invisible hand, the tendency of free markets to regulate themselves by means of competition, supply and demand, and self-interest.

Not one of them raised any of these issues, Madam Speaker. Not one of them proposed anything in terms of how we should manage the economy going forward in the face of COVID-19. And if any of them had bothered to pay attention they would have realized that we on this side, unlike them, are not slaves to any particular economic model but rather in this budget which, as the Prime Minister has said, has received universal acclamation from all sectors of the population, rather in this budget, to kick start the economy, we have utilized a judicious mix of all three economic models. And that is why this budget has been acclaimed by all and sundry as a good budget, because there is something in this budget for everyone. [*Desk thumping*]

Let me give you some examples, Madam Speaker. Low income taxpayers, all, everyone earning \$7,000 a month or less, now have an additional \$250 per month every month in their pockets and that is demand side economics, Madam Speaker, a \$750 million injection into the economy.

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By way of another example, the sale of fuel will now be regulated by competition on a free market. That is classic economics. And tax incentives for businesses such as those designed to stimulate construction and investment in technology; that is supply side economics. And that is what I expect to hear in a budget debate. Sadly, we heard none of this. All we heard was the usual tired, old, stale, populist, platitudes, and rhetoric, the usual puerile and baseless allegations backed up with no facts, which has failed to work for them in the last two general elections. There was no economic analysis, no econometrics, nothing to look at our situation as a country and what we should do to go forward. Just mauvais langage and irrelevance on that side.

Indeed, Madam Speaker, suggestions about what should be the approach to the 2021 Budget came from elsewhere not inside here. One former Minister of Finance suggested that we have played it too safe and have been too conservative, and that the better approach would be to engage in large scale borrowing to stimulate the productive sector, taking our debt to GDP ratio up to 100 per cent from the current 80 per cent. In other words, a former Minister of Finance has proposed we should borrow a further \$30 billion in 2021, instead of the planned \$8 billion and spend our way out of the recessionary effects of COVID-19. That is one option.

Other economists have suggested that we should spend a further \$5 to \$6 billion in 2021 on an expanded social safety net, taking expenditure up to \$55 billion instead of the \$49 billion that we have planned. That is another option.

These are all very serious alternatives, very serious options, which we have considered in formulating this budget, and which we may revisit in due course as the virus continues its economic rampage and the full effects of the pandemic

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unfold. But one thing we will not do is surrender to sterile debates such as I have heard for the last four days, or be inflexible on our policies since we, this PNM, are in the business of Government for the long term. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker, it is a tradition that the Leader of the Opposition is given the same amount of time as the Minister of Finance to respond to the budget statement. I have had the Leader of the Opposition's response analyzed and in that three-hour disjointed response, the Leader of the Opposition made just two points, two. That is all. One was that the Minister of Finance was hiding the latest annual report of the National Insurance Board in some pursuit of hiding unemployment figures, and secondly, that Ministers were "living large" at taxpayers' expense.

The allegation regarding the National Insurance Board report was of course preposterous. Parliament was dissolved earlier this year before the report could be laid, and further, with respect to that report, there are a number of serious issues that needs to be resolved with the National Insurance Board including how to treat with migrant workers; what the retirement age should be; and what should be done with the self-employed. These are serious matters, Madam Speaker, for serious people to look at. There is nothing in that report that speaks to official statistics on employment levels.

With respect to the second point about Ministers "living it up", which in my view is merely a weak attempt at distraction from the internal issues within the Opposition where there is an unprecedented national billboard campaign being conducted, not by the PNM, but by Members of the UNC. [*Desk thumping*] Not we, Madam Speaker, it is former UNC Ministers who are engaged in an unprecedented national billboard campaign calling on the Leader of the Opposition to step down having taken that Member's party to so many electoral defeats over

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the last five years—twelve I think.

But for the Leader of the Opposition I would say, Madam Speaker, I would refer to the old European proverb, “people who live in glass houses should not throw stones” and “if you cannot take it do not throw it”. And I therefore commend the Leader of the Opposition, who as Prime Minister insisted on retaining travel benefits for MPs, to enquire of the Opposition Chief Whip, the Member of Parliament for Pointe-a-Pierre, as to why, since his leader claims to be—that Member’s leader claims to be concerned for the poor and downtrodden and “how it go look?”, how our concessions “go look?”. Perhaps the Leader of the Opposition can enquire of the Member for Pointe-a-Pierre as to why he used his tax exemption privileges to purchase in 2019 the most expensive car of all Members of Parliament, probably in the history of this Parliament, Madam Speaker, a four-litre Mercedes Benz AMG G63 valued at \$2.3 million and why that Opposition Member accessed a benefit of \$1.4 million in tax and duty concessions, four times more than the benefits accessed by most other MPs for a car which he hardly ever drives to Parliament if at all. And I take responsibility for my words, Madam Speaker.

Further, Madam Speaker, that multi-million dollar luxury car purchased by the Member for Pointe-a-Pierre, the UNC Member, was imported straight out of New Zealand and not through the local agent. And it begs the question as to whether such an approach to such an expensive car purchase voids the requirement for submission of a declaration of source of funds to the FIU. Because, Madam Speaker, if you go through a local car dealer you have to fill out a source of funds. If you bring it in straight you may not have to do that.

The other question I would put, Madam Speaker, and this is a general

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question, not thrown particularly at the Member for Pointe-a-Pierre, that if a car is purchased by an MP with a substantial benefit in kind such as \$1.4 million in tax concessions, but is used almost exclusively by an unrelated private citizen from day one, is that a breach of the spirit, purpose, and intent of travel benefits afforded to MPs, Madam Speaker? I ask the Leader of the Opposition to reflect on those questions.

And as for the Member for Oropouche East—

Ms. Ameen: Madam Speaker, I think you made a ruling on this earlier?

Madam Speaker: Please continue, Minister.

Hon. C. Imbert: As for the Member for Oropouche East who has lived up to his reputation, at least in my opinion, of being a political [*Crosstalk*] comedian, Madam Speaker—

Madam Speaker: One minute please.

Hon. C. Imbert: This is an Opposition MP—

Madam Speaker: One minute please, Minister of Finance. Please continue.

Hon. C. Imbert: Thank you Madam Speaker. Member for Oropouche East, an Opposition MP on a salary of just \$17,000 per month with no other obvious source of income has purchased a Jaguar and a Mercedes Benz within the last three years and has the temerity to throw shade at the rest of us, Madam Speaker. I advise the Leader of the Opposition to look within her ranks rather than throwing shade on this side. And, Madam Speaker, in my opinion it is political hypocrisy like this among other things that cause the two back to back election defeats of the UNC.
[*Desk thumping*]

Another matter, Madam Speaker, of which I heard nothing from Members opposite and something that the Leader of the Opposition flirts with quite

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irresponsibly at times, is the question of our exchange rate. I would have liked to hear a discussion about that. But instead, Madam Speaker, we hear vague utterances such as, “let the market determine our exchange rate” and you get the impression that when these statements are made Members opposite are simply mouthing the words of interest groups.

We on this side have been told, always by those who can afford an inflationary spike that our exchange rate is uncompetitive. We should devalue our currency. Several experts keep pushing us to do so, claiming that if we did not do so, our foreign reserves would evaporate in short order. One can conclude however, Madam Speaker, that some of the arguments advanced about devaluation come from those who are hoarding US dollars and wish to make windfall profits. I would have liked to have a discussion about that. No, we heard nothing of this, Madam Speaker.

And just let me say in passing on this issue that proponents of devaluation argued that it improves competitiveness by increasing the price of imports and making exports cheaper. But it is argued by others that this is a fallacy because it takes no account of the increased cost of local goods and services that arise from an exchange rate devaluation and that the real result of a devaluation is a destruction in real incomes, inflation and poverty, Madam Speaker.

That is why this Government has so far chosen the route of exchange rate stability to minimize inflation and keep consumer prices down. That is the kind of discussion that I would have expected to hear in a budget debate rather than factious and baseless claims of geographic discrimination, and wild and unfounded allegations of impropriety such as those that routinely emanate from the Member for Oropouche East without a shred of evidence.

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Let me move now to one of those wild statements from Oropouche East, Madam Speaker, and that is that we have slashed the police budget and we have brought the police to their knees. I say to that, Madam Speaker, that that is nonsense. At \$49.6 billion the overall budget for 2021 is 6 per cent less than the original budget of \$53 billion for 2020. In addition, total government revenue for 2020 is \$13 billion less than estimated at the beginning of the year pre-COVID. Allocations have thus been reduced across the board consistent with reality. Money does not grow on trees, Madam Speaker. It is a matter of public record that COVID-19 has caused not just us in Trinidad and Tobago but every country in the world to suffer a serious loss of revenue in 2020. And 2021 will be no exception.

And let me go to the facts. I am advised by the Budget Division in the Ministry of Finance that the TTPS requested \$418 million for Goods and Services in fiscal 2020 and received 390 million or 93 per cent of what it requested. Further, the allocation for goods and services for the TTPS in 2021 is 335 million and we encourage, we in the Ministry of Finance, encourage the TTPS to apply for that money as soon as they can so that we could make whatever adjustment is required and possible at the mid-year review stage which is normal, standard, and traditional in this budgetary process, Madam Speaker. After all, what we are dealing with here are estimates of expenditure. So at this time we have allocated \$335 million to the police for Goods and Services.

And I want to repeat, I encourage the TTPS to apply for that money so that we can make whatever adjustments are required and are possible at the mid-year review. All of this carrying on by the Opposition is just histrionics, Madam Speaker.

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Some other matters that require clarification. I have observed commentators making inaccurate statements about the reference to the retirement age in the budget speech. What I actually said was that in the context of the known shortfall between national insurance contributions and benefits there is a need to seriously examine the question of increasing the retirement age to 65. Contrary to allegations made therefore by the Member for Couva South, and others, that does not equate to a unilateral *carte blanche* adjustment by the Minister of Finance of the retirement age. All I said is that we need to look at it because there is a gross discrepancy between contributions and benefits at the National Insurance Board, and we need to do something about it.

I have also heard the Leader of the Opposition and the Member for Oropouche East claim they do not know what the Government spent money on for COVID-19 relief and because they do not know they have demanded a forensic audit. This inaccuracy, Madam Speaker, has even found itself into the editorial pages of a daily newspaper despite the fact that the Prime Minister pointed out that on numerous occasions we have given full details of the areas of expenditure involved in COVID-19 relief and fiscal stimulus, most recently in the 2021 Budget Statement.

So, for those on the other side, and for those who like to write editorials, I will repeat what is on pages 7 and 8 of the budget statement.

“A”—social—“safety net for the most vulnerable households and businesses was...established. It was appropriately targeted at a cost of \$6.0 billion of which we have spent \$4 billion so far. We are leaving no one behind.

We established a social and humanitarian support programme in which:

- 25,101 grants have been paid under the food support programme.

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- 50,904 grants have been paid to individuals who” —lost—“income...;
- 20,500 grants have been paid to households which receive meals from the School Feeding Programme...
- 42,451 grants have been paid as income support...
- 33,813 individuals who lost their jobs or had their incomes reduced have received 81,179 grants amounting to \$129.8 million dollars in salary relief...
- 2,818 grants were paid to senior citizens who have not yet received their...pensions
- 488 grants were paid to individuals who had not yet received their disability assistance grants...
- 1,400 emergency hampers were provided to families in urgent need;
- 25,000 food vouchers, which included fresh produce, were provided to families...
- 3,770 families have received rental assistance;
- \$30.0 million”—was—“given to...religious bodies for food distribution which in turn distributed 49,330 hampers...
- ...fuel grants in an amount of \$2000”—for—“maxi-taxis”—and—“\$750”—for—“taxis”—were given out. “...1720 grants”—for—“...maxi-taxis...and 253...” —grants for taxis.
- “343 of our...artistes have received grants of \$5000...
- 300 nationals who are stranded overseas have received cash grants...
- 359,000 cloth face masks were distributed...
- 25,095 individuals received accelerated income tax refunds;

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- 5,010 small- and medium-enterprises with a per VAT threshold of up to \$500,000 received in cash accelerated VAT refunds;
- 460 companies with up to \$10 million in refunds per VAT cycle receive fully tradable VAT bonds amounting to \$3 billion;
- 142 small- and medium-enterprises have received zero interest government-guaranteed loans;
- ...50 business owners have received...loans under the Credit Union...Facility...
- 5,000 micro-enterprises will receive grants under the micro-enterprise grant programme...
- 124 importers of essential items have received US \$75.0 million through the Special Import Forex Window...
- ...payments...to contractors and suppliers in an amount of \$2.0 billion..."

This is in the budget speech, Madam Speaker, yet they want an audit. They do not know what we spent the money on, and as I said, it finds its way into the newspapers. [*Desk thumping*] And this is the fourth time I have come in this Parliament to give a detailed list of what we spent the money on.

How much more time do I have, Madam Speaker?

Madam Speaker: Your time expires—you have roughly 20 minutes. Your time expires at 5.26.06.

Hon. C. Imbert: Thank you very much.

Another point made by Members opposite is whether our estimates are realistic. What I can say, Madam Speaker, with respect to that point, is that even in

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the face of increased in uncertainty created by COVID, there will be vigilance and increased vigilance in 2021 by the Inland Revenue Division since it has come to our attention that suppliers of goods and services to Government do not always report the income received from Government to the Board of Inland Revenue. They simply bank the money without reporting it. This must stop and will stop in 2021. Whether you supply a \$10 ballpoint pen to Government or you construct a multi-million dollar secondary school, we will take steps to ensure that there is a proper correlation between money received from Government and income declared to the Board of Inland Revenue. So we are going on an aggressive drive to see how best we can deal with leakage of tax revenue in 2021.

Let me also deal with some inaccurate statements made by various Members. I will start with the Member for Barataria/San Juan who screamed that it is illegal to use stamp duty assessment to put values on properties because, according to the various laws associated with valuations and property tax, we must use the annual rental value and we must not use stamp duty to determine the capital value of land and property to determine property tax. The kindest word I could put on that, Madam Speaker, is “nonsense”.

There are two laws that govern property tax. One is the Valuation of Land Act, the other is the Property Tax Act. And if the Member for Barataria/San Juan, had bothered to spend five minutes reading these two Acts, he would see that in the definition section, in the Valuation of Land Act, there is a definition of capital value. And, if he bothered to go a little further into that law, he would see in section 5, that:

“The Commissioner shall make a valuation of the—
...site value and improved value; or

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...capital value and annual rental value,
of every parcel of land or part thereof.”

And if he had gone a little deeper, Madam Speaker, into the Schedule, he would see that there is a percentage that is applied to land to determine the annual rental value. For agricultural land, it is 2 per cent of the capital value; for residential land 3.5 per cent of the capital value; commercial 5 per cent of the capital value; industrial 5 per cent of the capital value; and so on. And therefore, Madam Speaker, in order to establish the rental value of a property, you must first establish its capital value. And stamp duty is based on the capital value of the property. I sometimes wonder who wrote the exams in law school for these fellows, Madam Speaker, these honorable Members. I wonder, because the law is clear. You establish the capital value, and then apply a percentage to get the rental value and the property tax is based on the rental value. It is here, like ABC, like primary school.

The other inaccuracy stated by the hon. Member was that we made a big song and dance about the Leader of the Opposition's plan to huff the money in the Unit Trust and the NIB. And he said that the Prime Minister did not know what was going on because in the Roadmap Phase 2 Report, it recommends using 3 billion from the Unit Trust to fund expenditure for three months. I have read the entire phase two report, twice, today. It is not there. But in the event that I was wrong, I called the co-chairman of the roadmap committee. Ah say” go through every paragraph inside of there and see if you could find a statement saying that this: “Government is going to take \$3 billion from the Unit Trust to fund expenditure for three months”. I am quite satisfied that that is simply untrue. It is just not there. Typical UNC, Madam Speaker.

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Now, let me go to the Member for Pointe-a-Pierre. I have a newspaper article here.

“Chief Whip questions ‘fishy’ purchase of CL Marine”.

What does he say? What are the allegations he makes?

“CL Marine...has been losing millions every year...

Unit Trust is holding a lot of debt on that... shipyard.”

Why did I not talk about the company in the budget statement? What is the plan?

Let me deal with the facts, Madam Speaker. I have the official records.

Let me start with allegation one. False allegation one: CL Marine has been losing millions every year. In 2014, Madam Speaker, CL Marine made a profit of \$11.5 million. In 2016, CL Marine made a profit of \$18.3 million. And in 2019, Madam Speaker, it lost \$81,000. So how can a profit of \$11 million, a profit of \$18 million and a loss of \$81,000 be equivalent to its losing a million dollars every year? But that is typical UNC rhetoric, Madam Speaker. Typical UNC rhetoric.

The other allegation: Unit Trust is holding a lot of debt in the shipyards so why did we buy it? We “go find” ourselves in problems. Madam Speaker, the Unit Trust liability was settled years ago by CL Marine. There is no Unit Trust debt on CL Marine, Madam Speaker, and as we have said before, and I will repeat, the acquisition of CL Marine deals with three policy objectives of this Government. Firstly, it is part of the debt recovery from CLICO, and through the acquisition of CL Marine, we have been able to get an asset valued at \$119 million, Madam Speaker. So we have, in effect, recovered \$119 million of taxpayers’ money through the acquisition of CL Marine.

5.15 p.m.

Secondly, it is public knowledge that two fast ferries are being constructed

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in Australia. One is getting ready to leave Australia at the end of October to get here before the end of the year, the other one shortly thereafter—one built by Austal, one built by Incat. There are two Cable Class Military Vessels being constructed by Austal as well, which will arrive next year 2021. We have a number of Damen Vessels. We have a number of other vessels belonging to the coast guard, and one of the strategic purposes of this acquisition is to consolidate the repair of our fleet, our marine fleet, at a single location at the Dock Yard in Chaguaramas. [*Desk thumping*] And the third objective, of course, is diversification, Madam Speaker, because shipbuilding and ship repair is one of the areas that we have earmarked for diversification. [*Desk thumping*] So that deals with the statement from the Member for Pointe-a-Pierre, the \$2 million car man.

Madam Speaker, I have really been heartened listening to commentary from all sectors of the society. I must say, I have been in this Parliament now for 29 years and this is a budget that has received such universal acclamation that I, myself, I am surprised, Madam Speaker. I am surprised. From the \$500 million allocation for farmers—and let me say, two Members on that side—I understand there was one Member, I was not in this Parliament, Madam Speaker. I must have been at the Ministry of Finance or something doing some work—who indicated that I spoke untruths, and there is no allocation in the budget of 500 million for agriculture. That is nonsense and I would urge Members opposite, go and read your documents. Some of you are new and you are taking basket from those remnants that have continued into this Parliament on your side. There is a \$500 million allocation, Madam Speaker, which has been placed for agriculture for farmers in the Ministry of Finance's allocation, Madam Speaker. And we put it that way because it is now up to the Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries to

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come up with plans and proposals—detailed plans and proposals—to access that \$500 million.

So, as the Minister of Finance comes to Cabinet from time to time—he spoke of one of his plans yesterday in terms of access roads—he may wish to spend \$50 million on access road, he comes to Cabinet, Cabinet agrees and then the Ministry of Finance will disburse out of the \$500 million. It is there in black and white for anybody who has eyes to see. But I heard the Leader of the Opposition say, that hon. Member, cannot find it in the budget and then one of the newbies jumped in and say, “They cannot find it either.” I will point it out during the Standing Finance Committee so that they could see with their own eyes that the \$500 million is there at the Ministry of Finance’s allocation. [*Desk thumping*] But from that \$500 million which is going to be used for a series of productive projects in the Ministry of Agriculture, running the entire gamut of support to the agriculture sector.

We have also put \$50 million, Madam Speaker, for export market promotion for the Ministry of Trade and Industry to allow our exporters to get accreditation and to penetrate overseas markets and to assist our exporters to penetrate overseas markets. We put \$50 million in this budget for that, Madam Speaker. I did not hear any of them talk about that.

And then, we have also decided to help first time homeowners by increasing the allowance for stamp duty exemption from \$1.5 million to \$2 million, Madam Speaker. A series of incentives for construction for property development and so on, Madam Speaker; a series of incentives for technology, the divestment of gas stations to the private sector with first preference going to dealers; the introduction of a private operator in the port, Madam Speaker. This budget has hit the mark in

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so many areas, it has excited so many people in this country. [*Desk thumping*]

And, therefore, I am humbled and pleased to be a Member of this Government. I have presented the budget, but the budget has been informed by many advisors—people from the private sector, people from the public sector, people from the university, from the Government, et cetera. We had a very good team looking at what we should do, consultation with the Prime Minister and other Members of the Government and so on, Madam Speaker. And before I conclude, I have been reminded that I should also thank the hard-working staff at the Ministry of Planning and Development for creating the PSIP for 2021. [*Desk thumping*]

So I am overwhelmed by the support of the population for this budget. I am overwhelmed at the excitement it has generated in the population and I look forward to this year 2021, Madam Speaker, as we seek to find our way through this nightmare that is COVID. As I said, we may have to revisit some of our plans for the budget in the context of some of the advice we have received from senior practitioners and so on. As we go along, there is great uncertainty. In the United Kingdom, for example, the Chancellor cancelled the budget. So I wish to thank all Members on this side who have contributed. [*Desk thumping*] I wish to thank all Members of the Government, all Members of Parliament for contributing and I beg to move, Madam Speaker. [*Desk thumping*]

Question put and agreed to.

Bill accordingly read a second time.

Hon. C. Imbert: Thank you, Madam Speaker. In accordance with Standing Order 81(8), I beg to move:

That the Appropriation (Financial Year 2021) Bill, 2020, be referred to the Standing Finance Committee for the consideration of the Bill together with

the Estimates.

Madam Speaker: Hon. Members, the House shall now go into Standing Finance Committee to consider the Bill and the Estimates. *House resolved itself into Standing Finance Committee.*

Madam Chairman: Hon. Members, in accordance with Standing Order 81(2) and (8), the Estimates containing the details of the financial requirements along with the Appropriation Bill have been referred to this Committee for consideration.

The documents before the Committee therefore include—and those documents are what you all familiarly called “the yellow books”—the *Draft Estimates Details of Estimates of Recurrent Expenditure* for the financial year 2021 which identifies:

1. The Heads of Expenditure;
2. The chart of accounts for expenditure;
3. The classification of expenditure Sub-Items under the Personnel Expenditure, Goods and Services and Minor Equipment Purchases Sub-Heads;
4. The summary of the total allocation to each Head of Expenditure;
5. The Sub-Item details relevant to each Head of Expenditure for the current fiscal year and the two fiscal years immediately preceding.

The *Draft Estimates of the Revenue and Expenditure of the Statutory Boards and Similar Bodies and of the Tobago House of Assembly* for the financial year 2021 which identifies:

1. The statutory board or body for each Head of Expenditure;
2. The abstract of estimated revenue and expenditure for the year ending 30th of September 2021;
3. The abstract showing the Government’s subvention for 2019 Actual

Expenditure, 2020 Estimates, 2020 Revised Estimates and 2021 Estimates and the increase or decrease of the 2021 Estimates over or under the 2020 Revised Estimates;

4. The chart of accounts for income and expenditure;
5. The classification of expenditure Sub-Items under the Personnel Expenditure, Goods and Services and Minor Equipment Purchases, Sub-Heads;
6. The Sub-Item details relevant to each statutory body or board for current fiscal year and the two fiscal years immediately preceding.

The *Draft Estimates of Development Programme* for the financial year 2021 which includes:

1. The summary of estimates of the Development Programme for the financial year 2021 for Part A, the Consolidated Fund;
2. The summary of the total allocation for each Head of Expenditure for Sub-Head 09, Development Programme Consolidated Fund;
3. The Sub-Item, Project Group and Project Description details relevant to each Head of Expenditure for the current fiscal year and the two fiscal years immediately preceding;
4. The summary of estimates of Part B, the Infrastructure Development Fund for the financial year 2021;
5. The summary of the total allocation to each Head of Expenditure for Sub-Head 701, Infrastructure Development Fund;
6. The Sub-Item, Project Group and Project Description details relevant to each Head of Expenditure for the current fiscal year and the two fiscal years immediately preceding.

The Appropriation (Financial Year 2021) Bill, 2020: This Bill provides for the

service of Trinidad and Tobago for the financial year ending on the 30th day of September, 2021. The Bill seeks to authorize the sum of \$41,394,343,424 from the Consolidated Fund. The Schedule details the sum to be approved for each Head of Expenditure.

Members, in accordance with Standing Order 85(1), the consideration of the clauses of the Bill will be postponed until after the consideration of the Schedule which lists the Heads of Expenditure to be approved. The Heads will be considered in the order submitted by the Leader of the Opposition which I have received, and these are set out in accordance with the five days and, basically, on day one we do:

Ministry of Health

Ministry of Education

Ministry of Social Development and Family Services

Integrity Commission

Elections and Boundaries Commission

Office of the Attorney General and Ministry of Legal Affairs

There is also listed here the Judiciary, but I believe a request has come for a rescheduling. Has that reached the Whip?

Mr. Lee: We changed the Judiciary with the Office of the Parliament.

Madam Chairman: Okay, so at “7” we will do the Office of the Parliament.

Mr. Lee: Or we can leave the Office of the Parliament last, Madam Chairman.

Madam Chairman: Okay.

Mr. Lee: On day one.

Madam Chairman: So that at “7” we will do Industrial Court and at “8” we will do the Office of Parliament. Okay? On the second day we will do:

Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries

Ministry of Public Utilities

Ministry of Works and Transport
Ministry of Tourism, Culture and the Arts
Ministry of Trade and Industry
Tax Appeal Board
Public Service Appeal Board

And, therefore, the Judiciary will then come here on the second day. On the third day we will do the:

Ministry of National Security
Trinidad and Tobago Police Service
Ministry of Rural Development and Local Government
Ministry of Housing and Urban Development
Ministry of Labour
Registration, Recognition and Certification Board
Ministry of Youth Development and National Service
Auditor General

Day four we will do:

Tobago House of Assembly
Central Administrative Services, Tobago
Ministry of Public Administration and Digital Transformation
Service Commissions
Personnel Department
Ministry of Sport and Community Development
Ministry of Planning and Development
Environmental Commission

Day five we will do:

Ministry of Finance

Pensions and Gratuities

Office of the Prime Minister

Ministry of Energy and Energy Industries

Ministry of Foreign and Caricom Affairs

Statutory Authorities Service Commission

Equal Opportunity Tribunal

Office of the President

The proposed work schedule: Hon. Members, as we have just enunciated there, there are 40 Heads of Expenditure to be considered over a five-day period. Therefore, I propose that the Committee shall meet each day from 10.00 to 8.00 p.m., save and except on Friday the 16th of October, 2020, or for so long thereafter, to consider a minimum of eight Heads of Expenditure per day. Please note that I said save and except Friday the 16th of October, 2020. We begin then at 1.30. But please note Members that we must consider and complete at least eight Heads per day including on Friday the 16th October, 2020.

Consideration of the Tobago House of Assembly: Hon. Members, I crave your indulgence to have the Committee agree on the time for the examination of the Tobago House of Assembly and Central Administrative Services, Tobago, and they will be taken on day four, which will be Wednesday the 21st of October, 2020 and, therefore, we are asking for them to be taken first in order to allow these representatives to make the arrangements to travel to Trinidad. And may I suggest that in accordance with the order—and I think the order allows for it—that we take Tobago House of Assembly at 10.00 a.m., immediately followed by the Central Administrative Services, Tobago and if we can really target to take Central Administrative Services, Tobago no later than 1.00 p.m.

The speaking time: Hon. Members, in accordance with Standing Order

45(1), the speaking time in Standing Finance Committee shall not exceed five minutes on each intervention. Each Member will be invited to make a brief five-minute opening statement on the Ministry's or department's priority areas for the upcoming year.

Procedure for each Head: Hon. Members, the procedure for each Head of Expenditure shall be as follows:

1. The Head and the amount to be appropriated will be announced by me as Chairman;
2. The Minister will then be invited to make a brief opening statement;
3. The Chairman will then propose the question that the sum proposed stand part of the Schedule;
4. For each Head of Expenditure I will call the Sub-Head followed by the Item. I will not call the Sub-Items. Discussions can ensue on the Item called or the relevant Sub-Item and clarifications sought. Once the Committee moves to another Sub-Head, questions from a previous Sub-Head will not be entertained. And from experience, I know this tends to be a bit difficult and, therefore, it would really call for us all to be alert.
5. The Chairman will repeat the procedure for the Development Programme;
6. Once this is concluded, the Chairman will then put the question that the sum stand part of the Schedule;
7. The procedure will be repeated for each Head of Expenditure.

So the procedure having been laid out, I am to enquire whether there is any other item of business which either the Whip or the Leader of the House may wish to—
So I—yes.

Mr. Lee: On day one we start on Friday at 1.30 p.m., we have eight Heads to complete and we will complete that, how long ever it takes, right, on Friday?

Madam Chairman: That is the point. Whatever time we start, we have to complete eight Heads. Friday is day one, as you mentioned, Whip, and therefore, we have to complete the eight Heads. So there is no end time. The end time has to do with the numbers. Okay? So if there is no further business, hon. Members, the meeting of this Standing Finance Committee is suspended and will be resumed on Friday, October 16, 2020 at 1.30 p.m. Please reach home safely.

5.38 p.m.: *Standing Finance Committee suspended.*