

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES*Wednesday, December 09, 2020*

The House met at 1.30 p.m.

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

Madam Speaker: Hon. Members, I have received communication from Mr. David Lee, MP, Member of Parliament for Pointe-a-Pierre, and Mr. Dinesh Rambally, MP, Member of Parliament for Chaguanas West, who have requested leave of absence from today's sitting of the House. The leave which the Members seek is granted.

PAPERS LAID

1. Draft Elections and Boundaries Commission (Local Government and Tobago House of Assembly) (Tobago) Order, 2020. [*The Prime Minister (Hon. Dr. Keith Rowley)*]
2. Report of the Auditor General of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago on the Financial Statements of the Chaguanas Borough Corporation for the year ended September 30, 2012. [*The Minister of Finance (Hon. Colm Imbert)*]
3. Report of the Auditor General of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago on the Financial Statements of the Chaguanas Borough Corporation for the year ended September 30, 2013. [*Hon. C. Imbert*]
Papers 2 and 3 to be referred to the Public Accounts Committee.
4. Central Bank (Payment of Supervisory Fees and Charges) (Amendment) Regulations, 2020. [*Hon. C. Imbert*]
5. Insurance (Approved Securities) Regulations, 2020. [*Hon. C. Imbert*]
6. Insurance (Capital Adequacy) Regulations, 2020. [*Hon. C. Imbert*]

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7. Insurance (Caribbean Policy Premium Method) Regulations, 2020. [*Hon. C. Imbert*]
8. Insurance (Companies) Registration Regulations, 2020. [*Hon. C. Imbert*]
9. Insurance (Financial Condition Report) Regulations, 2020. [*Hon. C. Imbert*]
10. Insurance (Intermediaries) Registration Regulations, 2020. [*Hon. C. Imbert*]
11. Insurance (Participating Account) Regulations, 2020. [*Hon. C. Imbert*]
12. Insurance (Pension Fund Plan Investments) Regulations, 2020. [*Hon. C. Imbert*]
13. Insurance (Pension Fund Plans Registration Fees) Regulations, 2020. [*Hon. C. Imbert*]
14. Annual Report of the Statutory Authorities Service Commission for the period October 2018 to September 2019. [*The Minister of Planning and Development and Acting Minister of Housing and Urban Development (Hon. Camille Robinson-Regis)*]
15. White Paper on the National Child Policy. [*The Minister in the Office of the Prime Minister (Hon. Ayanna Webster-Roy)*]

PRIME MINISTER'S QUESTIONS

ContourGlobal Purchase Assertion (Details of)

Mr. Arnold Ram (*Caroni Central*): In light of recent reports that London-listed power generator ContourGlobal intends to purchase an operating power plant in Trinidad and Tobago, could the Prime Minister confirm or deny this assertion by ContourGlobal?

The Prime Minister (Hon. Dr. Keith Rowley): Madam Speaker, like the Member for Caroni Central, I too would have heard the midday news and therefore there is nothing to confirm or deny. However, the item of news indicates that there is some change to be made or an intention for some company to purchase another

company. What I can say, Madam Speaker, is upon seeing the article on the 8th of the twelfth, T&TEC's General Manager contacted the General Manager of Trinity Power Limited and the officer of that company on that date confirmed that this process has started for acquisition of Trinity Power Limited by a company named ContourGlobal.

The present owner remains Western Generation Partners and the officer at Trinity confirmed that T&TEC will be notified when the transaction is completed. Trinity Power Limited is one of the independent power producers of electricity generation, 225 megawatts, at the Point Lisas Estate. The company is owned by Western Generation Partners, a US company.

Women/Children in Domestic Violence Environment Government Measures to Address

Ms. Vandana Mohit (*Chaguanas East*): Thank you, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, in light of a recent report which highlighted that there are currently more than 400 vulnerable women and children in desperate need of help to get away from an environment of domestic violence, could the Prime Minister inform the House what measures his Government will be taking to address this untenable situation?

Madam Speaker: Prime Minister.

The Prime Minister (Hon. Dr. Keith Rowley): Madam Speaker, if the Member could identify the report by name or some form or fashion which would allow this level of specificity to be responded to, I may try to assist. I know of no specific report of that nature.

Ms. Mohit: Madam Speaker, just to assist, article dated December 08, 2020, Trinidad and Tobago's *Guardian*, report from the Victim In The Dark organization.

Hon. Dr. K. Rowley: Well, well, Madam Speaker, the *Guardian* had a number of

pages and a number of days so I do not know what the Member has put here implies that there is a specific report somewhere in the Government where we can identify 400 vulnerable women and children and I am being asked to respond to this specific untenable situation. Madam Speaker, I know of no such report in the Government. What I do know is that the Office of the Prime Minister has a Minister responsible for Gender and Child Affairs and the Government is aware that there are a number of women and children in the country who are in need of improved accommodation. And of course, the Government is aware that the police department and social service support departments have taken a number of steps to respond when it has become known that there are people in need of those kinds of interventions.

The Government continues its efforts to heighten the population's awareness on domestic violence by engaging in a series of events over these 16 days of activism to bring the urgency of this issue to the national community, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker: Member for Couva South.

Mr. Indarsingh: Madam Speaker, have you passed question 3?

**Patriotic Energies and Technologies Company Limited
(Evaluation Committee Report Status)**

Mr. Rudranath Indarsingh (*Couva South*): Could the Prime Minister inform this House of the status of the Report of the Evaluation Committee which was given a deadline of 30th of November, 2020, to review the successful bid of the Patriotic Energies and Technologies Company Limited as it relates to the acquisition to the former Petrotrin refinery and related assets?

Madam Speaker: Prime Minister.

The Prime Minister (Hon. Dr. Keith Rowley): Madam Speaker, on the 29th of October, 2020, Patriotic Technologies submitted a revised proposal for the

purchase of the refinery and additional information clarifying issues relating to the financing and national fuel security, which are as usual being carefully reviewed to determine whether they may meet the necessary criteria and conditions to allow the transaction to move to the next stage.

Madam Speaker: Member for Couva South.

Mr. Indarsingh: Prime Minister, could you tell this House definitively if the Cabinet has given an extension to the evaluation committee in relation to evaluating this bid? [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. Dr. K. Rowley: Madam Speaker, I do not know where that mischief is coming from, but when an extension was granted it was immediately made known to the public that an extension was granted to November 30th. And I know of no statement or any issue with respect to any extension, so this is just once again pure mischief on the part of those who have taken a position that they will scuttle this at all costs. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker: Supplemental.

Mr. Indarsingh: Prime Minister, there is no mischief on the path of seeking a [*Crosstalk*] definitive date as it relates to—

Madam Speaker: Member for Couva South—

Mr. Indarsingh:—this particular issue.

Madam Speaker: Member for Couva South—Member for Couva South, you are too senior and this is—either you are rising to raise your question 4 or it is a supplemental question. It is not an opportunity to make a statement. Right?

Mr. Indarsingh: Prime Minister, again could I ask if the Cabinet has received the report of the evaluation committee and when a decision will be made on this issue?

Madam Speaker: Okay. So one question at a time. I believe your first question was answered with respect to the report and therefore the second question, it will

be allowed. You may have to say the second question for the Prime Minister.

Mr. Indarsingh: Prime Minister, could you tell this House as it relates to a specific date when a decision will be made by the Cabinet of Trinidad and Tobago as it relates to this said issue?

Hon. Dr. K. Rowley: Madam Speaker, in response to the anxiety of my colleague to scuttle this matter, I may want to advise him that the report is not yet before the Cabinet and therefore I cannot indicate to you when, which day, which week it will be available to you to scuttle it. What I can say to you is that the report has been received in the proper quarter. It is being reviewed and it would be advanced to the Cabinet in the proper way and the population will be kept informed quite appropriately as it has been along the way. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker: Member for Couva South.

Mr. Indarsingh: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Question No. 5: Could the Prime Minister inform this House—

Madam Speaker: I believe you are at Question No. 4.

Hon. Dr. K. Rowley: Madam Speaker, counting from one to five is a task for him you know. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Indarsingh: Madam Speaker, just in terms of the typographical error I will move on.

**Water and Sewerage Authority
(Cabinet Sub-Committee Report on)**

Mr. Rudranath Indarsingh (*Couva South*): Could the Prime Minister inform this House if the Cabinet has received the report of its subcommittee which was mandated to review the operations of the Water and Sewerage Authority?

Madam Speaker: Prime Minister.

The Prime Minister (**Hon. Dr. Keith Rowley**): Madam Speaker, the Cabinet-appointed subcommittee on the said issue of the Water and Sewerage

Authority has advised that a draft report has been prepared and its submission is pending its final review currently being undertaken by members of the subcommittee. I have granted approval for the report to be submitted on Friday the 11th, 2020—11th December, that is.

Mr. Indarsingh: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Prime Minister, a supplemental in relation to—yesterday we saw in the public domain that actions are being initiated by the Water and Sewerage Authority, for example, to close the customer service operation office of the Water and Sewerage Authority in Couva. Is this action on the part pre-empting the work of this subcommittee?

Madam Speaker: Prime Minister.

Hon. Dr. K. Rowley: Madam Speaker, I have seen no such report, and the level of mischief-making in this country defies logic, you know. How is something like that connected to a question like this? I have no answer for you on that because I have no idea what you are talking about in the context of this review of the Water and Sewerage Authority. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker: Supplemental, Couva South.

Mr. Indarsingh: Well, Prime Minister, all I could ask is for you to be guided by your Minister of Public Utilities in this matter. [*Crosstalk*]

COVID-19 Vaccines (Pre-Order of)

Dr. Roodal Moonilal (*Oropouche East*): Question No. 5 to the Prime Minister: Could the Prime Minister indicate whether the Government has pre-ordered vaccines which will become globally available in days, to inoculate against the COVID-19 virus?

Madam Speaker: Prime Minister.

The Prime Minister (Hon. Dr. Keith Rowley): Madam Speaker, for the benefit of the public for the nth time—and only last week, I think it was, in this very place

and many other places this question has been answered to the public. So for the benefit of any other person in the country who did not hear the Government's position, permit me, Madam Speaker, to say that Trinidad and Tobago in September 2020, signed up as a member of the COVAX Facility, a collaboration between WHO, Gavi and the Coalition for Epidemic Preparedness Innovations (CEPI). Gavi is an NGO that looks at fair and equitable allocation of vaccines globally. COVAX supports the research development and manufacturing of COVID-19 vaccine candidates and once there is a successful vaccine approved by WHO through COVAX, Trinidad and Tobago will have equal access to it. The Government has said this on many occasions in and out of this Parliament.

Trinidad and Tobago has pre-ordered vaccines to cover 33 per cent of our population; that is 461,000 persons at a cost of \$9.7 million. We have already made an initial payment of \$1.477 million and that was made public to the population of Trinidad and Tobago. Once a vaccine is approved we will receive, in the first instance, enough vaccines for 20 per cent of the population; that is 279,000 persons. That was made public at a press conference and many other instances to the national population. And for high-risk groups, Madam Speaker, these are elderly people over 60, those with non-communicable diseases, health care and other front-line workers, and those who are immunocompromised like those who are suffering from lupus or cancer, they will be our first citizens to access these vaccines.

Madam Speaker, all this information was made public on numerous occasions before. [*Desk thumping*]

Dr. Moonilal: Thank you very much.

Madam Speaker: Member for Oropouche East.

Dr. Moonilal: Prime Minister, after hearing of course all the information that was

made public and bearing in mind that there are countries in the world now that have already set a date to begin the process of disseminating the vaccines, does the Government of Trinidad and Tobago have in mind any date or week or month or year when vaccination—that process will start in Trinidad and Tobago or are you still waiting for some other approval somewhere?

Hon. Member: Still waiting.

Hon. Dr. K. Rowley: There is one country in our orbit that is using the vaccine that has been cleared and that is the United Kingdom. In the United States, even as we are speaking now, their vaccines have not been cleared by the relevant authority with any date to be distributed to the population. And I just would like the Member for Oropouche East to stop misleading the public, there are no vaccines available globally for us now to have so we can set a date when we are going to have it and distribute it. That is just pure mischief once again. [*Desk thumping*]

Once we are advised by WHO that the vaccines are cleared and ready to go and our portion is available, then we will know what we are getting and when we are getting it, and only then we can we decide when it is going to be distributed. In the meantime the Minister has been very clear on more than one occasion to indicate that all preparations to receive vaccines whenever they become available are being made by the Government of Trinidad and Tobago. Mischief afoot. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker: Member for Oropouche East.

Dr. Moonilal: Let me ask the Prime Minister if he believes that anyone who asks a question, whether it is on the vaccine or procurement is making—

Madam Speaker: Member for Oropouche—

Dr. Moonilal:—mischief and is being a trouble maker? [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker: Member for Oropouche East, out of order. [*Desk thumping*]

That is out of order.

Dr. Moonilal:—to question 6.

Madam Speaker: Question No. 6?

Dr. Moonilal: Yes.

Madam Speaker: Please.

**Legalizing Pepper Spray
(Government's Position)**

Dr. Roodal Moonilal (*Oropouche East*): Could the Prime Minister state his Government's position in relation to the call by the Commissioner of Police to make non-lethal pepper spray legal—non-lethal to make it legal for use as an immediate and temporary deterrent to violent criminal attacks?

Madam Speaker: Prime Minister.

The Prime Minister (Hon. Dr. Keith Rowley): Madam Speaker—

Dr. Moonilal: Was that mischief too?

Madam Speaker: Member for Oropouche East, just withdraw that.

Dr. Moonilal: Withdrawn.

Madam Speaker: You are too experienced for this.

Dr. Moonilal: Yes, yes, I agree.

Hon. Dr. K. Rowley: Madam Speaker, as Prime Minister and head of the Government of Trinidad and Tobago I speak for the Government of Trinidad and Tobago and with respect to this particular matter the position as stated by me as Prime Minister of Trinidad and Tobago is that on this particular matter and similar matters, the Government will be advised by the appropriate experts and other considerations in the use of any such material in our public study. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker: Supplemental.

Dr. Moonilal: Bearing in mind that the head of the Trinidad and Tobago Police

Service has already spoken and recommended the adoption of this type of non-lethal product to protect particularly vulnerable groups of women, does the Prime Minister have a view on this and care to share that view?

Madam Speaker: Prime Minister.

Hon. Dr. K. Rowley: Madam Speaker, I have no view to share with the Member for Oropouche East. Other than what I have said, I have no other view to share with him.

Dr. Moonilal: Could the Prime Minister indicate whether or not the police, the TTPS would be provided with any more resources to purchase these products to protect women and vulnerable groups or does the Government care nothing at all?
[*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker: Just now. The products—that question is too wide, not products. That question, it is too wide. It is not allowed.

Dr. Moonilal: Prime Minister, in the context where the TTPS still owes over \$100 million for goods and services, could the Government indicate through you, whether you are prepared to release more funds to the TTPS to procure these non-lethal items and devices to protect citizens? [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. Dr. K. Rowley: Madam Speaker, it should be obvious to all persons who are sane and sober that it does not matter how many millions are owing to the police service but the procurement of items which are not authorized by the Government of Trinidad and Tobago will not be a matter for discussion or purchase.

Madam Speaker: Supplemental.

Dr. Moonilal: Prime Minister, in the context where the TTPS has no funds, would funds be provided to the TTPS to procure these required devices that they themselves recommend?

Madam Speaker: But I believe that question was asked and answered; asked in a

different form but same question. Member for St. Augustine.

Ms. Ameen: Thank you, Madam Speaker. A supplemental question: Does the Government intend to bring legislation to make those non-lethal devices recommended by the TTPS legal as it pertains to customs as well as the use within the country?

Hon. Dr. K. Rowley: Madam Speaker, that matter is not in front of the Government for legislation. What is in front of us is a decision as to whether such devices are suitable for widespread use in the population. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker: Oropouche East.

Dr. Moonilal: No, Ma'am. Thank you.

ORAL ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS

The Minister of Planning and Development and Acting Minister of Housing and Urban Development (Hon. Camille Robinson-Regis): Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, there are three questions for oral answer and we will be answering all three.

Land Settlement Agency Plots in Guayaguayare (Update on)

29. Mr. Rushton Paray (Mayaro) asked the hon. Minister of Housing and Urban Development:

Could the Minister provide:

- (a) an update on the Land Settlement Agency Plots at Sunset Ave and Nurse Trace, New Lands, Guayaguayare; and
- (b) advise how soon will these parcels in part (a) will be ready for allocation and distribution?

The Minister of Planning and Development and Acting Minister of Housing and Urban Development (Hon. Camille Robinson-Regis): Thank, you Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, developmental works at Sunset Avenue and Nurse

Trace, New Lands, Guayaguayare have been completed by the Land Settlement Agency and the LSA is awaiting the final approval from the Director of Surveys as well as the completion certificate from the Water and Sewerage Authority. When the completion certificate is received the Land Settlement Agency will request final approval from the Trinidad and Tobago Fire Service.

The allocation and distribution of the parcels of land located at Sunset Avenue and Nurse Trace, New Lands, Guayaguayare, will be dependent on approvals by the relevant agencies. Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker: Supplemental, Member for Mayaro.

Mr. Paray: Minister, taking note that the distribution of these plots will assist in the construction sector—it can give a little boost to the community, can the Minister say if there is an opportunity to expedite this process so those plots can be distributed so we can see an uptick in the construction sector in that area?

Madam Speaker: Minister.

Hon. C. Robinson-Regis: Yes, there is. Thank you, Madam Speaker.

**Guayaguayare Community Centre
(Commencement of Reconstruction)**

31. Mr. Rushton Paray (*Mayaro*) asked the hon. Minister of Tourism, Culture and the Arts:

Could the Minister provide the expected commencement date for the reconstruction of the Community Centre located at Warrick Street, New Lands, Guayaguayare?

The Minister of Sport and Community Development (Hon. Shamfa Cudjoe): Thank you, Madam Speaker. This question should have been posed to the Minister of Sport and Community Development so I will answer. The Ministry of Sport and Community Development has engaged the services of UDeCOTT as the project manager for the construction of community centres. At present over 60 community

centres, including the La Savanne community centre in Guayaguayare have been approved for construction. The Ministry of Sport and Community Development is systematically scheduling the construction of centres based on need and available funding and while the commencement date cannot be given for the reconstruction of the La Savanne community centre specifically, it has, at this time, been placed on the Ministry of Sport and Community Development's priority listing. Thank you.

**Distribution of Laptops and Tablets
(Details of)**

61. Mr. Rushton Paray (*Mayaro*) asked the hon. Minister of Education:

Could the Minister advise:

- (a) the total number of devices (laptops and tablets) distributed to schools throughout Trinidad and Tobago by the Ministry, through donations or otherwise; and
- (b) the total number of these devices distributed to primary and secondary schools in the Mayaro Constituency?

The Minister of Education (Hon. Dr. Nyan Gadsby-Dolly): Thank you, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, the total number of devices—that includes laptops and tablets—distributed to schools for March 2020, to date, is approximately 17,000. The Ministry is also in the process of procuring a further 20,000 laptops for distribution to students in the secondary school system and a further 19,000 devices have been pledged by private donors for distributions to schools.

Devices are distributed to schools within education districts as requested by principals for teachers and as donated by the corporate donors. The Ministry of Education does not collect information by constituency and therefore cannot respond to this query in this format.

Madam Speaker: Supplemental, Member for Mayaro.

Mr. Paray: Thank you very much, Minister. Are you aware that in several of those secondary schools there are laptops that are sitting there in their storerooms, and I have been advised by a few of the principals in the constituency schools, the five secondary schools, that they have these equipment there. It can be distributed but there is no provision for approvals from the Ministry to remove them and have them distributed to students. Is that something that you are aware of and you can take some action on that to have them out there to the students?

Madam Speaker: Minister of Education.

Hon. Dr. N. Gadsby-Dolly: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, the first call on the devices that were distributed to schools that lie in their computer labs would have been the teachers who need the devices. In the initial circumstance certain teachers indicated the need and certain did not, and subsequent to that when schools moved fully online other teachers came forward who now require devices. And so we have been systematically providing the teachers with those devices that lie in the computer labs, and some of them have programmes on them that are based on the school, the AutoCAD, and so on, programmes.

So we have been using those for the teachers and their needs because the primary schools in particular, there were a lot of teachers needing devices. So that is where those are being used. And if there is excess in any school that can be apportioned we can certainly look at that, if the Member can let me know which schools that have excess to that extent because we have to cater for the teachers in having the devices.

2.00 p.m.

STATEMENT BY MINISTER

National Child Policy White Paper

The Minister in the Office of the Prime Minister (Hon. Ayanna Webster-Roy):

Madam Speaker, I have been authorized by the Cabinet of Trinidad and Tobago to

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make the following statement.

Madam Speaker, it is truly an honour to lay Government's first National Child Policy in the Parliament as a White Paper, the first of its kind in the country and the Eastern Caribbean. This policy [*Desk thumping*] is a signpost that child protection and development is of utmost importance to this Government and this country. As we lay this policy today, it marks a great victory for the nation's children and our nation's future.

The Government of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago has worked diligently and relentlessly to develop a policy that is informed by our national and regional context, whilst meeting our international obligations. Guided by research, the policy crystalizes the Government's commitment to children's well-being, as it provides a framework and clear strategies that plot a trajectory which leads to a destination where all children, and by extension all citizens, have access to a better quality of life.

Considering the current national and global context, the implementation of this policy is crucial and must commence with urgency. The volatility of the national situation, as a consequence of the global COVID-19 pandemic, requires the Government to act expeditiously and strategically to ensure that the most vulnerable groups are well-insulated. Moreover, social protection must be prioritized so that the most vulnerable are able to withstand the harsh emerging impacts.

Madam Speaker, the National Child Policy provides a compelling response to the current situation, as well as other possible emergencies, since one of its strategic areas of focus includes shock-responsive social protection measures.

The policy is rooted in eight guiding philosophies and outlines six outcomes for children. These outcomes include the following: children are loved, valued,

nurtured, protected, empowered and supported. To ensure that our children are loved, our strategies will advocate for and promote children's rights and responsibilities; advocate for relationships of care, trust and connection between children and their caregivers and families; enhance measures to ensure children are free from racism, discrimination and stigma; provide a full range of opportunities for children to develop, express and celebrate their talents.

To value our children, the strategies will design and implement a national social and behaviour change communication campaign; create opportunities for children's achievements to be recognized and celebrated; celebrate diversity and foster inclusion.

To ensure our children are nurtured, the policy directs that we provide support to families, family environments and caregivers to care for children; ensure the provision of quality physical and mental health services for children; enhance access to quality inclusive education services, including early childhood development and learning opportunities; provide safe child-friendly spaces for recreation and play.

To ensure our children are well protected, the strategies dictate that we strengthen measures to prevent, identify, report and respond to abuse, abduction, exploitation, trafficking and neglect; enhance measures to reduce children's involvement in violence, and support their rehabilitation and restoration; enhance measures to prevent child labour and children's involvement in hazardous work; strengthen measures to prepare for, mitigate, respond to and recover from emergencies and disasters.

To achieve the empowerment of our children, our strategies will provide opportunities for children to participate in the decisions that affect them and the wider society; enhance access to information and services aimed at reducing risky

behaviour and facilitating informed decision-making; provide children with opportunities for civic engagement and community service; provide children with equal access to the skills, knowledge and capabilities for success in life, learning and work.

To give our children the best support possible, the strategies will enhance legislative and policy frameworks to support children's well-being; increase the provision of social protection mechanisms to support children and their families; enhance the provision, developments and operationalization of support systems and specialized services for children; ensure a coordinating approach to planning and provision of effective support systems and services for children; establish a national research agenda to provide strong empirical support in child well-being policies and strategies and design and deliver support services to satisfy the diverse needs and priorities of children and their caregivers.

In addition to these thematic areas and related strategies, the policy also highlights six key areas of priority. These areas of priority include: early childhood developments, social protection, health, special needs, education and child protection. Once these strategic objectives are implemented and areas of focus emphasized and invested in, it is envisaged the vision of this policy will be achieved, which is for all children to be happy, healthy and confident that their rights are respected, protected and promoted to facilitate their holistic development towards achieving their fullest potential as constructive members of society now and in the future.

Madam Speaker, most importantly, especially at this time, the policy includes an extensive implementation plan which includes a comprehensive communication strategy. This plan relies on multisectoral collaboration and cooperation and outlines clear roles and responsibilities for each stakeholder. The

policy ensures that there are no silos, but instead a common goal, clear objectives, well-stated outputs and outcomes. The implementation plan will be pursued through the establishment of various structures, mechanisms and processes identified in the policy. Thus, it is envisaged that the plan will facilitate a more effective and deeper way of collaboration across Government and all relevant sectors.

Madam Speaker, I wish to take this opportunity to thank all children, UNICEF, groups, individuals, agencies and Ministries who dedicated time and support to the Office of the Prime Minister throughout the policy development process. I also wish to call all implementing partners to action, as we begin implementation of this very important policy.

May God bless the children of this nation and all persons in our beloved twin island of Trinidad and Tobago. I thank you. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker: Prime Minister.

**ELECTIONS AND BOUNDARIES COMMISSION (LOCAL
GOVERNMENT AND TOBAGO HOUSE OF ASSEMBLY) (TOBAGO)
ORDER, 2020**

The Prime Minister (Hon. Dr. Keith Rowley): Thank you, Madam Speaker. I beg to move the following Motion:

Whereas it is provided by subsection (3) of section 4 of the Election and Boundaries Commission (Local Government and Tobago House of Assembly) Act (hereinafter referred to as the “Act”) that as soon as may be after the Elections and Boundaries Commission (hereinafter referred to as the “Commission”) has submitted a report under paragraph (a) of subsection (1) of section 4 of the Act, the Minister shall lay before the House of Representatives for its approval the draft of an Order by the President for giving effect, whether with or without modifications, to the

recommendations contained within the report;

And whereas the Commission has submitted a report to the Minister in accordance with the provisions of subsection (1) of section 4 of the Act;

And whereas the draft of an Order entitled “the Elections and Boundaries Commission (Local Government and Tobago House of Assembly) (Tobago) Order, 2020” giving effect to the recommendations of the Commission was laid before the House of Representatives on the 9th day of December, 2020;

Be it resolved that the Draft of the “Elections and Boundaries Commission (Local Government and Tobago House of Assembly) (Tobago) Order, 2020” be approved.

Madam Speaker, section 71 of the Constitution of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago established an Elections and Boundaries Commission, having just mentioned it as “the Commission”. And that Act provided, inter alia, that:

“The Commission shall define and review the boundaries of the electoral districts into which an electoral area is, or is to be divided and shall submit to the Minister reports either —

- (a) showing the constituencies into which it recommends that an electoral area should be divided in order to give effect to the Rules set out in the Second Schedule; or
- (b) stating that, in the opinion of the Commission, no alteration is required to the existing number or boundaries of electoral districts in order to give effect to the said Rules.”

On the 8th of September, 2020, the Commission submitted to the Minister a report which is recommended that for the purposes of the elections to the Tobago House of Assembly, no alteration is required to the existing number of electoral districts into which the electoral area mentioned in Part III of the First Schedule to the Act

is divided, and should be as defined in the Schedule to this Order. Madam Speaker, that, in summary, is the recommendation that is before us today.

As some Members in this House would know, the Tobago House of Assembly is constituted with 12 electoral districts, and the last elections in Tobago, as some Members here would remember, there were these same 12 districts and the total electorate in Tobago that qualified to participate in the elections in August 2016 was 48,677 electors.

Today, in the report before us, as presented by Elections and Boundaries Commission, the voting population of Tobago has grown from 48,677 to 50,789. Madam Speaker, under the rules as described earlier on as set out in the relevant law, the size of an electoral district in Tobago cannot legally be 25 per cent above or 25 per cent below the average for the voting population.

Madam Speaker, the 25 per cent above the lowest electorate in Tobago would be 4,699 per district; 25 per cent below the highest would be 3,487. With a population of 50,789, and using the rules as stated, the highest electoral district in Tobago is limited to 4,649 electors, and the lowest number that is approvable is 3,759.

Against that background, Madam Speaker, and the recommendation which I had mentioned coming to us from the Commission, these are the total numbers as approved and recommended by the Commission to this House:

For Bacolet/Mount St. George, 3,839; Belle Garden East/Roxborough/DelaFord, 3,849; Bethel/Mount Irvine, 4,587; Black Rock/Whim/Spring Garden, 4,649. Buccoo/Mount Pleasant, 4,552; Canaan/Bon Accord, 4,125; Goodwood/Belle Garden West, 4,275; Lambeau/Signal Hill, 4,553; Parlatuvier/L'Anse Fourmi/Speyside, 3,759; Plymouth/Golden Lane, 3,975; Providence/Mason Hall/Moriah, 4,433 and in Scarborough/Calder Hall, 4,213, for

a grand total of 50,789.

Madam Speaker, one would gather from these numbers as allocated within each electoral district that none is 25 per cent above or more—more than 25 per cent above and none is less than 25 per cent below. So all of these districts, even though their voting population has grown a bit in the various districts—and I could indicate how they have grown district by district.

In 2016, Bacolet/Mount St. George had 3,654 electors. In 2020, approved for the next election, which is due, 3,839. Belle Garden East/Roxborough/Delaforde had 3,736 in the last election, they now have 3,849. Bethel/Mount Irvine had 4,335 in 2016; that has grown to 4,587. Black Rock/Whim/Spring Garden had 4,462 in 2016, by 2020 that has grown to 4,649. Buccoo/Mount Pleasant had 4,326; that has grown to 4,552. Canaan/Bon Accord had 3,970; that has grown to 4,125. Goodwood/Belle Garden West had 4,128 in 2016; that has grown to 4,275. Lambeau/Signal Hill had 4,320 in 2016, today it has 4,533. Parlatuvier/L'Anse Fourmi/Speyside had 3,625; that has grown to 3,759. Plymouth/Golden Lane had 3,826 in 2016, that has grown to 3,975. Providence/Mason Hall had 4,241; that has grown to 4,433. And Scarborough/Calder Hall had 4,054 in 2016, and that has grown to 4,213.

Madam Speaker, you would have observed from those numbers that in the various electoral districts the increase has been approximately 200, slightly above, slightly below, and therefore, we can account for the electors in that way.

Madam Speaker, as you would be aware, the Tobago House of Assembly has been dissolved a little while earlier in November. The relevant communication has been made between the Chief Secretary, the President in consultation with the Prime Minister, as the law requires. The date has been set for the Tobago House of Assembly elections, January 24, 2021, and nomination day is January 04, 2021.

Madam Speaker, to the best of our knowledge the Elections and Boundaries Commission is ready to conduct this election with its usual efficiency, and on that basis, I beg to move. [*Desk thumping*]

Question proposed.

Madam Speaker: Member for Barataria/San Juan.

Mr. Saddam Hosein (*Barataria/San Juan*): Thank you very much, Madam Speaker, for allowing me the opportunity to contribute to this Motion relating to the Elections and Boundaries Commission (Local Government and Tobago House of Assembly) (Tobago) Order, 2020, and the approval of same for the conduct of THA election. Before I begin, just as a matter of correction, I think the Prime Minister would have said the election is on the 24th of January. The election is in fact, based on the report that I have seen, the 25th of January, 2020. So that is the first thing I observed in the contribution of the Prime Minister.

Now, looking at the report, Madam Speaker, which is the Twelfth Report of the Elections and Boundaries Commission on the boundaries of the electoral districts in the electoral area of Tobago, dated 08 September 2020, which was received by Sen. The Hon. Kazim Hosein, Minister of Rural Development and Local Government.

Looking at the report, as pointed out by the Prime Minister, there are no changes to the electoral districts in Tobago in terms of the boundaries. There have been very slight adjustments in terms of the population, and based on the report, that increase went up from 2016 to 2020 by 2,122 persons of the voting population. As the 12 electoral districts were in fact outlined, we see that there were very minute numbers in terms of the voting population in all 12 electoral districts, just under 200 in some areas, that the population would have grown. So that would have been the reason why the EBC, in conducting their constitutional duty, would

not have changed the boundaries because all would have been complying with rules 3 and 2 of the electoral rules that they have to guide themselves by when adjusting boundaries.

So basically before us, there is no contention in terms of the boundaries shifts or the changes because there is none. The elections will be conducted based on the exact same boundaries that the 2016 elections would have been conducted.

There is only one matter that I would just like to look at. Based on what transpired in the last THA election was that a validation Act had to be passed in terms of the date in which the election was in fact announced. I looked at the calculation of the numbers. If election date is on the 25th of January, it is correct that nomination day is on the 4th as announced, and when you look at the Representation of the People Act, as long as the writ of election is issued before the 21st of December. Therefore, we would in fact be in compliance with the law and the election would in fact be validly held. This is also consistent with section 22 of the Tobago House of Assembly Act which states that the election cannot be held earlier than two months from the date of dissolution of the House, but not later than three months. So the latest date is 18th of January—sorry—the earliest date is 18th of January to call the elections, and the latest date would have been 18th of February for the election to be held. So we are in compliance with the statutory provisions as outlined in the THA Act, based on the fact that the THA was dissolved on 17th of November, 2020.

So basically the report that is presented by the EBC, there is no contention with respect to what is therefore contained inside there, and Madam Speaker, I thank you very much.

Madam Speaker: Prime Minister.

The Prime Minister (Hon. Dr. Keith Rowley): Madam Speaker, I thank the

Member for Barataria/San Juan for correcting a misspeaking that I did. I mentioned January 24th, when in fact it should be January 25th. So let me make it abundantly clear that the elections in Tobago is scheduled for Monday, January 25th. So thank you very much, Member for Barataria/San Juan.

Those of us who spend some time with the ecclesiastical documents would know it being said that out of the mouths of babes and sucklings can come great wisdom. The Member for Barataria/San Juan just made a statement which I could not, not draw to the attention of the House and by extension, the wider national community, because it is a very comforting and valuable statement.

The statement was that he accepted, he and his team, I presume he speaks for his team, that the fact that there are no changes to be made, as recommended by the EBC and accepted by the Parliament, as we do now, that the EBC, and I am quoting him, “has done its constitutional duty and recommended no change to the boundaries”.

Madam Speaker, why do I raise that as a very comforting statement? It is because not too long ago another one of his colleagues, in trying to describe to the population her disastrous reign, said to the population that with respect to seats being apportioned in the country in constituencies, in total disregard for what has been accepted here without rancor this evening by the Member for Barataria/San Juan, that the shifting of boundaries, the adjustments of boundaries in this country is the constitutional duty of the Elections and Boundaries Commission and the Parliament of Trinidad and Tobago. So today, I am very happy that a Member of the UNC has put that on record in the Parliament. [*Desk thumping*]

Therefore, Madam Speaker, I would end on the note that I hope that that erases from the minds of all those who would have heard the Leader of the Opposition say that the reason why elections are won by the PNM is because they

have small seats in Diego Martin, and Diego Martin has three seats and Siparia only has one seat. That piece of misinformation, this afternoon the Member for Barataria/San Juan has put that in its perspective and given the lie to what has been said, that changes of boundaries are not done by political parties, but done by the EBC under its constitutional duty. [*Desk thumping*] Having said that, Madam Speaker, maybe I must be the only person who believes that there is hope for our colleagues on the other side, and on that basis, I beg to move.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved:

That the Draft of the Election and Boundaries Commission (Local Government and Tobago House of Assembly) (Tobago) Order, 2020, be approved.

2.30 p.m.

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: Madam Speaker, I crave the indulgence of the House, the Minister of Trade and Industry is here. I am surprised that she is not in the Chamber. She is here. She was here since earlier. [*Crosstalk*] Yes. Thank you for that, Madam Speaker. [*Crosstalk*]

RELATED MOTIONS

The Minister of Trade and Industry (Sen. The Hon. Paula Gopee-Scoon):

[*Desk thumping*] Madam Speaker, I sincerely apologize to you and to the other Members in this House. I did not realize that you were ready for me. So it gives me great pleasure to be here. Madam Speaker, I beg to move Motion No. 1 standing in my name.

Madam Speaker, in moving this Motion, I seek the leave of the House in accordance with Standing Order 50(1) to debate along with this Motion, Motion No. 1 on the Order Paper which relates to the same subject.

Mr. Indarsingh: Thank you, Madam Speaker. This is not the view of the

Opposition and we object to both Motions being done concurrent or together.

Madam Speaker: So, Minister, having regard to the position, we will have to them in sequential order, 1 and then 2.

CONDITIONAL CUSTOMS DUTY EXEMPTIONS

The Minister of Trade and Industry (Sen. The Hon. Paula Gopee-Scoon):

Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, I beg to move the following Motion standing in my name:

Whereas it is provided by section 56(1)(a) of the Customs Act, Chap. 78:01 that the House of Representatives may, from time to time, by Resolution, provide that any class of goods specified in the Resolution shall be exempt from import duties of Customs if the goods are imported or entered for use by any person for any purpose specified in the Resolution during any period to be fixed by the Minister in each particular case, not being a period terminating later than the date prescribed in the Resolution as the last day on which such exemption shall be operative, and subject to such conditions as the Minister may impose;

And whereas by Legal Notice No. 157 of 2017, the last Resolution in respect of the goods identified therein came into effect on 1st January, 2018 would expire on 31st December, 2020;

And whereas it is expedient that the goods continue to be exempt from import duties of Customs as of 1st January 2021;

Be it resolved that the House of Representatives, in accordance with and subject to the provisions of section 56 of the Customs Act, exempt from import duties of Customs, for the period beginning 1st January, 2021 and ending 31st December, 2023, the classes of goods imported and entered for use in Trinidad and Tobago for the following purposes set out in Part A of the

list of Conditional Duty Exemptions in the Third Schedule to the Customs Act:

- (a) I- For Approved Industry;
- (b) II-For Approved Agriculture, Livestock, Forestry and Fisheries;
- (c) III-For Approved Hotels;
- (d) IV-For Approved Mining Purposes; and
- (e) V-For Other Approved Purposes.

This Resolution shall come into effect on 1st January, 2021.

Madam Speaker, the purpose of the Motion is to seek an extension for the benefits granted pursuant to section 56(1)(a) of the Customs Act. And I sought to find out a little bit of history about this. This is the third time that I am actually moving this particular Motion. And so I found out that this was actually introduced since 1959, these types of concessions. And introduced since then, these concessions introduced since then, these concessions provide relief of customs duty to manufacturers and processors in the private sector. And prior to attaining political independence, the manufacturing sector was driven by the processing of raw materials for local and export usage. And we are talking about, and we would all know, sugar and rum and petroleum products and pitch. And some time in 1948, attempts were made to stimulate the secondary industries and establish a genuine manufacturing sector and one that can be a source of revenue generation for the economy.

So on the heels of passing the aide to Pioneer Industries Ordinance in 1950, Trinidad and Tobago began to pursue its industrialization which included, among other measures, the granting of incentives and concessions to potential investors. And I believe it really took on in the '80s, that is when the sector took on a different profile and went to another level.

So, Madam Speaker, under the section 56 of the Customs Act, import duty concessions may be granted for a specific period to approve enterprises for approved projects. And to date the purposes for which concessions are granted are set out in the Third Schedule of the Customs Act, Part A list of—and it is called, list of Conditional Duty Exemptions, and for the approved industries as I had called out earlier.

Under this Schedule, concessions are conditionally granted to qualifying manufacturing and processing and other relevant companies incorporated in Trinidad and Tobago. And companies involved in these qualifying activities benefit from the exemptions of payments of customs duty on term on items that they import as for supplies for their manufacturing or their processing or their other needs.

And these items include machinery, equipment, raw materials and in some cases packaging materials. And you would know that this also is concerned with the CET. And in 1991 Trinidad applied the Caricom Common External Tariff. Most of you would know it as the CET based on the harmonized commodity description and coding system. Again, you would know it as HS Codes. And the list of conditional duty exemptions we are referring to is included an appendix to the CET as List A. And that list lists items and approved activities in detail for which the application of the CET may be waived, and a Caricom member may choose not use some or all of the exemptions and apply the CET instead. It depends on the member state. Right?

So this list A is Caricom approved and it applies to all member states. And there are modifications made from time to time and this may occur, but it is done at the level of Caricom. And that is, should any member state be interested in removing or adding any new area to the schedule, the Caricom Secretariat must be

engaged. And Trinidad and Tobago, I will tell you, has not for some time added or modified—has not had the need to do so.

Madam Speaker, so this is of great benefit to the manufacturing sectors and to the other areas that I had spoken of. And it is that it gives you the opportunity to acquire foreign inputs that are otherwise locally or regionally not available, and this allows access to raw materials and to very modern equipment and technology at a world market prices.

Over the period January 2018 to October 2020, 136 companies of varying sizes would have benefited from these customs duty exemptions as provided under the existing resolutions. And of those companies, 134 were non-energy companies operating primarily in the manufacturing and agricultural sectors, whereas two were energy related, and these two would be NP and what then Petrotrin.

And for the same period there was no record of utilization, so I am saying this up front even though I will give a little description after. There was no record of utilization of concessions by companies involved in the remaining approved industries which, as I said before, I am talking about hotels, mining purposes and what is other approved purposes. It is important to note that there is a cost to this. So over that period, the revenue forgone from granting import duty concessions to 136 companies tallied 704 million. And you would find that this is tall order, but there is a benefit to it.

So looking a bit closer at the numbers. Of the 134 non-energy businesses, 108 are involved in manufacturing while the remaining 26 businesses are undertaking activities in agriculture, in livestock, in forestry, in fisheries. And the benefits granted to these firms, among other things really bolster their ability to compete internationally. And you would find looking at the export figures, all of those, I looked at the particular period, exports amounted to approximately \$18

billion in good over the said period. So we are looking at the sacrifice of TT \$704 million to exports of TT 18 billion in goods over the period. And, of course, you would then agree with me that these provisions allow a level playing field for our domestic entities when they are trading globally.

And through the administering of import duty concessions under the Third Schedule of the Customs Act, I can tell you that the Ministry of Trade and Industry has facilitated significant investments made by these concessioners over the period. And all of that would have contributed to Government's diversification thrust particularly in the manufacturing sector.

So if it is that it has not been an entirely new entity, manufacturers would have been investing and reinvesting in plant and equipment and expanding as well. So that the exemptions have really proven to be a success in terms of bolstering business expansion in the manufacturing sector, and so they have used it also to diversify their products and their activities and to physically expand their operations.

Now, and when I speak about expansion of activities for instance, I will give you one example, like if you just take Angostura. Angostura in this year alone, I can think of three new products which have come, being the cocoa, Angostura Cocoa Bitters, their White Oak watermelon drink and also their sorrel bitters which was launched just about a week ago. You are continually seeing new stocks on the market. So you would have seen Bermudez's new Nood which would have been out in the last two years or so. Carib you would have seen their recent Caribe champagne drink which is quite wonderful, but it has hit the market by storm. So and, of course, in terms of new industries you would have had—oh sorry, in expansion, as a matter of fact, you would have had for instance, Bermudez who has built a \$200 million plant in Chaguanas.

And so these, as I said before, the benefit was introduced at the time when the manufacturing sector was in its embryonic stage and, of course, it has contributed to the growth of the sector, so much so, it is the third largest to the GDP in Trinidad and Tobago.

Just let me say briefly how the sector has been performing. It remains one the more dynamic sectors in the domestic economy. It has been—its growth has been steady, and really critical as I said to Trinidad and Tobago’s diversification; the economy that is. And for the period 2015 to 2019, the manufacturing sector would have accounted for average 19.3 per cent of GDP and, of course, creating quite a number of sustainable jobs approximately 52,000 persons employed in the sector.

So despite all of the economic cycles and trials and the pandemic and so on, the sector really has exhibited its resilience, and so much so that they are now—I looked at the 2019 figure, Madam Speaker, and the non-energy manufacturing exports are now valued at TT \$11 billion, that is in 2019, and they have reached 120 markets spanning most regions in the world.

I want to go very quickly because time flies, and I go to agriculture, livestock, forestry and fisheries. So this also is of equal importance in terms of the development and the sustainability of the agriculture and agro-processing sectors. And for the period under consideration which is January 2018 to October 2020, 26 agricultural businesses including poultry, fruit and vegetable farming, fish and sea food processing and bee keeping, all utilize concessions provided under section 56 of the Customs Act.

And of course, Madam Speaker, we all bore witness to the impact of the pandemic on overall global food supply chains and therefore, it is a lesson to ensure resilience, we must become a more self-sustained economy. We must focus

on expanding the domestic supply and also consumption of our agricultural products as well. Essentially we should grow what we eat. And with government policies, and we would know of the TT \$500 million that the Minister of Finance and the Cabinet has approved for the agricultural industry for this year, this fiscal period, this is a signal to our commitment to growing this sector. And of course, really, really sending home the importance of expanding our agricultural products and, of course, also ensuring that we look at the linkages with the manufacturing sector so that they become inputs into the manufacturing sector, Madam Speaker.

So the continuation of the exemptions to businesses operating in the agriculture and agro-processing sectors will ensure that they are not disadvantaged as it relates to acquiring all of the necessary advanced machinery and technology and equipment for sustaining and improving their activities.

I just want us to stop for a brief moment and tell you some of those that would have benefited in the agricultural sector during this period. For instance, Arawak and Company Limited would have utilized the benefit to acquire raw materials, machinery and equipment. Then you would have had smaller companies like Carmel Valley Estate using it again for machinery and equipment, Erin Farm Limited for the purchase of raw materials without duty. Kent Farms, again, another young industry is using it for raw materials and machinery and equipment as well.

So I would go now to approved hotels. Madam Speaker, the pandemic brought quite an unexpected economic shock for the region. And as a region we are highly dependent on tourism, this is as a region. It is a significant contributor to GDP in the vast majority of the region's small island economies, and literally the industry has been brought to a virtual standstill as on account of travel restrictions and border closures and so on which were imposed to flatten the curves.

Trinidad and Tobago's in particular Tobago's tourism industry, though one

of our smaller sectors with regard to its contribution to GDP was also hard hit, but the goal is now to restore our local tourism industry and to encourage deeper business linkages and sustainable investments. And in this regard, the provision of customs duty exemptions is fundamental in stimulating economic activity in this sector.

I had said before that there were no users of this particular provision in the last three years however, we are all elated by the recent announcement of my colleague the Minister of Tourism, Culture and the Arts, he would have announced that there are three international hotel brands set to open in Trinidad and Tobago in 2021. The Radisson Blu hotel, I think it is pronounced “Bree”, but it is B-R-I-X. The Brix hotel by Marriott and, of course, Comfort Inn Suites in Tobago. And I know of another brand that is being looked at right now.

I want you to know however that these hotels, these kinds of investments within the hotel industry also benefit from a myriad of concessions, most of them under the Tourism Development Act. And of course, these new investments that I have mentioned are hardening, they attest to the continued confidence in our economy and, of course, that is despite these very difficult times.

Let me just speak to the mining, for mining purposes, although, as I had said before, I am reminding you that there were no takers under this particular category. So mining, I will just say, that mining and quarrying activities in Trinidad and Tobago are closely linked to the construction sector which is a key sector of the economy which contributes significantly to employment generation, capacity expansion and social stability in terms of public infrastructure development. And of course, Madam Speaker, making reference to our *Review of the Economy* in 2020 that for 2019, mining and quarrying contributed 18.3 per cent of real GDP. So that mineral production is integral to national development. So we are going to

retain the incentives for these particular activities, noting of course that there were no firms, because Trinidad and Tobago supplies its own aggregates and so on, and those particular businesses wishing to access machinery and equipment relative to this type of business in this sector would, of course, still be able to benefit during the coming period which is for another three years.

I go now to approved purposes. The other approved purposes, the other purposes for which customs exemptions are being sort include navigation equipment for boats, equipment to be used in sports and recreational activities and public transport-type vehicles. And the Government recognizes that there can be both health and economic benefits to be gained from encouraging sporting and recreational activities. And furthermore, this administration sees the potential in promoting sports tourism as a viable industry.

So that the provision of the duty exemptions for these activities is essential to achieving this goal. And if properly harnessed, the Government is of the view that these sectors can have meaningful contributions to our economic development and diversification thrust.

So, Madam Speaker, I have identified several industries and have spoken to them and the importance of these industries to our economic well-being. I have given you an insight of some of the particular businesses that benefit from them and the kind of expansionary activity that we have had particularly in the manufacturing sector, they all play a significant role in the diversification of our economy. And some are pivotal to the reduction of the country's food import bill, generation of foreign exchange and the provision of substantial and sustainable employment. Madam Speaker, I am going to stop right here. And I beg to move.
[Desk thumping]

Question proposed.

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

Mrs. Kamla Persad-Bissessar SC (Siparia): Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. I join in this debate with to respect to Motion 1 on the Order Paper, very important Motion in terms of developing and growing our economy. [*Interruption*]
Thank you.

So, Madam Speaker, I was very disappointed in the contribution of the hon. Minister given that this is not the first time that such a Motion is being moved for exemptions under the Customs Act for the purposes of approved industry, “approved agriculture, livestock, forestry and fisheries, approved hotels, approved mining purposes, other approved purposes”. And the Minister has come, in my respectful view, with mere rhetoric, fluff and gloss. [*Desk thumping*] The hon. Minister has not given us any empirical data to show that the exemptions granted—the last time the Minister came with the Motion and for previous times under the their administration, that these exemptions have done something to indeed grow industry, to grow agriculture, to grow livestock, forestry and fisheries.

With respect to hotels, with respect to approved mining business and other approved purposes. Indeed, if were to examine the empirical data, the quantitative data, not quantifiable, not qualitative, the quantifiable data, we will see that we have done worse than before the exemptions. [*Desk thumping*] The Minister, again, rhetoric, it is just fluff, it is gloss, [*Desk thumping*] says these exemptions have played a pivotal role in diversification, diversification.

Madam Speaker, when our import bill, food import bill has increased rather than decrease, so how is it helping in agriculture, fisheries and so on? Minister says, pivotal role in diversification for sustainable employment. Well, what we have seen is, in fact, thousands of persons lost their jobs [*Desk thumping*]
thousands lost their jobs before COVID and thousands more continue to lose their

jobs during COVID, and post-COVID we do not see, do not expect any better. So we are looking at this.

The first time Minister presented this exemption. Of course, it has been utilized by many previous governments since about 1959. So are we just trumping and following suit administration after administration? Are we making a review of how these exemptions work? Who benefits and how they benefit? And what is in the best interest of the people of Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*]

So since 1959, *Hansard* 15 December, 2017, we can check there where it is said; since 1959. However, the relevant sections are deemed to have come into force on 1, March 1991, section 56. So we approve these approve these exemptions too, and the last exemption was granted via legal notice 157 from 1st January, 2018, to 31st December, 2020, so a period of three years. So the past three years these exemptions have been in place. The present Motion is brought within the prescribed time frame to have an extension for another three years.

3.00 p.m.

So, what is the purpose? What is the purpose of these waivers, these exemptions by removing customs duties on imports to specific sectors to target specific industries? And usually this targeting is done for protection of the industry and/or for development and growth of the particular sector. During the period of governance of this Government we have seen no deliberate focus on energy industry development in major sectors [*Desk thumping*] to protect our economic base. There is more evidence of a deliberate attack on specific sectors over the past five years. These attacks have come either as a result of an overt attempt to destroy a sector, or by reason of negligence and incompetence on the part of this Government.

Madam Speaker, let us look at employment in specific sectors. Let us look at

the provisions under the Third Schedule to the Customs Act for impact on that particular sector. Let us look at sector performance reports for agriculture, livestock, forestry, fisheries approved hotels, approved mining purposes. And these are the ones are targeted in the particular Motion and with respect to the customs exemptions, tariff exemptions, and maybe.

Exemptions for agriculture must be measured in the context of how much output has resulted from the past three years whilst this exemption was subsisting. Central Bank data has output data on primary produce in the agriculture sector, and we can look at it. We can get quantitative data as to how these exemptions have assisted in agricultural production. We look at Central Bank data and we will see massive declines in output. [*Desk thumping*] This states, for example, production of tomatoes, 2017—in kilograms—2,648; 2018, decreased down to 1,678; 2019 down to 1,700. We have a 36 per cent decline during the period of this particular exemption. We look at the production of cabbage, 2017, 435 kilograms; 2018, 756; and we are down to 365 kilograms in 2019; 16 per cent decline. Let us look at the production of dasheen, 2017, 3,242 kilograms; 2019, 2,097; a 35 per cent decline, Madam Speaker.

So we do not need to just come and say we are protecting these sectors, we are promoting these sectors for sustainable development and growth, when the data is saying the total opposite. [*Desk thumping*] The data gives a lie to the fluff and to the grass and to the rhetoric. [*Desk thumping*] Let us look at pumpkin, let us look at melongene, and we will see in most of these primary agricultural products production of tomatoes is 36 per cent decline; production of cabbage, 16 per cent decline; production of dasheen, 35 per cent decline; production of pigeon peas, 40 per cent decline. And, Madam Speaker, I am told pigeon peas is something very easy to grow. In fact, I planted some and they are taller than me now, those trees. It

is something that we can grow easily. [*Desk thumping*]

So it is clear that the exemptions alone are not working for these broad categories of farmers. Therefore, much more is needed to give us the sustainable development the Minister speaks about, and we can look at, for example, what are the issues? Is it because you need an exemptions that you will do better if you get an exemption, a customs exemption? Or is it because there are other factors militating against the farmers in the agricultural sector? Let us take, for example, what we have been seeing is all the complaints from the farmers were praedial larceny, a serious issue. So the exemption alone will not do what the Minister says it will do. [*Desk thumping*] Sustainable growth and development, creating employment, no, that cannot do it. [*Desk thumping*] In February of this year the *Guardian* ran an exposé on the failure of the Praedial Larceny Interdiction Unit. The article says, headline, “Farmer says Praedial Larceny Squad not helping”; published Saturday the 29th of February, 2020. In the article farmer Ramdeo Bondoo, head of the Root and Tuber Producers Association has in essence being, he says has been ineffective. The squad has been ineffective in arresting offenders. Farmers are at the mercy of criminals as so many other people in this country, the mercy of the criminals. And, you know, all that is also reflective of the failure of this Government to properly resource the police with the necessary resources. [*Desk thumping*]

CNC3 ran a story as recent as October 17th of this year, headlined, “Farmer kills man stealing plantains”. “Farmer kills man stealing plantains”. The incident as reported by CNC3 involved three bandits, one who was armed with a firearm. As a result the farmer took matters into his own hands to protect himself, and the levels of larceny has resulted in farmers calling for firearm user’s licence to protect themselves. So the Government has failed when it comes to resourcing the police

service, and therefore the farmers cannot depend on that squad.

Let us look at the exemption of approved hotels, and before we— [*Opposition Member hands Mrs. Persad-Bissessar SC a document*] Thank you very much. Thank you. Madam Speaker, if we look at what is also happening, the *Review of the Economy*, GDP at current market price, the contribution of agriculture, forestry, fishery, 2018, \$1.8 billion. By the time we get to 2019 and these exemptions are in place, we see GDP at current market price down to 1.6 billion. So that too has also fallen. Madam Speaker, I spoke about agriculture and the impact of these exemptions, whether it is benefiting the farmers. The Minister has not given us any indication of how many farmers benefited in the agriculture sector. How many persons? When I read the *Hansard* for the last time this Motion came, if my memory serves me right, only eight farmers benefited. Minister, tell me I am wrong. I stand to be corrected.

But in the *Hansard* the last time this Motion was debated we heard for the prior period, eight farmers. So how many really, Minister, benefited from the exemption, and how has it impacted on production? On output? That is a very important measure. In assessing a measure that you have in place for increasing output in the sector and so on, for growth, development, employment, we need to look at the numbers. It is not sufficient hon. Minister to come to the Parliament and just say, oh, these things are very good, we are going to grow here, we will do this, we will do that. What is in the data? What is the empirical data? [*Desk thumping*]

We come to the exemption of approved hotels. The Motion calls for an exemption of a waiver for approved hotels. Government will speak about their glowing efforts in this sector, hospitality and tourism. The Minister will speak of promised support for this hotel industry. But the record in this industry is at odds with what is being said. Let us be reminded, we have witnessed the marvels of a \$7

million Hilton Hotel swimming pool. We have seen the failed Sandals deal. [*Desk thumping*] We have seen the callous withdrawal of funding for the TT Hospitality and Tourism Institute which caused the permanent closure of that institute. This resulted in a great vacuuming in the access of tertiary level education for the hospitality and tourism sector.

The Government has stated the UWI has options there. But, of course, we know you cannot enrol in baking and bartending, and cooking, and that broad spectrum of skills that we got under the TTHIT. To show that Government is failing in this sector, and thus failing of relying solely on the mere exemption, Madam. That is the point I am making. The mere exemption will not do what the Minister is telling this House it will do, [*Desk thumping*] diversify, sustainable growth, development, employment. That exemption will not work on its own. A *Newsday* article of Sunday 01 November, 2020, titled, “Tobago hoteliers ‘in the dark’ over COVID-19 recovery plan”. In the article the hotel and tourism association vice-president, Carol Ann Birchwood-James is quoted to saying, and I quote, Madam:

“There are no real plans as to how we should move forward...”

She said that. Several hoteliers have not received clientele since March 2020. This does not paint a picture of a sector that is engaged and supported by the Government. We also know and understand the importance of tourism to the economy of Tobago.

You know they will bleat each time and say, we do not care about Tobago. They have a monopoly over Tobago. They are the ones who care. And yet the Tobago economy is the one that has been hardest hit under this Government. Hardest hit under this Government. However, despite having a Tobago Prime Minister, the callous actions of this Government has really flattened the Tobago

economy. [*Desk thumping*] Let us look at some of the data for the tourism sector, Madam, to see how this exemption, this help for the tourism sector has impacted on benefits in that sector.

Now, “Review of the Tourism Industry of Trinidad and Tobago (A Data Driven Perspective)” was completed in 2018 by the Trinidad Hotels Restaurants and Tourism Association. In this report they showed in clear detail the neglect of the sector by this Government. The Ministry of Tourism had received at the time of the report a decline in allocation from just under 90 million in their first budget, so 90 million in their first budget, 2015, to 55.9 million. So, expenditure was cut by more than one-third despite hotel accommodation tax generating in excess of TT \$56 million in 2017. Hotel accommodation tax is just one stream of revenue to the State from this industry. There is also personal income tax of employees, corporation tax, payments that accrue from licensed operations such as Hilton, Hyatt and others, and the general economy surrounding the hospitality and tourism industry which creates employment along the tourism value chain from taxi drivers to farmers, and tourist sites.

So, let us look at the allocations, Madam. So the mere exemption is not this. What is going to grow the sector of the economy? The mere exemption will not bring diversification. The mere exemption will not bring unemployment. Listen to these figures please, Madam. Allocations from the national budget. The source, Ministry of Finance. *Estimates of Recurrent Expenditure* allocation in 2014, under the government I led, was 167.498. By time you get to 2018 it is 55.8. When you look at the total estimates, total allocations in hundreds of thousands, it was in 2018, 78.65; in 2014 the actual was 189.34. So you have repeatedly under-resourced the sector, and you are saying by this exemption you will grow the sector. It is not working. It is not working. The hotel association lamented that the

Government disbanded the Tourism Development Company, and did not have the successor companies up and running. There are still issues with the work of the successor companies for Trinidad and Tobago marketing to this day. To make matters worse at the time when the Government was tabling the prior exemptions—that is the last time in Parliament—they were busy cancelling the contracts of the international advertising and public relations firms, our overseas marketing reps. So even prior to this with the last set of exemptions they were shutting down the industry. This Government's record has been abysmal in the tourism sector. [*Desk thumping*]

Let us come not to exemption for approved mining purposes, another one for exemptions under the proposed Motion, extension of the waiver of the customs and so on. Mining purposes is expected to be granted by the passage of this Motion. There are questions, Madam, in my respectful view, that need to be answered. Which PNM financiers have benefited from these exemptions in the mining sector? Which finances have been given the benefits from exemptions in the mining sector? [*Desk thumping*] Therefore, tell us, during the last period of exemptions who were the entities who benefited from these exemptions? The country needs to know that. Especially, you know, today is anti—world anti-corruption day, where you have transparency and accountability, Madam Speaker. So, who are the entities benefiting from the existing exemptions, and so we will get an idea of which entities will benefit when the exemptions are now extended? You see, because the mining sector has always been one—creates a lot of dangers and difficulties. We remember when it is, it was the Jamaat al Muslimeen who talked about being given all these lucrative mining contracts.

So, this is a serious matter. If my memory is right, that organization had raised several things in an affidavit that went to court, Madam, in terms of the

granting of certain contracts for mining. How much financial gains have these entities benefited from by way of the exemptions? How much? How many of them? How much? Have any state lands recently gifted to persons being earmarked for mining activities? [*Desk thumping*] Any? I think there is a farm, maybe another MP would raise this, about the farm that the Minister of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries—what is the word? [*Interruption*] Yes, that the Minister of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries removed from purview, therefore giving it to someone else. These are larger questions the public would like to know. Because while the engine of the economy is grinding to a halt, there are PNM insiders which seem to be laughing all the way to the bank. [*Desk thumping*]

So, let us look at the track record of industry development over the past five years. Government has failed over their tenure to shepherd the economy properly. The Central Bank *Quarterly Index of Real Economic Activity* shows as—in publications by the Central Bank, outlines the decline from the quarter ended December 2016 prior to the last exemptions being granted. When this is compared with the index as at the last date, with records available up to June 2019, we see a marked decline in non-energy sector as follows: Non-energy itself declined five basis points. This basically means that all activity outside of oil and gas has declined significantly. These are the industries the Minister is seeking to give these exemptions to. Manufacturing has declined by a 100 basis point. And this is at June 2019, you know. This is pre-COVID. Pre-COVID. Manufacturing, as I say, by 100 basis points. This is a disastrous decline and shows Government's abject failure prior to COVID-19 to address the economic decline. [*Desk thumping*]

In construction the decline was in excess of six points. This decline is symptomatic of the malaise in the sector usually driven by state projects. Government has all but collapsed home construction in the last five years. The

former Minister of Housing and Urban Development Corporation, who now serves as the Minister of Tourism, Culture and the Arts attempted to rubbish the UNC's plan for home owning democracy, instead, pushing for a so-called roof over your head democracy in one budget presentation. But their abysmal performance in construction, it serves as a wonder if the Government believes that a waiver for quarrying equipment would be sufficient to support the needs of the sector. Quarter ending—quarterly activity index, I have read some of it already for the energy, manufacturing, construction, all in decline. Other services also in decline.

So, let us measure the value of this exemption. That is the only way we would know, you know, this is a good thing, let us do it. We do not want to come and say, the Government is so nice, they are good people, generous, giving all these exemptions. Does it work? Is it helping? Is it growing the economy? It is diversifying the economy? [*Desk thumping*] So the question, I think citizens would like to know, is how do they benefit from the exemptions? Secondly, has the regime of exemptions been applied fairly across the board? So, yes, there are exemptions, is there any criteria or is it that any Tom, Dick and Harrilal who puts in for an exemption they get it? That is why we need to know who are the entities, or which entities have benefited for all these exemptions? [*Desk thumping*] What is the level of local content participation in the waivers? The Government owes it to the country to present to Parliament the details of the waivers as pertains to whether the beneficiary companies and institutions are largely local or foreign. That is a very important point. Is it that local companies benefit equally or to a greater extent than foreign companies from these exemptions? We need to get the details.

Further, we need to know what the quantum in dollar value is of the exemptions that redound to the benefit of local versus foreign entities. That is a

very important point. Are these things benefiting the foreign companies more than the local companies, these benefits and these exemptions? We need to know that. We know how many. We need to do quantum in dollar value what it is. This measure is important, because it gives local stakeholders detail as to the level of support their foreign competitors are accessing. We would also enable policymakers to ascertain the full level of fiscal benefit extracted by foreign entities. We recognized the importance of wooing, phoning our foreign investors to ensure they contribute to the development of our nation. We do understand that these gains must be mutual for them to be sustainable. However, we on this side also subscribe to the mantra that for it to be managed it must be measured. [*Desk thumping*]

Therefore, Government owes it to the taxpayer a full disclosure of the final beneficiaries of these exemptions. The last time the exemption came, I mentioned it before, 15th December, 2017, the hon. Minister said, and I quote:

“These concessions enable companies incorporated in” T&T “and engaged in the aforementioned sectors, to acquire the necessary foreign inputs such as raw materials, machinery and equipment, at world market prices, without being subject to customs duties on entry. These benefits allow domestic business to obtain raw materials that are otherwise unavailable in the local and regional markets, and to access modern equipment and technology that improve their productivity. It is also important to note that this provision ensures that companies are not placed at a disadvantage in terms of their international competitiveness.”

Very nice words, Madam Speaker. I totally subscribe to it. But again, subscribe to these words. Subscribe to this thinking. But again, if you no detail, no data, no quantifiable data, then it means nothing. It means absolutely nothing. [*Desk*

thumping] Nothing whatsoever. The Minister then said:

“For the period January 01, 2016, to July 01, 2017, 125 non-energy companies of varying sizes benefited for the customs duty exemptions under this facility.

Again the question is: Who are they? To what extent? Minister said:

“The manufacturing sector: 110 companies involved in manufacturing food and beverage, wood and metal furniture, industrial chemicals, construction products and textile and garments”

Who are they? What is the dollar value of how much they benefited? [*Desk thumping*] That was in the period of the last exemption previous to the exemption we are doing now? What has it been for the last three years? Who benefited? What is the quantum? Minister also said, and I continue quoting:

“Also, agriculture, livestock, forestry and fisheries:”—hear this—eight farmers in the three years. “Eight farmers producing vegetables, and rearing animals such as sheep, goats and cattle;”

And you talk about growing the agricultural sector. Eight farmers benefited. Who are they? Is it the sheep and goat man who is a best friend of one of your officials? Who benefited? Eight farmers, Madam Speaker. Shameful! [*Desk thumping*] Listen to this, tourism sector.

“In the tourism sector: one hotel in Trinidad and three in Tobago”—benefited. One in Trinidad and three in Tobago. Who are they? Tell us.

“Under other improved activities: three companies engaged in various activities.”

Who are they and how much did they benefit from the exemptions? Minister needs to tell us that.

So we have to also ask, in the last minutes I have, what is the plan for our

nation's non-energy sector? Because we keep talking do not put all your eggs in one basket. And indeed we cannot even depend on that energy sector much more, because you have shut down and closed down that sector. Out at Point Lisas seven plants have been shut down, so we cannot depend on it. [*Desk thumping*] We have to look at the non-energy sector, but the data shows us that we have had serious declines in that sector. So, what is the nation's plan? What is the Government's plan for the sector, apart from giving these waivers on customs? With mass joblessness in the nation, even before COVID, Government does not provide much hope for the future. Given the revelations by the Central Bank of the decline in real economic activity, there is a need for Government to step up to the plate and concern themselves with the development of the non-oil economy in this country. Government has to step up and give their plans. Do not just come and say you are giving all these nice waivers and thing. That has been going on for a while, and the economy still crashed. [*Desk thumping*]

The frame in the road map to recovery is devoid of substance and cannot answer the challenges. For example, when we examine the \$500 million to be earmarked for agriculture, there is absolutely no detail that provides comfort to stakeholders in that sector. And indeed, previously, these incentives are there, but they were not being taken up. Why? Have you done a review to see why people did not access it? Minister mentioned that the Minister of Finance in his budget talked about all these incentives; apart from the exemptions, why did it not work? So you throw out policy positions with rhetoric and fluff and a big fanfare but you do not review them to see what is the effect of this. How does it work? How does it work? [*Desk thumping*] Government may wish to borrow, I say with the greatest of respect, from the UNC master plan, to understand [*Desk thumping*] how to set goals for national economic development.

And as I close, Madam, the private sector has been resilient. What are they saying? During this period of the pandemic they have sought means to keep their workforce employed and their businesses afloat. This is very commendable. In fact, the unsung heroes of this pandemic will be the thousands of business owners and operators who have been fighting tooth and nail to keep their operations running and viable. It is because of these individuals we can have workers still looking forward to a job and a means of livelihood. Needless to say, it has Government that has been recalcitrant. They have ground the wheels of the economy to a screeching halt before COVID-19. They crashed the economy before COVID-19. I repeat that. [*Desk thumping*] And by their actions, thousands of persons have lost their jobs pre-COVID, over 60,000 during COVID, now running at about 100,000, Madam Speaker. So, I take no comfort from the exuberance and optimism of the hon. Minister of Trade and Industry and Enterprise Development—

Madam Speaker: Member for Siparia—

Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar SC:—that giving out these exemptions—

Madam Speaker: Your time is spent.

Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: I am sorry, Madam. I thank you very much for this opportunity. [*Desk thumping*]

The Minister of Public Utilities and Minister of Youth Development and National Services (Hon. Fitzgerald Hinds): Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, I listened to the Member for Siparia speaking loudly and boldly today, perhaps celebrating the victory in a bogus election a few days ago.

Hon. Member: “Oooh.” [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. F. Hinds:—having lost seven national elections or otherwise on the track.

Mr. Padarath: Madam Speaker, 48(1) please. 48(1) and 48(6).

Hon. F. Hinds: Madam Speaker—

Hon. Member: Relevance.

Mr. Charles: Irrelevant.

Madam Speaker: Okay, so, while I understand this is a place to banter, I would just advise the Member for Laventille West to remember what we are debating and just keep on track.

Hon. F. Hinds: Obligated. Madam Speaker, you would have noticed like I did that the Opposition Leader read from a very well written speech, most certainly not written by her. Madam Speaker, as always, I observed—

Mrs. Persad-Bissessar SC: I object! The Member is making the claim that I did not write my speech. I object! I object! [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker: Again, let us—there is a rule against personal reflections. You know that that is unparliamentary. Again, I will guide the Member for Laventille West, to please desist from that, and let us proceed to get your valuable contribution.

Hon. F. Hinds: Madam Speaker, but the Member did make reference to PNM insiders benefiting from the concessions, so I must respond to that, to let the Member for Siparia know, we do not have no “Mamoo” here. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker, the Opposition Leader asked whether foreign companies are benefiting more than local entities in the context of the concessions that we debate in this Motion, the amendment to section 56(1). And, Madam Speaker, I thought it could not be more ridiculous to hear that coming from the Member for Siparia, who led a government, and when we came to office in 2015 we inherited some obviously very badly negotiated gas contracts, where the people of Trinidad and Tobago would have had to learn—

Mr. Indarsingh: Madam Speaker, 48(1). This Motion has nothing to do with gas

contract. [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. F. Hinds: The Prime Minister—

Hon. Member: Read the Motion. He did not read the Motion.

Madam Speaker: I would give you some leeway. I did not take it that this is about gas contracts. The Member is answering something with an example. That is what I understand it.

3.30 p.m.

Hon. F. Hinds: I am obliged. And the Prime Minister of this country led a team with some of my ministerial colleagues, and went to boardrooms around this world, in Australia, in the US, in London and renegotiated these contracts that were found to be disadvantageous to foreign entities against the people of Trinidad and Tobago. That is a fact. And having renegotiated these contracts, Trinidad and Tobago's revenue is in a far better position today than it was in September of 2015.

Mr. Charles: Madam Speaker, 48(1). We are discussing exemption on agriculture, hotel—

Hon. F. Hinds: I am pressing on.

Mr. Charles: Nothing about energy.

Hon. F. Hinds: I am pressing on. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker: Overruled.

Hon. F. Hinds: The Member for Siparia also told us ingloriously and quoted figures to suggest that the Government has underfunded the sectors that we are discussing here today that must benefit from these concessions, whether it is agriculture, livestock, forestry, fisheries, hotels, mining purposes, and other approved projects, including tourism.

The Member wondered aloud, shamelessly in my view, whether the Government was underfunding these, not telling the people of this country, some

of whom she represents from Siparia, and as a former Prime Minister, Madam Speaker, that the world economies have gone into a serious tailspin long before COVID. Trinidad and Tobago is part of that experience. A small country, a small island state in the context of the turbulence of the world, the World Bank, the IMF, all the international institutions understand that. And they have this mantra about before COVID, before COVID. Well, before COVID the world economies were in a tailspin. And Trinidad and Tobago, which earns most of its money from gas and oil, suffered directly as a result of it. COVID only made it severely worse.

So all the cutbacks that the Member spoke of, government cutbacks, were not because we wanted to do that, but of necessity because those were the circumstances that fell to us as a government since September 2015. Some of it were evident before 2015, but rather than deal with the issues the Member for Siparia led a team that collaborated with others, went along with it and spent billions of dollars out of NGC and otherwise, the largest budgets that we saw in this country, 63 and 64 billion at the hands of the Member for Siparia. So, I think it is disingenuous for her to say so and people of Trinidad and Tobago must understand that.

Madam Speaker, the Member again raise the question of diversification. Diversification is a process away from the dependence on the hydrocarbon sector as we have done for the last four, five decades. And today, Madam Speaker, because of the economic circumstances that we find ourselves in is the worst possible time to talk about diversification. But we are proceeding. We tried to boost the tourism sector. The Member for Siparia mentioned Sandals, a noble idea, a noble project to bring thousands of jobs and to bring tourists to the island of Tobago and the Member for Siparia and her friends in Tobago objected to it, scandalized and chased away the potential investor.

Long time before that under another government when we talked about diversification into smelting that generated a whole lot of noise from the Opposition. That too fell by the wayside. And of course the Member mentioned fleetingly and flippantly almost that this Government put aside an allocation, allocated \$500 million to direct to the agricultural sector in this country and has created a tax free sector out of agriculture. Taxes have been obliterated from that sector to make it easier for those who will participate in it profitably and to provide food and nutrition security for the people of Trinidad and Tobago.

And then the Member for Siparia also ask who is benefiting. Well let me remind her. The Minister who presented this Motion told us that Arawak & Company Limited bought with these concessions substantial millions in raw materials, machinery and equipment; Carmel Valley Estate, Central Farms, Christine Frank, Crispin Allen, Erin Farm Limited. I am just calling the names of those in the livestock trade, in the agricultural sector who benefitted from this and made substantial investments as a consequence, while the Member for Siparia was doing other things. Fine Choice Meats Limited, Floyd's Poultry Farms Limited, Hare Krishna Seedlings, Hindustan Egg Farm, Ian P. Serrao, Kazim Baksh, Kent Farms Limited. I "eh" see PNM or no PNM inside there or anywhere there.

So that kind of foolishness, Madam Speaker, and every one of those who benefitted from these concessions and who call on the Government constantly to provide them, they employ thousands of persons in that industry creating jobs and keeping the economy afloat. We have done very well in the circumstances in Trinidad and Tobago, but my short intervention in this debate, Madam Speaker, and before that, the Member for Siparia, a former Prime Minister, told us that the Government failed in providing resources for the police. I chair the Joint Select Committee on National Security. I had the Commissioner of Police before our

Committee and there were Members on that side in that Committee who in answer to a direct question from me, I asked whether they had the resources to fight crime and to do the job? The Commissioner's answer was indubitably, yes! We have the manpower, we have the vehicles, we have the technology. That is on the *Hansard* record in a committee that I chair. What they lack is the support of this Parliament, for example, with the anti-gang law to take on the criminals as gangs and to bring justice to the people of Trinidad and Tobago. That is what they lack and the Member for Siparia is single handedly responsible for denying the police that. And coming here to sound hypocrite. I did not say she was a hypocrite. [*Laughter*] I may not have been wrong, but I did not say that.

Madam Speaker, and all of this, these concessions are not done in abstract or because we have any insiders or we like anyone, it is the commonsense, it is the prudent, it is the sensible thing to do especially given the current circumstances. Because we want to develop the local—we want to see local economic development which is defined as a participative locally owned inclusive and holistic approach to building economic capacity and promoting long term economic development in a given territory. And you would have heard from the Minister who presented this, we do this for good reason because you are talking about imports of 18 billion in terms of agriculture. So these concessions do support them, every one of them in all of the sectors that we are dealing with today. And it is helping to reduce this First World/Third World gap, because Trinidad and Tobago is a small island state. When we develop our local sector and they can participate and they could benefit from it and we could reduce our imports we are doing developmentally well.

The Minister told us that the manufacturing sector accounts for 17 per cent of our GDP, some \$11 billion in money terms. Big firms here you know, like

Angostura, S.M. Jaleel, CGA, Carib and others. But I want to spend a few moments focusing, Madam Speaker, since it now falls within the portfolio of the Ministry of Youth Development and National Service the question of the small and micro enterprises which this Government has given a lot of attention to and proposes to continue so doing to develop that sector. Because while you have the bigger firms, these small and micro enterprises consisting of about over 50,000 in all you know. They say there are about 24,000 registered and another 25,000 informal or unregistered small and micro enterprises in the country. So they are like the capillaries, if I may use a metaphor, into the heart and soul and the furthest and deepest reaches of the economy, but necessary to keep the body economic afloat. And that is why we focus so substantially on it, Madam Speaker, and we will continue.

In that regard, Madam Speaker, I must tell you that the—[*Crosstalk*] “You doh worry, you doh worry.” The Government provides funding support for these small and micro enterprises. They employ, based on statistics in front of me, upwards of 250,000 people in that sector, in the small and micro enterprise sector. We, Madam Speaker, have directed a lot of time and energy to this. We understand the young people, and I am speaking from the perspective of the Ministry of Youth Development and National Service, the young people in Trinidad and Tobago must play a part in all of this. So we are encouraging them to focus on the non-traditional skills and occupations so that they could create employment for themselves and in their SMEs or small micro enterprises they could create employment rather than looking for a job as we did back in the day.

They have opportunities in information technology, computer repairs, computer programming, cell phone repairs. I know a young man who repairs cell phones in Port of Spain, I “doh” want to hazard a guess about how he earns, but

whenever I go there the place is packed to capacity and he is on the job, night and day, crowds there, all the time, right in the city, right. Non-traditional occupations, graphic art and design, social media management. I told you before during my last campaign I had three social media activists or personnel working in my campaign. That is why we won so resoundingly and beat the UNC and chase them out of town for a second term. [*Crosstalk*] Yes. Music industry, food and beverage, tourism and hospitality, bath and body care, nail technology, make-up artistry, fashion design, cosmetology, sound and audio engineering. A pastor told me that his son who did sound engineering at the Laventille Technology & Continuing Education Center, which the PNM put there, Madam Speaker, told me that he is making a very good living with his little studio producing gospel music. Events management, data mining, and mechatronic engineering. All of these, the local craft and creative arts, all of these are opportunities where the young people in the small and micro enterprise sector can make their way. Lots of opportunities and we are focusing on that.

And there is a recognition that some of the main challenges they face is the question of the availability of funding. And that is why back in 2002 a PNM Government established the National Entrepreneurship Development Company or NEDCO. That company has a specific mandate in the context of small and micro enterprises. It carries a mandate to develop the micro and small enterprises in Trinidad and Tobago whose needs cannot be met by the traditional lending agencies. NEDCO offers a wide suite of entrepreneurial development services to help micro enterprises from the business concept or idea to successful commercialization. Small business finance in entrepreneurial training, business assessment, mentorship, business advisory services and client focus services well known to the national community and I dare say should be even better known

Hon. F. Hinds

because they do a wonderful job, Madam Speaker, in terms of supporting, particularly young people and women in their activities in that sector.

And from the day one the focus of NEDCO was on the disadvantaged in the society, many of whom I represent proudly. The youth as I said, it is in their mandate, youth since 2002. This is why I say, this new Ministry of Youth Development and National Service it is not altogether new, it is simply with laser beam focus we are doing it now, but all of the programmes and the elements had been here for a long time.

Mr. Indarsingh: Madam Speaker, I am trying to follow. What does this Motion have to do—

Hon. F. Hinds: It is hard for you to follow anything.

Mr. Indarsingh: 48(1). [*Crosstalk*]

Madam Speaker: Okay, so Minister, while I would have allowed you some leeway to answer in terms of points were raised about diversification, I will not allow you to widen this debate, it is not about diversification.

Hon. F. Hinds: I am obliged.

Madam Speaker: So that you have responded to that and I would ask you to come back—

Hon. F. Hinds: I am obliged.

Madam Speaker:—to what the Motion is.

Hon. F. Hinds: I am obliged. So, Madam Speaker, the point I am making is simply this, there is a reason for these concessions and it is to support the various industries and sectors identified in the Motion before us, and there are big players, big business, big industries and there are also, because we are talking about the economy and germane to the economy, and those who benefit from this at the end of the day are those as well in the small and micro enterprise sector. Because when

a big firm gets concessions to bring in raw materials it filters down to the small and micro enterprises. And we are saying here, in this debate, we are focused on that for the benefit of the whole, the whole economy. If the Member for Couva South cannot understand that it does not surprise me. [*Crosstalk*] I would not say he is incapable of understanding.

But, Madam Speaker, my time has run, I am simply saying that I am here today in support of the Motion and in support of the measures as proposed by my colleague, the Minister of Trade and Industry and we reject flatly all of the side show and the side talk that the Member for Siparia raised. We remain focused on the development of these sectors and these concessions are designed to make their business easier, to make them more efficient for the sake of keeping Trinidad and Tobago's local industry and sector alive and well. I thank you, Madam Speaker. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Ravi Ratiram (*Couva North*): [*Desk thumping*] Thank you very much, Madam Speaker, for this opportunity to participate in this debate on this Motion today which seeks an extension of the exemption from import duties pursuant to Part A of the list of Conditional Duty Exemptions in the Third Schedule of the Customs Act.

Before I go directly into my work that I would like to present today I want to take a moment to respond to my colleague who clearly came here totally unprepared for this debate. [*Desk thumping*] And listening to him go all over in his contribution I want to humbly advise him that the next time he attempts to join a debate he should consider reading the Motion before he speaks. [*Desk thumping*] Because nowhere in his contribution, Madam Speaker, did he respond to the contribution from the hon. Leader of the Opposition.

The Leader of the Opposition spoke of matters relating to the hotel industry, she

spoke to challenges facing the agricultural sector, she spoke about the lack of data that has been presented by the Minister in putting forward the Motion and our colleague, the Member for Laventille West, comes here in this Chamber and goes all over but not addressing the issues that this Motion is about. [*Desk thumping*] He even makes claim that the PNM renegotiated gas deals, but I also want to remind him that the PNM also renegotiated the Malcolm Jones deal [*Desk thumping*] with the WGTL, billions of dollars, the withdrawal of legal matters to recovering money.

Hon. Gopee-Scoon: Madam Speaker—

Mr. R. Ratiram: They renegotiated—[*Crosstalk*]

Hon. Gopee-Scoon: Point of order, 48(1), relevance. [*Crosstalk*]

Madam Speaker: Member for St. Augustine, if you would allow me to do my work I would allow you to do yours when you are recognized. Member for Couva North, while I understand that you may be responding I am also going to rein you in. Because the gas mentioned was in response to something that was said with regard to how the local content and how things are being administered. So I am not going to let you widen this debate about all other things, okay. So quickly come to your point and move on back to this matter. Thank you.

Mr. R. Ratiram: Thank you for your guidance, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, the Minister, the Member spoke about youth and youth development and I want to congratulate the oldest Minister of Youth Development and National Service on their Benches. [*Desk thumping*] He managed to touch on three social media personalities that were created, that were utilized for the elections. [*Crosstalk*] And I really want to know what was the role and functions of these social media personalities. Was it real personalities or was it unreal social media personalities? But we will deal with that—

Hon. Gopee-Scoon: Madam Speaker, 48(1), point of order, relevance. [*Crosstalk*]

Madam Speaker: So let us get on with the debate please.

Mr. R. Ratiram: Thank you, Madam Speaker, and I am guided accordingly. On the last occasion, Madam Speaker, when a similar Motion was brought to this Parliament almost three years ago by the hon. Minister, the hon. Minister informed this House that this Motion allows for the extension of concessions to enable T&T incorporated companies in the private sector to acquire the necessary foreign inputs at world market prices without being subject to custom duties on entry.

The hon. Minister also stated that this provision would ensure that companies were not placed at a disadvantage in terms of their international competitiveness. However, Madam Speaker, almost one year after this country witnessed the closure of Petrotrin and the virtual shutting down of the oil and gas sector. Perhaps one of the biggest economic fallout from this was a compromise in both the availability of and the access of foreign exchange by members of the private sector. While the Minister may not have intended for this to be so this is the unfortunate position that the ordinary man has faced for the past two years due to the failed governance of this PNM administration. And by extension, Madam Speaker, our local export businesses have become sorely disadvantage in terms of their international competitiveness due to the lack of this foreign exchange. Coming from this disadvantage position that our farmers have found themselves in, through no fault of their own, even in their access to fund projects, agricultural projects that may be capital intensive in nature, the access to US foreign exchange or the lack thereof plays a critical role in the success of these agricultural projects.

Madam Speaker, if you were to permit me I want to use my limited time to focus on approved agriculture livestock forestry and fisheries as they relate to this Motion. If this Government was really serious about agriculture and farming in

Trinidad and Tobago as they claimed to be they would allow farmers to have priority access to foreign exchange in order to make the full use of the exemptions on the approved agricultural machine, equipment, implements and tools and medicine, minerals and supplement for livestock, et cetera. But farmers, like all other citizens out there, continue to find it extremely difficult to access this US. Madam Speaker, three years ago on piloting a similar Motion, the hon. Minister of Trade and Industry highlighted the value of agriculture production in 2016 and its contribution to GDP. The Minister indicated and I quote:

“...agriculture has been identified as one of the sectors earmarked within the Government’s diversification strategy. The success of this sector contributes to increase food security, agricultural exports, employment and conservation of foreign exchange, while also providing an incentive for people to live more healthy and productive lifestyles.”

However, the Government must face the many questions that arise regarding the effectiveness of their focus on diversification in terms of the results achieved, for instance, by way of attracting and encouraging new participants and how these exemptions have played a part in the management of the sector. One of the questions that has arisen is how these exemptions performed in the past 24 months in terms of additional benefits to livestock farmers, poultry farmers, food crop farmers, fishermen, et cetera, taking into account that on the 15th of December, 2017, the hon. Minister stated that:

“For the period January 01, 2016, to July 01, 2017...”—under—

“...agriculture, livestock, forestry and fisheries: Eight farmers producing vegetables, and rearing animals such as sheep, goats and cattle; benefited from custom duties exception under this facility.”

And the leader spoke on questioned who these eight farmers are. And we

would really like to hear—[*Desk thumping*] are these farmers planting sweet potato, who these farmers are? Are they rearing goat or peacock, who these farmers really are, Madam Speaker? We would really like to hear from the hon. Minister what happened to the remaining thousands of farmers in this country, farmers who continue to face challenges since this Government has entered office in 2015 and the initial extension to these exemption? Challenges, such as, land use, land tenure, access road, irrigation, drainage, flooding, praedial larceny just to name a few. These challenges continue up to today's date. What we can clearly see are gaps in the system. [*Desk thumping*]

This Motion refer to Part A of the conditions, duty exemption in the Third Schedule of the Customs Act. Can the hon. Minister advise us as for the timeline for processing these exemptions, taking into account that farmers who have applied for subsidies, reimbursement, exemptions and who have filed claim for loss of produce due to flooding have been waiting for over two years for their applications to be approved.

Madam Speaker, I want to swiftly turn to the *Review of the Economy*. Page 165, a book presented here, 2020, presented for the budget and the year 2017 shows a value of TT \$1.8 billion for gross domestic produce of Trinidad and Tobago at market prices for agriculture, forestry and fishing. Madam Speaker, this *Review of the Economy* for the period, for the year 2019, GDP fell to \$1,608,000,000 which is a decline of 273 million highlighting the failure of this PNM Government once more. [*Desk thumping*] In December 2017, Madam Speaker, the hon. Minister indicated that Cabinet had approved the development of a new Agro-Processing and Light Industrial Park in Moruga to support the agro-processing industry. The Minister explained and I quote:

“This park will provide the foundation upon which businesses will be able to

grow and prosper, create employment, and attract investment.”

Madam Speaker, after spending some \$80 million to complete this facility in Moruga on the eve of the 2020 General Election, what has become of this initiative, Madam Speaker? How many persons are currently employed there? What level of investment has it attracted to date, Madam Speaker? You can ask my colleague, the MP for Moruga/Tableland. She visited this facility only a few days ago and there was absolutely no activity going on there, Madam Speaker, none whatsoever.

4.00 p.m.

So the question that we have to ask: Was this \$80 million spent for a photo opportunity for the PNM candidate and his partner who was severely defeated in a recent election? [*Desk thumping*] What did we spend this \$80 million for, Madam Speaker? Madam Speaker, the hon Minister in her 2017 presentation continued to explain and I quote once more:

“All these initiatives are geared towards increasing revenue and decreasing our reliance on food imports.”

Madam Speaker, let us review our food import bill for the period as I now turn to the Central Statistical Office. Total import of food and live animal for the period 2017, this was a total of TT \$5,606,000,000; and the year 2019, the total food import bill was TT \$5,673,000,000, an increase, Madam Speaker, of \$67 million. Again, another failure of this PNM Government. [*Desk thumping*]

I now turn to the issue facing our livestock farmers, Madam Speaker. You see, Madam Speaker, while perusing the list of conditional duties, exemptions for approved agriculture, livestock, forestry and fisheries, I was looking to see if forage was going to be included because forage is something that is very important to our livestock farmer. But it was not, Madam Speaker, and I would therefore like

to suggest that it should. You see, Madam Speaker, the forage bank at the Mon Jaloux farms had become overgrown with weed, bushes, shrubs, and has not been maintained for the past couple of years. Another failure of this PNM administration. [*Desk thumping*] And, Madam Speaker, the dry season will soon be upon us and livestock farmers will face significant challenge to provide forage for their animals. The PNM Government has once again fail to maintain the Mon Jaloux farms and provide the necessary resources for the growth and the development of our livestock industry. Where is livestock board?

Madam Speaker, I would like to ask the hon. Minister: how has this Motion really benefited the fishing industry? The intent of this Motion is to attract new entrance into the industry and enhance their competitiveness. But, Madam Speaker, when we look at the challenges facing the fishing industry, this provision does not alleviate the hardship or the fears that our fisherfolk faces, and the fishing industry we all know is one that is very close to the heart of Couva North.

Madam Speaker, just as recent as Sunday the 6th of December, just a few days ago, around 7.00 p.m. persons working on a vessel owned by Mr. R. Khan were approached by six men in a pirogue who appeared to be pirates out at sea. Just Sunday gone. This was reported yesterday to our coast guards. The men on Mr. Khan's vessel were able to narrowly escape with their lives by turn off their lights and speeding off into the darkness of the sea. Madam Speaker, this incident has served as a reminder once more to our fisherfolk of the tragic incident that took place just a few years ago, where five of our own Couva North young men were slaughtered out at sea with two still missing up to today's date, and this Motion, Madam Speaker, does not help in any way to alleviate the fears of the fishing industry. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker, the list of exemptions to which this Motion refers, I draw

you attention to item 10, boats and boat equipment, and fuel for fishing—item 10 on the Schedule. The initial incarnation of this exempt item was because previous administration would have recognized the need to bolster the competitiveness of our fishermen. But, Madam Speaker, in terminating the supply of regular gas which our fishermen used to fuel their vessels, they are now faced with an exorbitant fuel cost that eliminated any possibility of being competitive against the larger vessels who fish in international waters and sell their catch here in Trinidad at considerably lower prices. The bureaucracy involved in the existing fuel subsidy is extremely tiresome and many fishermen do not even use this facility any more. Madam Speaker, I would like to propose that this Government perhaps looks at a more considerate fuel subsidy programme for the fishing industry, and even seek to expand this schedule to include items such as GPS and other security devices for our fisherfolk.

Madam Speaker, in closing, I have no objection in supporting the principle behind this Motion for the sake of the local agriculture, livestock, forestry, and fishing industry. However, based on the reasoning put forward by the hon. Minister of Trade and Industry on the last occasion, and by what was said in today's debate where she hurriedly presented on agriculture for two minutes, from 2.46 p.m. to 2.48 p.m.. She spent two minutes, Madam Speaker. While they claimed to be putting agriculture at the centre of their diversification trust, only two minutes was allocated to the diversification and to the agriculture industry in her presentation. I would like to ask that the Government's understanding and reasoning behind this extension take into consideration the recommendations that I have made, because it seems as though that this Government's understanding and reasoning behind this exemption seems a far cry from the reality of what ought to be.

This Motion has failed to enhance agriculture, it has failed to improve the

contributions of agriculture to GDP, it has failed at reducing our food import bill by conserving foreign exchange. Madam Speaker, the Government has lost their way in placing agriculture at the centre of their diversification thrust [*Desk thumping*] and in general the records will reflect that this Government has lost their way in totality as they have failed all of us. They have failed of all us—

Madam Speaker: Member for Couva North—

Mr. R. Ratiram:—here in T&T.

Madam Speaker:—your time is up.

Mr. R. Ratiram: I thank you. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker: Minister in the Ministry of Finance.

The Minister in the Ministry of Finance (Hon. Brian Manning): Madam Speaker, thank you so much. Madam Speaker, I must say I must begin by saying how impressed I am to hear those on the other side remind us that today is International Anti-Corruption Day, when so many of their financiers have not been seen since 2015. There are several financiers on the other side that I am sure the proper authorities would like to have a discussion with, but they cannot find them. [*Desk thumping*]

I am also, Madam Speaker, extremely impressed to hear those on the other side speak about what we are not doing for agriculture, when it is—[*Crosstalk*] Madam Speaker, that is a factual comment.

Madam Speaker: One minute, please. Overruled. [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. B. Manning: Madam Speaker, I am also—

Madam Speaker: One minute please. Member for Naparima, I did hear you and I do not think what I heard you say is what I heard. Please continue.

Hon. B. Manning: Madam Speaker, I am also impressed to hear those on the other side speak about agriculture, when it is this PNM Government that has added

stimulus of \$500 million to the agricultural sector. [*Desk thumping*]

I would like to ask them if they can remember how much stimulus they added to the agricultural sector when they were in office, Madam Speaker. [*Desk thumping*] While delivering two of the largest budget in the history of Trinidad and Tobago, they did very little, if anything at all, for agriculture. [*Desk thumping*] But let me get back to why I am here today, Madam Speaker. This Motion has its underlying objective, the exemption from customs duty, equipment, material and supplies for use in offshore petroleum exploration and petroleum operations. So since I am speaking about the energy sector today, Madam Speaker, I am allowed to say that it was the energy regimes signed by the other side that almost brought this economy and this country to economic collapse. [*Desk thumping*] We have spent almost the last five years trying to renegotiate these contracts to save Trinidad and Tobago from almost certain though.

Madam, this Motion seeks to extend the benefits granted pursuant to section 56(1)(a) of the Customs Act from 1st of January, 2021, to 31st of December, 2022. The current exemption expires on the 31st of December, 2020. This conditional exemption reduces operational cost on offshore exploration by eliminating import duties. As well, it continues to make Trinidad and Tobago—

Mr. Indarsingh: Madam Speaker, 48(1). I am a bit—is it that we are on Motion No 1.

Hon. B. Manning: Madam Speaker, I apologize I wish to inform that it is not my turn at this point, so I will have to step down.

Madam Speaker: So your contribution is ended?

Hon. B. Manning: Yes, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker: Member for Mayaro.

Mr. Rushton Paray (Mayaro): Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. Madam

Speaker, with the limited time that I have, first let me start by rebutting a bit of what the two speakers after the mover of the Bill would have said in their contributions. Like the mover of the Bill, Madam Speaker, the MP for Laventille West, Member, he stood for 20 minutes and added no value to the discussion. [*Desk thumping*] He added no value in terms of empirical data that would support the mover of the Bill. In his usual style, his ranting and raving did nothing to instil the confidence in his Government's ability to make conscious cost corrections which is so dire needed at this point in time in our economic development.

Madam Speaker, the Member also debated about 10 other Bills than what he was supposed to debate in the House today. That is a bit of—you know the sad reality that the Member chose to dance all around what was more important in the Bill that we are dealing with today in terms of concessions in specific industries. Madam Speaker, and the Member for San Fernando East in his very short contribution, he boasted—the hon. Member—he boasted about a \$500 million stimulus package, and unfortunately not \$1 of that 500 million have been sent to the agricultural sector. So there has been nothing to the agricultural sector to boast about.

Madam Speaker, the Bill before us today is a very simple Bill. The intent of the Bill, I do not think anything in the Bill itself is objectionable—

Madam Speaker: Member for Mayaro, I know it is just a slip, it is a Motion.

Mr. R. Paray: Sorry. Thank you, Madam Speaker. The Motion before us today is—there is nothing objectionable in the Motion. I think the intent of the Motion is to allow an environment for business to grow, to develop, for foreign direct investment to grow and develop as well, and the Motion brings these concessions to five broad areas which—many have been spoken about before, and what we are doing is extending these concessions for an additional two years. Madam Speaker,

as I mentioned nothing in the Motion is objectionable at this time. We on this side, I think we agree with the intention of the Bill because we all want to see Trinidad and Tobago prosper for the development of every single citizen in this country. But, Madam Speaker, we do have a duty to measure the efficacy of the Motion over the past two years.

One would have thought that the hon. Minister, who is moving this Bill, would come with the relevant data to show that the Motion, the concessions, have actually added value to the development of the economic situation in this country. Unfortunately, Madam Speaker, that has not been done. Madam Speaker, the Government is simply seeking to extend the term of the incentives without really reporting to the nation on their effectiveness and whether alternative measures would have been more applicable. Madam Speaker, while these exemptions now appear to be a rite of passage and an extending existing benefits, the Government really should have come here today and provide the specifics of the gains and advantages to the local economy especially in light of the current economic challenges.

Madam Speaker, the Minister lamented the lack of information that was available for her presentation today, but I want to ask this House in the absence of that data perhaps we can use the country's GDP as a yardstick to see if these concessions really would have done what it was supposed to do. [*Desk thumping*] Madam Speaker, the World Bank has stated that the T&T economy was worth \$24.1 billion in 2019, taking note that it was down from US 25.06 billion in 2015. Madam Speaker, the economy of Trinidad and Tobago has steadily declined from a peak of 27.62 billion in 2014 till today. So if we ought to measure whether these concessions, as mentioned in the Motion today, is adding any real economic value, then it tells me that it has not because we have not been able to grow the GDP in

any significant way.

Madam Speaker, the Motion states in a very nominal way that it is expedient that certain goods continue to be exempt from importation duties. In presenting the Motion, the Minister neither did she indicate the financial benefits except to state in a very generalized broad-brush way that the exemptions would stimulate and grow the economy. Madam Speaker, the exemption in this Motion is designed to bolstered trade and industry including the agricultural sector which my colleague from Couva North has dealt with, look at some improvement in the hotel and tourism sector, and mining among other approved purposes. But, Madam Speaker, generally speaking, exemptions from customs duties should not just be a standard and schedule rollover procedure, which we are doing today, but should be rooted in a more planned measured system to diversify our economy. In doing so, we allow investments, we allow the country to become attractive to investments. These concessions should allow the improvement in the ease of doing business in this country. It should also incentivize manufacturers, and it must most importantly aid small and medium sized enterprises. Anything less than that, Madam Speaker, is an indication of a continual absence of strategic planning and lack of vision by this Government.

Madam Speaker, if I can draw your attention to the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development which represents about 37 major economies and promotes world trade, they conducted a survey on the impact of tax incentives. And before I just mention what that survey said, I want to just lay some foundation that delivery of the hon. Leader of the Opposition was spot on, and in terms of her positioning the concessions alone is not enough because it has not been able to grow the economy in any significant way. [*Desk thumping*] And organisations like the OECD, they have concluded as well that benefits should be

evaluated on a periodic basis to gauge their effectiveness. But listen to this, Madam Speaker. The OECD has also said that in order to enable proper evaluation and assessment the specific goals of a given tax incentive need to be explicit at the outset.

Madam Speaker, that same study also revealed that when you provide incentives for specific economic purposes they will attract specific investments in particular industry. Madam Speaker, the Opposition, my colleagues on this side, we do concur with all of the objectives which represent the best practice in the industry. In my research as well there is a publication called “The International Lawyer”. They too did a survey which summarized amongst several countries that tax incentives, like what is included in the Motion today, were found to be very ineffective means of achieving economic development. Madam Speaker, the study justified incentives for a specified period and for well-defined objectives, and it showed that there were very little effect in terms of providing some of these tax incentives. The study went on to recommend that other measures must always be used to incentivize investors and to grow your local business economy.

Madam Speaker, in another study that was done in Israel, they found that investors emphasized the need for major general economic reform rather than an incentive programme. The investigation also said that many perspective investors prefer discussions with the authorities rather than, sorry, with the authorities on finding a right mix of incentives which includes not only tax concessions for customs and duties in these areas, but so many other areas that would help enforce the economic reform that is required.

Madam Speaker, when the Minister presented this very similar Motion in 2015, I recall that the Minister said about a total of 147 companies had made use of the concession, but at that time gave no specific details. Today, I understand 136

companies have used this concession. So I have to ask why the decline? Why is it that less companies are choosing to access these concessions? It means that there are some other things that is prevalent in the economy in our investment climate that is disincentivizing our local business and our foreign investors from investing money in this country.

Madam Speaker, international studies have found that tax incentives must be coupled with other critical factors to attract investment in countries such as ours. Some of those factors would include political and economic stability, trade policies, infrastructure, skill level of the host economy, and other resources that facilitate efficient production. Madam Speaker, so the question I would have to ask is: What has the Government done with respect to those matters in order to attract the foreign direct investment that we are hoping that these concessions that are mentioned in this Motion ought to be doing?

Madam Speaker, allow me to just share a couple of the incentives that other countries, other jurisdictions, are using to drive their economies. They are looking at implementation of tax credits for research and development; they are looking at financial incentives for diversifying the product ranges among the individual companies, manufacturers, and so on; they are looking to provide technical support to assist manufacturers in managing cash flow, boosting worker production, securing export markets, and other relevant issues; they are looking at tax credits for maintaining or increasing the workforce or for retaining employees. But, Madam Speaker, why it is that we ought to be looking at some of these things as mentioned? The concessions by itself, as noble as they are, it is not working. But if we do not fix the environment, the investment climate in Trinidad and Tobago, “don’t” matter what concessions we put in place we will not get the objectives. [*Desk thumping*] And what are some of those issues?

Madam Speaker, this is what the investment climate in Trinidad and Tobago is today. It takes about 254 days to receive a construction permit; it takes 77 days to register a property.

Ms. Cudjoe: Madam Speaker, on a point of order, relevance, 48(1).

Madam Speaker: Okay. So, Member for Mayaro, I understand what you are developing. I will just ask you to remember to stick closely to what is before us.

Mr. R. Paray: Sure. Thank you, Madam Speaker. I am guided. Just suffice it to say that if we do not fix some of the other issues that are perilous to our economy, any concessions we provide it will not stimulate the interest for further development in Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker, I just want to touch very quickly on the issue of agriculture. I know we went into some detail. I will not be very long with it, but you know I take note that the Minister of Finance in his budget presentation in October 2020, the Minister spoke of decades' old malice and the structural impediments inherent to the agricultural sector. So my question is: How is the customs concessions, these duty concessions, going to address that malice? I am saying, Madam Speaker, that it cannot use the concessions alone, and there are some other areas that, in my respectful view, that must be addressed in order to get the benefits for the agricultural sector which is so high a priority on our developmental plan. And I speak about areas in providing financial aids to rehabilitate abandoned estates; I speak about improved system for payments of subsidies to farmers, the supporting of establishing co-operatives and agro processing operations outside of the State, create an environment where private sector can use those concessions to improve in its ability to do agro processing. Madam Speaker—and obviously my colleague from Couva North spoke about the improvements to access roads, drainage and other systems that are required. So,

Madam Speaker these customs exemptions should ideally be connected to the strategic objectives for the sector with the sole purpose of increasing domestic production and reducing the food import bills.

Madam Speaker, just to touch very, very quickly on the issue of hotels, and so on, there has been so much of incentives, other tax incentives that has been provided by this administration over the last five years and the data has not shown any improvement in the sector. When you look about the tax incentives for yachting services, you look at a subsidized loan for new tourist and tourism facilities; in 2018 you had Tourism Accommodation Upgrade Programme. Madam Speaker, none of those things have reversed the decline, and we speak about this pre-COVID-19. So this was already in train in place at that point in time.

So, Madam Speaker, what I want to just close with the couple minutes I have remain, is that we on this side, on the Opposition Benches, we have no objection to the Motion and the intent of the Motion. What we are saying is that clearly the Government has not been able to put other areas which requires a bit of thought in order to bolster the investment climate so they can achieve the objective of improving our economic situations. So, I have no problem in supporting the Motion in terms of what is stated for concessions, but I plead with the Government to take a very closer look at what else needs to be done in order to move our economy forward. Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker: Member for Tobago West.

The Minister of Sport and Community Development (Hon. Shamfa Cudjoe): Thank you, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, I am grateful for this opportunity to join this debate at this time and to offer a short contribution. Once again I was not scheduled to speak today, but I had to respond or throw my two cents in when I heard the contribution of the Member of Parliament for Siparia, who is also a

former Prime Minister, and the Member would have said that this Government has brought the Tobago economy down to the ground, has flattened the Tobago economy. I join the rest of the Members on this side, the Members of the Government side, in supporting this critical measure at this time.

I think now more than ever the private sector, entrepreneurs, small enterprises, need this type of assistance where the Government is providing incentives to help them in the advancement of their businesses, to keep their businesses afloat. Because businesses or private sector entities that would have otherwise been healthy have all been brought to their knees in some way or the other, whether it is from falling demand, reduced input supply, tightening credit, or just uncertainty based on this whole COVID situation, and assistance from the Government is really, really required.

For as long as we can remember, the Ministry of Trade and Industry, the Ministry of Tourism, and several other Ministries have been offering this type of assistance to the private sector before the whole COVID situation, and I think it is most important at this point in time hence the reason I felt the need to add my two cents. Now as it relates to Tobago, I always find it rather interesting and just startling when I listen to the hypocrisy coming from the other side as it relates to Tobago development and the development of the Tobago economy.

4.30 p.m.

Now, Madam Speaker, the Member for Siparia said the Tobago economy had been flattened by this Government and that nothing was being done. But in the same breath, I think that that Member forgot to tell us about the precious nothing that she and her government would have done in their time. [*Desk thumping*]

As we speak even about agriculture, for the first time in our history, Madam Speaker, this Government launched the Agricultural Incentive Programme in the

October of 2018, and for the first time, grants that were being offered by the Ministry of Agriculture in Tobago were now for the first time being extended to farmers in Tobago. That had not been done before and I had the opportunity to witness a distribution ceremony in the month of June of this year where farmers from Tobago were given up to \$100,000 each to provide support as they modernize their farms. This is the first time farmers from Tobago had the opportunity to access this grant coming from the Ministry. That was not done under the leadership of the UNC and the Member for Siparia.

And on top of that, this Government has offered incentives to farmers, we would have redoubled our efforts in doing agricultural access roads in Tobago providing better access for farmers in the rural areas to bring their—

Mr. Indarsingh: Madam Speaker, 48(1). The Member seems to be going off course as it relates to this particular Motion.

Madam Speaker: Overruled.

Hon. S. Cudjoe: Madam Speaker, the previous speaker—

Madam Speaker: Member, overruled please. Please continue.

Hon. S. Cudjoe: Thanks. I want to continue, yes. So the previous speaker would have spoken to the incentives or the concessions are not enough, that we have to do more and I want to speak to the more that we have been doing because this incentive, these concessions are supposed to help our private sector, help our farmers to advance their business. So we have the Agricultural Incentive Grant where the Tobago farmers are getting for the first time under this Government. The Agricultural Access Road Programme which started also in 2018, giving better access to our farmers to bring their livestock and their crops to market.

Just one week ago, we would have opened our newly refurbished or renovated Scarborough market and I can tell you all 242 farmers and vendors are

extremely happy by being able to operate their businesses out of the Scarborough market and that was done under this leadership. So I want to commend the Government and commend the different Ministries who would have provided that support to the Tobago House of Assembly and to the people of Tobago. And whilst the Member for Siparia spoke to flattening the economy of Tobago, this Government would have given grants to Tobagonians to the Tobago House of Assembly so that farmers in Tobago can improve our food security during this COVID situation.

I want to turn to tourism. The Member for Siparia spoke about the Government would have disbanded the TDC and did not properly establish the new companies. Madam Speaker, that is far from the truth. The Tobago Tourism Agency, which is now in operation in Tobago, has been providing assistance to the tourism stakeholders in Tobago and would have won a silver award for their national tourism campaign. [*Desk thumping*] Madam Speaker, this entity has also gone the distance to work with the stakeholders to develop plans and projects for tourism in Tobago and a standards initiative for Tobago. Madam Speaker, the Member forgot to mention the less than nothing that was done by her Government.

The Member for Mayaro would have raised the Tourism Accommodation Upgrade Programme. Under the Member for Siparia when she was Prime Minister and under that same UNC administration, what we got from the TAUP programme in Tobago? Nothing again, Madam Speaker, precious nothing. It took December of 2015, when I became Minister of Tourism, that was the first time that grant, that Tourism Upgrade Programme was being offered to the stakeholders in Tobago where the Government goes 50:50 in the investment as they upgrade their rooms and they upgrade their plans. That programme had been in operation in Trinidad for over three years under the UNC and they did not see it fit to offer that incentive

to the Tobago tourism stakeholders, so once again this Government has come to the rescue. I am sorry that the Member for Siparia forgot to mention that.

So, Madam Speaker, you would have seen over and over where this Government had stepped in in a time of little to offer support to the people of Tobago and to the tourism industry in Tobago. Over the years, over decades, the people of Tobago had cried out, the tourism stakeholders had made their plea for a refurbished or an expanded or new airport and the other government, the Opposition in their time would have said that was too much money for Tobago, and even as we place this investment of over \$2 billion in the ANR Robinson Crown Point Airport, they cried out that that was too much money to spend on Tobago. So we are making the investment in Tobago and that project is well on its way.

I remember when I was in Opposition and the Member for Siparia was Prime Minister, they went over to Tobago and had a big ceremony naming the airport after former President Arthur Napoleon Raymond Robinson. Madam Speaker—

Mr. Indarsingh: Madam Speaker, again, 48(1). I am hearing nothing about customs duties and exemptions and so on. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker: Overruled. Please continue.

Hon. S. Cudjoe: Thank you, Madam Speaker. [*Desk thumping*] So they had a whole little party, song and dance opening the airport and at that point in time up to the PNM coming in government, when we go to Tobago, we had to slew our luggage down a slide because the luggage belt had not been working, and they stood there for their five years and extra six months and watched that and have the audacity to come to Parliament today to speak about flattening the Tobago economy when they did nothing?

So, Madam Speaker, I stand here this afternoon giving support to the Minister of Trade and Industry as she offers these incentives and these concessions to the private sector. [*Desk thumping*] We know all too well that the Government cannot afford to employ everybody and that is more so for us in Tobago and the Tobago House of Assembly. So any support to the private sector, to the Tobagonian who is planting, that wants to improve their business in agriculture and take their crops and livestock to market, we are well on board, and I want to commend the Minister of Trade and Industry for bringing this Motion here today and to provide incentives to those who are now diversifying and improving their business in tourism in Tobago. I want to commend the Minister of Trade and Industry once again for offering the support to our private sector.

Madam Speaker, the Opposition whenever they had the opportunity, when the UNC and their friends, even their friends in Tobago have the opportunity to do these things for Tobago, to offer development to Tobago and incentives to help to improve our business sector—because it is all well and good to come here and complain about the Tobago House of Assembly hiring everybody and it is not well and good but they do it anyway by coming here and saying that Tobagonians are lazy but when we extend our hands and we ask for support in improving our private sector, the PNM is doing too much.

I stand by this Government in improving the lot for the private sector in Tobago [*Desk thumping*] and we are going to continue to work with this Government and with the People's National Movement because, Madam Speaker, every time we have been tricked by politicians in Tobago to walk down the road or to go into the hands of the UNC, we got salt, nothing, precious nothing, and in most recent years, we could see the development, we could see the effort that this Government is making and the investment through the grants, giving Tobagonians

two bites of the cherry where we can access support through the Tobago House of Assembly and from central government, Madam Speaker. Tobago is good and getting better and we stand with this People's National Movement Government and the Minister of Trade and Industry and I support these concessions and these incentives towards promoting and advancing our private sector.

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

Mr. Barry Padarath (*Princes Town*): Thank you, Madam Speaker, for the opportunity to contribute to today's debate. I paid attention to the contribution made by the Member for Tobago West who primarily focused on issues affecting Tobago and some of Government's projects that they have attempted to implement over the time that they have been in government during the period 2015 to today.

Madam Speaker, the hon. Member for Tobago West focused a lot on the land acquisitions as it relates to the Tobago airport and the history that surrounded that particular matter in terms of the building of the airport, in terms of what it meant for the people of Tobago, in terms of how it will be able to create business opportunities and so on. I want to remind the hon. Member that very little was focused on with respect to Tobago by her administration. It was a Kamla Persad-Bissessar administration that took steps to increase the capacity of the Tobago airport by bringing in additional flights from other parts of the world [*Desk thumping*] making the Tobago airport more marketable and opening up business opportunities for the people of Tobago.

Madam Speaker, I want to remind the hon. Member for Tobago West, today as we are dealing with customs duties and exemptions that deals with price controls and so on in terms of products that are available not only to the people of Trinidad but also to the people of Tobago, that when the hon. Minister speaks about product availability in Tobago, I want to remind the hon. Member for

Tobago West, it was this hon. Minister that said in this Parliament that Tobagonians experience no problems because they could get what? Yogurt and almond milk in the supermarket. [*Desk thumping*] So the Marie Antoinette of Tobago West must be very mindful, very mindful, Madam Speaker, of the challenges that these customs duties and exemptions pose.

Mr. Al-Rawi: Standing Orders 48(4) and 48(6).

Ms. Cudjoe: And 48(1).

Mr. Al-Rawi: And 48(1).

Ms. Cudjoe: All of 48.

Madam Speaker: I overrule 48(4) and 48(6). Member, I give you a little latitude because I think you are responding. But just remember what was said by the Member for Tobago West was in response to something else. So that I am going to curtail you very much.

Mr. B. Padarath: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I move on to the contribution made by my colleague from Laventille West who spoke about the loans available through NEDCO and in terms of how it would empower young people and so on. That programme was moved from the Ministry of Labour to the Ministry of Youth Development and National Service. However, if you look at the history of that particular programme in the context of what we are dealing with today as it relates to the customs duties and exemptions and the creation of small businesses that these customs duties and exemptions will impact, when the Member for Laventille West spoke about that particular programme and you look at the history of that particular programme, there has been very little progress in terms of the development of these loans that will assist small and medium enterprise development.

Madam Speaker, if I recall the figures that NEDCO had put out prior to it

going over to the Ministry of Youth Development and National Service, it was something like less than 100 loans that were provided to small and medium enterprise development that today, the Minister speaks about that will benefit from these customs duties and exemptions. So, Madam Speaker, in terms of those loans and that point made by the hon. Minister, I am not in full support of the Minister's position that he has adopted that it will create more small and medium enterprise business development and therefore, these customs duties and exemptions will have very little because this has been the history as we have seen going forward.

Madam Speaker, I also want to turn to the issue as it relates to the customs duties and exemptions that we are dealing with today, the ease of doing business in tandem with these loans that the hon. Member for Laventille West spoke about. Earlier this year in the budget, the hon. Minister of Trade and Industry came to the honourable Parliament and we thought that this year, the hon. Minister would have given us a report. Because the Member for Siparia spoke that it is not the first time that we are dealing with these customs duties and exemptions, it has spanned several administrations but we must have measurable targets in terms of how these customs duties and exemptions have impacted, especially under the Ministry of Trade and Industry as it relates—

Madam Speaker: Member, Member, I am now rising on Standing Order 55(1)(b), tedious repetition. Every Member on your side who has spoken thus far has spoken about a report and the efficacy and all of that sort of thing. So that I would say if you are doing that point, I am not going to allow it, go on to another point, please.

Mr. B. Padarath: Madam, I will turn to a few of the other points that were raised by the hon. Minister of Trade and Industry as it relates to the customs duties and exemptions. The hon. Minister dealt with the issue of the exemptions in particular sectors and how it would impact in terms of bringing a measurable amount of relief

to the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago. But one of the issues that the hon. Minister did not tell us about which would have assisted us in terms of lending our support from the Opposition would have been the progress that the Ministry of Trade and Industry has made as it relates to the Registrar General's Department in terms of the process; the process that will be utilized to implement these customs duties and exemptions as it relates to small and medium enterprise development and also existing industries and sectors in Trinidad and Tobago.

Madam Speaker, one of the boasts from Government has been that they have been able to increase manufacturing, that they have been able to increase outside of the non-energy industry. But, Madam Speaker, when you move from position 61 to position 104 in terms of the ease of doing business, one asks then, how does the customs duties and exemptions that we are debating here today—

Mrs. Gopee-Scoon: Madam Speaker, a point of order, 48(1).

Madam Speaker: And I uphold that and I would also say again Standing Order 55(1)(b), ease of business because the general point—because you were not in the Chamber and while I know you were hearing outside, I would take it that maybe you did not hear everything. Every Member has spoken about other things in tandem with the customs exemptions, for them to work. At least two Members, if not three on your side have spoken about the ease of doing business. So I will ask you to go on to another point.

[MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Mr. B. Padarath: Sure, Madam Speaker, I will move on to another point. For the energy-related industries that the hon. Minister spoke about, it only took two advantages of the exemptions, that is NP and Petrotrin, therefore there is no evidence beyond these two that there has been improvement in the energy sector, especially as Petrotrin has been shut down for the past two years by the

Government. And then we look at the revenue foregone—

Mrs. Gopee-Scoon: Point of order, 48(1) because that particular exemption for which we spoke is not about energy. The two companies I mentioned were energy companies involved in manufacturing. We are talking about manufacturing. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Again, Member, I will have to uphold the objection and move on to a different point please.

Mr. B. Padarath: Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Actually, I was raising that in tandem with another point so the hon. Minister pre-empted me. The revenue foregone from exemptions to the 136 companies tallied \$704 million; 108 are in manufacturing, 26 in agriculture, livestock, forestry and fisheries. The exemptions give opportunity for access to inputs at world market prices and that was the point. Exports amount to \$18 billion in goods. This is the trade-off the Government is looking to for the gains from the foregone revenue of \$704 million.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I would like to repeat that point because I think that is something that while the Minister of Trade and Industry jumps up every two minutes because she is uncomfortable with some of the issues that we are raising, I would like for the hon. Minister to listen to this very carefully. Exports amount to \$18 billion in goods. This is the trade-off the Government is looking to, for the gains from the foregone revenue of \$704 million. Through the administering of concessions, he claimed it has contributed to the diversification thrust, however, based on the quarterly index of economic activity of the Central Bank, there has been a decline in the manufacturing sector over the five years of the PNM being in government. And this is exactly what the hon. Member—most of my colleagues have made the point. COVID-19 did not reach in 2015, 2016, 2017, 2018, it was a PNM Government that crashed the economy and has us in the position that we are

in today. [*Desk thumping*] And that is why I say that based on the quarterly index of economic activity—it is not the UNC saying this, it is the Central Bank of Trinidad and Tobago that puts out these quarterly index of economic activity.

And if the hon. Minister of Trade and Industry has a problem and an uncomfortableness dealing with these things, these are not numbers that are just popping up in the air. These are numbers that are provided by the quarterly index of economic activity of the Central Bank. But when we go into the reports and we look at the numbers, it clearly manifests that it is not COVID-19 that crashed the economy, it is PNM incompetence. [*Desk thumping*] Based on quarterly index of economic activity—if the hon. Minister did not hear it for the first time—of the Central Bank, there has been a decline in the manufacturing sector over the five years of the PNM being in government. And I think it was around 2017, when it was the Member for Diego Martin North/East, what they sought to do was to sort of reclassify the manufacturing sector by saying that we will now expand the non-energy sector and therefore we will put all the downstream from the oil and gas industry into the non-manufacturing sector to give the impression that the economy was growing. So when the hon. Prime Minister speaks about hogwash, that is hogwash and that is what the hon. Minister of Trade and Industry should have come and dealt with today. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Deputy Speaker, the Minister of Trade and Industry chose to cherry-pick with examples of Angostura, Carib and Bermudez though there are 134 companies in the non-energy sector that would have had cause to access these waivers. Mr. Deputy Speaker, 134 companies. So while the hon. Minister speaks about big conglomerates and speaks about Angostura, Carib and Bermudez who have a large scale capacity, what about the small and medium enterprise development? And these are the 134 companies in the non-energy sector that would have had cause to

access these waivers.

A more fulsome review of the impact of the waivers of customs duties should have been forthcoming, that is what we expected of the hon. Minister of Trade and Industry. But the hon. Minister of Trade and Industry has a habit that what the hon. Minister will tell us in 2015, there will be no follow-up in 2016. When the hon. Minister tells us something is happening in 2017, there is no follow-up in 2018. And therefore, we expected a more fulsome review of the impact of the waivers of customs duties. That is what should have been forthcoming today, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and that is why I say that in tandem with the point that I am making that last year, the hon. Minister told us that she would come to the Parliament and tell us that the work that she has been doing improved our ranking in terms of the ease of doing business but she stayed silent. You know why, Mr. Deputy Speaker? Because we did not do better, we did worse. [*Desk thumping*] But I will move on from that point.

Without speaking to gross capital formation in the manufacturing sector, the Minister instead chose to point to a handful of companies that utilized the exemptions. So therefore, Mr. Deputy Speaker, if a handful of these companies are utilizing the exemptions, then what is plan from the Ministry of Trade and Industry? What is the Government's policy as it relates, especially in the time of COVID-19 and going forward when a lot of small and medium enterprise developments have been closing down at a crucial time, massive job losses coming out from the small and medium enterprise development companies?

Why did the hon. Minister choose to cherry-pick without speaking to gross capital formation in the manufacturing sector? The Minister instead chose to just pull out of a hat a few companies. Gross capital formation is a measure of gross net investment into fixed capital goods by companies—that is no rocket

science—governments and households within the economy for a specific period, however, when taking stock of the value of an economic measure, it is important to measure the cumulative impact.

And these were the simple things that we expected the hon. Minister of Trade and Industry who has been in the portfolio since 2015, and has overseen the decline of trade and industry in Trinidad and Tobago, cannot point to one measurable success that this Government has had under her purview and under her portfolio. We would have thought that gross capital formation being a measure of gross net investments into fixed capital goods by companies, governments and households within the economy for a specific period would have been dealt with by hon. Minister of Trade and Industry. However, when taking stock of the value of an economic measure, it is important to measure the cumulative impact. Did the Minister deal with that? No, Mr. Deputy Speaker. The hon. Minister and no Member opposite has dealt with that issue. [*Desk thumping*]

But they believe, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that they come and they throw out great big companies—Angostura, Carib and Bermudez—and that the country will believe that these waivers are benefitting them and are affecting the pockets of every man, woman and child in the country. But, Mr. Deputy Speaker, when you look at the nitty-gritty of it and that is why we say, however, when taking stock of the value of an economic measure, it is important to measure the cumulative impact. What cumulative impact has it had on the economy of Trinidad and Tobago?

When you look at the indices that tell you whether or not an economy has grown because of these customs duties and waivers through big businesses, conglomerates but also small and medium enterprise development, did the Minister share any of this with us today? The Minister should be ashamed that

under her purview, [*Desk thumping*] many small and medium enterprises have what? They have collapsed, we have had severe job losses. That is what the hon. Minister of Trade and Industry has presiding over. Instead our Members opposite come and tell us that people in this country can get almond milk and yogurt in the grocery. But what about when you cannot get CRIX, the poor man's food in this country? And the hon. Minister did not tell us the impacts that these waivers will have in terms of the small and medium enterprise development and how the Government will utilize these waivers to ensure that they are sustained.

I turn to the issue of incoming investments for these hotels. The Minister spoke—she indicated that she had spoken to Marriott, Radisson and another in Tobago that should be coming. We are being told that another hotel, a few in Trinidad and possibly in Tobago. However, given the experience with the Sandals project, we should wait and see what comes out of these projects. And therefore, Mr. Deputy Speaker, you know when you look at Barbados and you look at Antigua and Barbuda in the context of these customs duties and waivers and the exemptions, what they have done, for industries that have severe impact that are more vulnerable, especially during the COVID period, if you look at the countries that depend on tourism as a major contributor to their economy, the Ministries that deal with trade and industry, what they have done, especially in Barbados where Prime Minister Mia Mottley is and also in Antigua and Barbuda—

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

Mr. B. Padarath: Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Mrs. Gopee-Scoon: Point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker, 48(1).

Mr. B. Padarath: Mr. Deputy Speaker, I am dealing in context of customs duties, waivers and the exemptions.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Okay, hold on, Member. Move on. Tie in the point, go

ahead.

Mr. B. Padarath: Mr. Deputy Speaker, when you look at Barbados, you look at Antigua and Barbuda in the context of what we are dealing with today, the customs exemptions, the waivers, et cetera, what they have done is that they had established a committee that in light of the COVID-19 issues that have affected importing industries like tourism in their country, what they had done was that they are putting together a master plan that deals comprehensively with products, marketing, foreign direct investment that would impact on customs duties and exemptions. What do we have in Trinidad and Tobago? You have the “bubble gum Minister”, the only the thing that she can boast about in terms of industries creating—

Mr. Al-Rawi: Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Mrs. Gopee-Scoon: Point of order.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: One second.

Mr. Al-Rawi: Mr. Deputy Speaker, I rise on Standing Orders 48(4) and 48(6). This is just unacceptable.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Member, I would like you to retract, withdraw.

Mr. B. Padarath: I withdraw, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Unlike the hon. Minister of Trade and Industry in Trinidad and Tobago, what we are doing today is that we are pulling the exemptions and the customs duties and waivers out of a hat. The hon. Member for Siparia dealt adequately with that particular issue but I would implore the hon. Minister of Trade and Industry to stop burying her head like the proverbial ostrich in the sand and look to see what other countries are doing because they are making progress and we are not. So if the Government feels and the hon. Minister of Trade and Industry thinks that Trinidad and Tobago is moving full speed ahead and that we are benefiting in a tangible way to developing our industry, it is simply

not happening.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Member, Member. Thank you. I recognize the Minister of Trade and Industry.

5.00 p.m.

The Minister of Trade and Industry (Sen. The Hon. Paula Gopee-Scoon): Mr. Deputy Speaker, I had almost forgotten what the Lower House—the standard is in the Lower House. I had almost forgotten. The UNC was completely out of tune with the purpose of this Motion, completely off point. And I was very, very—I mean, all of the speakers, they had to be called out on repetition. Many of the contributions were vacuous. In fact, when the hon. Member for Siparia got up, I thought well, here we are, we will get a report on what they did and the outcomes of the UNC master plan. And I am speaking directly on the points that they made. The Member for Siparia spoke about the UNC master plan. But if she came here to report, she should have reported to the country on what the results of the UNC master plan were; what occurred under her watch.

So I can tell you that there were no new hotels under that UNC government; absolutely none. There was no growth in the manufacturing sector. As a matter of fact, when we came in here in 2015, that manufacturing sector had tumbled. If you go back now and you look at the statistics, revenue under the manufacturing sector, from 2010 to 2015, fell considerably, absolutely, there were no improvements and let me not even talk about the energy sector.

The agriculture sector, what were the investments under the agriculture sector between 2010 and 2015? Tell me of any large—report to the country. Tell me of any large private sector investments in the tourism industry, in the agriculture sector, in the agro-processing sector, in the manufacturing sector. Talk about that. Report to the country. There was absolutely nothing to report on at all.

And do not come here and tell us about diversification, because after five years, with top-dollar revenues, you did not diversify this economy. Absolutely, there is nothing to report from your side, only a lot of hogwash, and I can use the word hogwash. It was used in this debate about the red economy, blue economy, green economy, silver economy; at the end of the day, absolutely no progress in terms of diversification. They cannot come here today wasting a lot of time, and absolutely nothing to report, no success coming out of that UNC master plan.

I never knew that the word “banditry” was allowed in this House. But the Opposition spoke about banditry in the agriculture sector. But the nerve of them to come here to talk about banditry. We remember all well the banditry that occurred under the last government. I am going to keep this debate very narrow, and I am responding to the points which they raised about banditry. That SIS, I mean they were receiving projects left, right and center, everywhere. Where is all that money? Where is all that money? [*Interruption*] That is right, in Panama, not benefiting the people of Trinidad and Tobago. And that \$1 billion on the Beetham Waste Water Project, \$1 billion flash down the drain. That could have gone to some good use and help to develop all of these sectors. You could have put that \$1 billion—you could have encouraged them to invest in that particular sector.

LIFEsport, and I am not going to—and you have the nerve to come here and talk about world corruption day? Yes, you should be celebrating. [*Desk thumping*] You have a right to be celebrating. You all were involved, your Members, the Members were involved in all sorts of spurious activities. And where are these Members? Where are they? They have returned to this honourable Parliament.

Mr. Indarsingh: Mr. Deputy Speaker, 48(6). The Member is imputing improper motives when she is saying that Members have returned to this Parliament.

[*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Members, please, I need no assistance, overruled.

Sen. The Hon. P. Gopee-Scoon: And I would remind you, and I do not want to waste too much time, you know. I would remind you about what we met here when we came in, in 2015. We had to set about, in the very difficult times between our first year in office from 2015 when we came in. Do you remember the level of expenditure that we met? I think it was \$63 billion, the deficit. As I said, those were good times. We are in not so good times now. Those were good times. Oil prices at \$100, and to come in here and to meet a deficit of about \$13.53 billion? That is what we met under them. With the very scarce resources we had, we had to think about prioritizing and we were able to reduce that to now \$8.21 billion in 2021. We have had to work to reverse all of the negative aspects of the economy that they have brought upon the people of Trinidad and Tobago. When I look at inflation, the level of inflation under that last government, we have worked assiduously to bring that level of inflation down to where it is now today, 0.6 per cent; one of the lowest in the world.

Our Prime Minister—I mean, I “ain’t” supposed to talk about energy here—had to really take the mantle when it came to repositioning the energy sector which we so depend on.

And you were not listening, you know, because I spoke about numbers. I told you, I spoke about the value of revenue foregone in granting this concession under section 56 of the Customs Act. I spoke about it. I gave the figure TT \$704 million. Right away, I showed you where out of that we were able to earn exports to the extent of \$18 billion over the period. I spoke extensively about the markets, 120 markets. You got it. You pretended you did not hear and just came and you ranted, and so on. I mean, and I can tell you I am very, very pleased with the manufacturing sector in Trinidad and Tobago.

There have been a number of new programmes that have been developed to incentivize and revitalize this sector. And we are doing this in consultation with the TTMA. There is a strong partnership between the Trinidad and Tobago Manufacturers Association and the Government of Trinidad and Tobago, a very strong partnership. So we are assisting them in penetrating traditional and non-traditional markets and financing growth and global expansion. We are helping them to boost their production capacity, helping them to create new and innovative products, and all of this we are doing with the generosity of the Minister of Finance and the Government, by extending to them \$50 million in what can be termed a national export booster initiative to help with a number of areas including international certification, and so on, which allowed them to be able to achieve all the food and beverage standards necessary to enter particular markets, and so on, to assist with product compliance, and so on. We are working well with the TTMA.
[Desk thumping]

Let me tell you something, this year, historic, unprecedented and this is what we had to deal with. Everybody understands that every country in the world was impacted by COVID. And with the scarce resources which we had, the Minister of Finance had to bob and weave. Under the guidance of the hon. Prime Minister, we were able to do a lot in terms of supporting business and getting all of these businesses back on their feet, a range of activities. In fact, and now there is an SME stimulus loan programme. So that we have invested I think about \$200 million into credit unions.

There is also a micro-enterprise grant programme through NEDCO, assisting some 5,000 micro businesses. We have introduced, and this was even before COVID, this is through the Eximbank, a forex facility, with an initial capitalization of US \$100 million to assist with securing inputs into our manufacturing sector,

US \$100 million. A number of exporters, I think the figure is in excess of 120. They have all benefited from a special import forex window, that is US \$75 million, launched in April 2020, in the height of COVID to ensure that we were able to import all that we needed to, all of the inputs into manufacturing, all of the basic goods that we needed. And since then, another US \$75 million has been introduced as well.

So that, a lot has been done to support small business. A lot has been done to support the small and medium manufacturers and small and medium enterprises and the micro enterprises.

And I came here today to speak about one incentive. That is one incentive, in terms of many that is on offer by this Government.

If you go to the Ministry of Finance's website, you will find nine pages of incentives available to agriculture, to tourism, to manufacturing, to the energy sector. It is there, nine pages of incentives. But you do not want to look. You want to come here to sing that I must call out all of the nine pages. Wrong.

And in particular for the manufacturing industry, there are a number of facilities, especially at ExporTT. All assisting with the development of not only large businesses but small and medium businesses as well.

You wanted to talk about SMEs. Under this Government, a number of small and medium manufacturers are growing, and I can give you a figure. There are about 184 non-energy exporters in Trinidad and Tobago, 184. And of those, you would be pleased to know that 102 of them are just small and medium-sized exporters, 102. And these are the businesses that, in particular ExporTT and the Ministry of Trade and Industry, the Ministry of Finance, we would be focusing on.

So there is no need for me to come here and call out the 134 businesses that have benefited. They are small, medium and large. I have a list here. If you want

to see the list you could get the list. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Member, please, no display.

Sen. The Hon. P. Gopee-Scoon: I am sorry, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I have the list here. I do not have to call them all out. And for SMEs, through the Ministry of Trade and Industry we are doing a number of special facilities, including our grant fund facility, including our research and development facility as well, our steelpan manufacturing grant facility. There are a myriad, as I have said, of opportunities and incentives and financing opportunities that have been provided by this Government.

And then one of the Members spoke about the Moruga Agro-Processing and Light Industrial Park that the Member for Moruga—and I am sure she did not say that—passed there last week and then she did not see anybody. Come on, if you open the park, it must have been in August of this year, how do you expect to see people walking in and out of the park?

Do you not realize that there would be leases to be signed and negotiated? Machinery and equipment to be brought into the actual park. But I can tell you, and I am pleased to report, that we have already signed three leases [*Desk thumping*] for pepper production, for root crop processing and also for the Moruga Hill rice as well. And there is more to come. The interest is there.

And I can tell you, again, not the Government; private sector, under this Government, has spent, within the last year and a half to two years, more than \$100 million investing in the agriculture and agro-processing sector.

The Nutrimix new hatchery plant in Rivulet Road in Central Trinidad, that is almost to completion. And Member for Couva South, you would know. You pass there all the time and you see the huge investment in your—right? Then of course the PPP, I am calling them out. I am calling some of them out, Mr. Deputy

Speaker. There is a PPP which has already been completed, and this is with regard to the Aripo Livestock Station, and this is with Marilissa Farms, a huge success. Then, of course, there is another entity which has gone into rabbit farming; a smaller entity. There is Central Farms which is now expanding and they are into duck production and duck processing. So that, there is another large project with organic beef and lamb being produced. And you know, that is in Couva again, in the Member for Couva South—within the Couva South constituency.

So we have been doing all that is necessary to boost this sector, allocating lands and satisfying people who have issues with land tenure. And they have just not been sorted out by the last Government.

And talking about tourism, what hotel projects were done under the last government? In addition to the three projects which I named, the Radisson Blue, the BRIX Hotel, the Comfort Inn, as well. There was also the recent investment by Rex Resorts in Tobago. So we now have the Turtle Beach Rex Resorts hotel. And these are difficult times, and we are having investments in the tourism industry in Trinidad and Tobago, and we could have had a fifth. We could have had a fifth. But let me not lay blame to any particular person here, but we could have had a fifth in terms of Sandals.

So, I know my time is limited, Mr. Deputy Speaker. It is recommended that this Motion be passed in this honourable House. I know that the Opposition is going to support after all that is said and done. This is going to allow the Minister with responsibility for industry to grant import duty concessions to approved industry, approved agriculture, livestock, forestry and fisheries, approved hotels, approved mining purposes and other approved purposes. I therefore beg to move.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved:

That the House of Representatives, in accordance with and subject to the provisions of section 56 of the Customs Act, exempt from import duties of Customs, for the period beginning 1st January, 2021 and ending 31st December, 2023, the classes of goods imported and entered for use in Trinidad and Tobago for the following purposes set out in Part A of the list of Conditional Duty Exemptions in the Third Schedule to the Customs Act:

- (a) I- For Approved Industry;
- (b) II-For Approved Agriculture, Livestock, Forestry and Fisheries;
- (c) III-For Approved Hotels;
- (d) IV-For Approved Mining Purposes; and
- (e) V-For Other Approved Purposes.

this Resolution shall come into effect on 1st January, 2021.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Motion No. 2, I call on Minister of Trade and Industry.

CUSTOMS IMPORT DUTIES EXEMPTIONS

The Minister of Trade and Industry (Sen. The Hon. Paula Gopee-Scoon):

Thank you very much, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Mr. Deputy Speaker, I beg to move the following Motion standing in my name. This is Motion No. 2.

Whereas it is provided by section 56(1)(a) of the Customs Act, Chap. 78:01 that the House of Representatives may, from time to time, by Resolution, provide that any class of goods specified in the Resolution shall be exempt from import duties of Customs if the goods are imported or entered for use by any person for any purpose specified in the Resolution during any period to be fixed by the Minister in each particular case, not being a period terminating later than the date prescribed in the Resolution as the last day on which such exemption shall be operative, and subject to such conditions as the Minister may impose;

And whereas by Legal Notice No. 158 of 2017, the last Resolution in respect of the goods identified therein came into effect on 1st January 2018 and shall expire on 31st December, 2020;

And whereas it is expedient that certain goods continue to be exempt from import duties of Customs as of 1st January 2021;

Be it resolved that the House of Representatives, in accordance with and subject to the provisions of section 56 of the Customs Act, exempt from import duties of Customs the class of goods specified in the First Column of the Schedule, being goods imported or entered for use for the purposes specified in the Second Column for the period specified in the Third Column, but that this Resolution shall cease to have effect in respect of any class of goods specified in the First Column that is manufactured in Trinidad and Tobago:

SCHEDULE

First Column	Second Column	Third Column
Class of goods	Purposes for which goods are to be used	Period of Exemption
Equipment, material and supplies	Imported for use in off-shore petroleum exploration and petroleum operations	From 1st January, 2021 to 31st December, 2022

this Resolution shall come into effect on 1st January, 2021.

So Mr. Deputy Speaker, in the first column we speak of class of goods being equipment, material and supplies. In the second column purposes for which goods are to be used, and these are imported for use in off-shore petroleum exploration

and petroleum operations. And can I repeat this one please? Imported for use in off-shore petroleum exploration and petroleum operations. And the third column, the period of exemption from 01 January, 2021 to 31 December, 2022.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, let me say upfront that I am here to do one thing, which is to speak in respect of an extension of benefits granted under section 56 of the Customs Act. This is not an energy debate. And I am going to confine my discussion solely to the extension of the benefit regarding off-shore petroleum exploration and petroleum operations. I repeat, this is not an energy debate.

So, Mr. Deputy Speaker, similar to the previous Motion, this Motion is straightforward. It is about the customs exemption on equipment, material and supplies for use in off-shore petroleum exploration and petroleum operations. And the purpose of the Motion is to seek an extension of the benefits granted pursuant to section 56(1)(a) of the Customs Act.

I would just say very generally that the energy sector has long been a primary driver of the Trinidad and Tobago economy. That is known and that is established. And as at 2019, it accounted for 34 per cent of our GDP, contributing significantly to government revenues, to employment and also to foreign exchange earnings. And these earnings we know at this time are however, constrained by international market conditions. And we have seen the trend over the last few decades, but even more recently during the pandemic, the COVID pandemic.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, despite this, activities in the exploration and extraction subsector remains positive and very promising; activity continues. This sector continues to be attractive to many upstream investors who are truly committed to their exploration and capital investment projects, even against the backdrop of this pervasive pandemic. And I repeat, many major energy companies in Trinidad and Tobago have committed to their planned and ongoing development projects. And

according to the “Review of the Economy 2020”, foreign direct investments from oil and gas companies in this sector are expected at US \$2.2 billion for the calendar year of 2020. And this, Mr. Deputy Speaker, exemplifies the continued faith and confidence in our economy, but it always was not so.

But this is so under the stewardship of our hon. Prime Minister and in the capable hands of our Minister of Energy and Energy Industries, Franklin Khan, ably assisted by Minister Young.

It is under the stewardship of our hon. Prime Minister that strides were being taken as early as 2015, when we came into office with a view to securing the future of our oil and gas sector, production and exploration in Trinidad and Tobago. And following the Prime Minister’s visit to the headquarters of BHP Petroleum and Shell and BP, all, I think, in 2019, all of these conglomerates have renewed their commitments to Trinidad and Tobago.

So this resolution supports the decisions by these companies to reinvest and to further explore upstream activities. And this is despite the global uncertainties.

Looking at the period January 2018 to October 2020, there were six companies that benefitted from duty-free exemptions under this particular section 56. And this is through the issuance of off-shore licences under the provisions for off-shore petroleum exploration and petroleum operations. I emphasize again this is but one incentive and not the myriad of incentives that are offered by our energy sector. I want to name those companies, those six licences which were given during the period 2018 to 2020. And one would be Perenco Trinidad and Tobago Limited, formerly Repsol. Then, of course, there were four, and I am going to give the name exactly as stated on the licences. Four of these licences were to EOG Resources Trinidad Block 4(a) Unlimited; and, of course, the sixth one was to BP Trinidad and Tobago Company Limited.

I would have spoken before, and I am clarifying again for this honourable House and Members on the other side, that when I spoke of two companies that benefited under, two energy companies, under the first incentive which I spoke to, those were Petrotrin and NP, the Trinidad and Tobago National Petroleum Marketing Company Limited, and this is in the capacity of them being energy manufacturers.

We are speaking now about the second resolution. So, Mr. Deputy Speaker, in coming to the House today, I would have consulted with the Ministry of Energy and Energy Industries on the continuation of these incentives under section 56(1)(a) of the Customs Act. It is not a decision only for me. I would have consulted. And we are all of the view that given the challenges being faced amidst the pandemic and also in view of the interest that is being shown in this sector, the provision of this incentive is important and particularly at this time in sustaining the proposed activities in the upstream sector. As such, it is being recommended for an extension of two years. On the last occasion we would have extended it for three years. The Ministry of Energy and Energies Industries has particularly asked us. They have particularly asked us to extend it for two years, commencing 01 January, 2021 to December 31, 2022.

They believe that they would like the opportunity to review this sector and the particular incentive, and that the two years will provide sufficient time to fully assess the environment and its needs and to think more fulsomely about its targeted approaches to sustaining activities in the energy sector.

5.30 p.m.

So I would just like to say, again, that there are several incentives. I want to make the point again because I know Members on the other side are going to get up and make a lot of noise about the fact that I did not speak about the other

incentives, but I am saying this is not the purpose. But I will just identify that there are a number of them including exploration allowances, deep water incentives, incentives related to workover rigs, heavy oil allowances, incentives related to plant and machinery and equipment used in the energy industry, of course there is the SPT regime. There are incentives as well for new field development, and of course, there are also incentives for renewable energy and energy efficiency.

So again, I think the sector is in very good hands under the watchful eye of the hon. Prime Minister and the capable hands of Minister Franklin Khan, who has prime responsibility and ably assisted by Minister Stuart Young. The sector is important, is the most important sector after services. Services contribute a little bit more but this is very important for earning foreign exchange in particular, on account of the exports of all of the energy products and of course, including as well, all of the petrochemical products which would be the by-products of this particular sector.

The sector continues to be integral to the long-term growth and development of our country. And I have said it before, we are an energy province. Right? So, the sector contributes considerably, significantly, to government's revenue, to our export earnings, as well as to our GDP. I want to make the point because the Opposition is going to get up. We are going to hear from them that when the PPP government was in office, they were absolutely not in control of the energy sector. And we had to correct many of their miscalculations under the energy sector that occurred under the PPP government, including numerous write-offs against Capex and so on, the effect of which did not help Trinidad and Tobago. Right?

In the last two years, notwithstanding we have done the work that is necessary— as I have said before, our Prime Minister took it upon himself, went to all of the energy conglomerates to the extent where we have firm long-lasting

relationships with all of the large energy investigators in Trinidad and Tobago. They know us in their board rooms. They know and understand the relationship is there.

In the last two years, Trinidad and Tobago would have earned about \$7.7 billion in revenue from a 12½ per cent royalty on all hydrocarbons produced in the country. That royalty system remains fundamental to the taxation of non-renewable assets which include oil and gas. So that, the work continues all to the benefit of the people of Trinidad and Tobago.

So, as I have said before, the Ministry of Energy and Energy Industries, they are satisfied. This time, the two years will give them sufficient time to assess the environment, the needs, its changing needs. We are in a period of volatility affecting almost every sector, but in particular, the energy sector. As you know, we are subject to—we are price-takers and we are subject to the vagaries of the international energy market.

So the measures that I have spoken about and, in particular, the one that we are here for, remain crucial to ensuring the success of the sector, and of course, the overall recovery and sustainability of our economy. Mr. Deputy Speaker, I beg to move. [*Desk thumping*]

Question proposed.

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

Ms. Anita Haynes (Tabaquite): Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. It is indeed my pleasure to join in the debate on Motion No. 2 on the Order Paper today, which looks at the custom exemptions for offshore petroleum and exploration products, and exemption for equipment and material and supplies imported for use in offshore petroleum exploration and production operations.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, the Minister of Trade and Industry spent quite a lot of

time focusing on what the Opposition or Members opposite intend to say, and focused precious little time on what she ought to be telling the population of Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Deputy Speaker, while this may be a simple Motion, I think it is always important for us to remember what the role of a Parliament is. And we have a scrutiny function in this House, in this honourable House. We as Members of Parliament have a duty to scrutinize the roles of the Executive and the proposals that they bring before us.

And therefore, when we ask questions and we raise concerns, it is for the good of the people of Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*] And therefore, if the Minister had spent her preparation time and spend the duration of her speech speaking to the people of Trinidad and Tobago, and accounting to the people of Trinidad and Tobago on the cost and benefit analysis of this exemption to the people of Trinidad and Tobago, we would have had a more fulsome and productive contribution by the Minister of Trade and Industry. [*Desk thumping*]

Instead, what we got was pure rhetoric. Very simply, we had a lot of propaganda with a slight sprinkling of policy every now and again. The Minister sought to tell us, with little to no evidence, that our energy sector is in good hands, whilst simultaneously going through a lot of pains to say, “This is not an energy debate. It is not an energy debate,” and we accept that it is not an energy debate. But if you read through the Motion, it would have been very easy to account to the population on a number of questions, which I will go through very shortly.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, when you are dealing with the natural resources and the wealth of the country, and the Minister was at pains to recognize the importance of the energy industry to Trinidad and Tobago, several questions come into play in the extractive industry decision chain. The extractive industry decision

chain looks at whether or not a country is getting value for money when you convert natural resources to—under the ground—better development for the State. And therefore, the Government, any Executive is obligated to report to the nation whether or not we are getting value for money. And so, we have a number of questions as to who stands to benefit from for these exemptions.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, when we look at these exemptions, the Minister was duty-bound to tell us how this exemption will benefit the economy and the country as a whole. And what we needed to know was the tangible benefits, figures, and actual results and revenue from the past. You see, Mr. Deputy Speaker, this is not new. There should be significant information that the Minister of Trade and Industry could have reported to us had she taken this debate seriously, and her role and her function as a member of the Executive reporting to the people of Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Deputy Speaker, what we are discussing here today is the bread and butter of Trinidad and Tobago. We are looking at how we, as a country, will survive over the next few years. Therefore, it was important to treat this debate with a degree of seriousness that I found severely lacking from the Minister of Trade and Industry.

When we look— and when I listened to the Minister’s contribution in an attempt to keep it brief and without going into too many details and expanding the debate, the Minister lost her sense of reporting to the nation. When, Minister of Trade and Industry, was the last time, if ever, was there a comprehensive review undertaken by this Ministry as to the efficacy of this exemption? And if so, if a report was undertaken, it is your job in a mature democracy to come to us as a nation and say, “Listen, over the past few years, as this exemption has been in effect, this is how you as a citizen benefited over time.” [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Deputy Speaker, if less than a desirable number of energy companies access this exemption, what may be the reasons for this and how does the Government propose to fix this? That is the kind of detail and mature debating we expect to see in the House of Representatives of Trinidad and Tobago. As we mature as a democracy, Mr. Deputy Speaker, we hope that the Government takes their job and responsibility to account to the people of Trinidad and Tobago more seriously, because what we saw here today was severely lacking. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Deputy Speaker, we needed to find out whether or not the companies that accessed this exemption fully complied with the terms of use granted by the licence under section 56 of the Customs Act. And if not, what measures have been taken with respect to these breaches? You see, if the Minister had tailored her contribution along these lines, we would have had something to respond to. But you opened the debate and you gave us nothing to respond to because you came here saying, “I expect the Opposition will say this and they will not agree to this.” Focus on your job and you will do a better job. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Deputy Speaker, we also must ask— and while I acknowledge and I accept that this is not an energy debate, we are speaking about incentives in the energy sector. And therefore, we must also ask, what is overarching policy of this Government with regard to incentives? Because we have heard a lot of flip-flopping on the incentives from the PNM administration. On one hand, it is giving it away, and on the other hand, it is good for the economy. And incentives are good, so you have to decide. Are you for incentives or are you against incentives? And what is your overarching policy with respect to the incentives used to boost oil production in the energy sector?

Mr. Deputy Speaker, listening to the Minister of Trade and Industry, you would be left in a state of confusion because on one hand, you are hearing the

energy sector is in good hands we are doing very well, and on the other hand, you are hearing well, it is not really our fault, prevailing international circumstances. So there is an attempt to pacify our population that is understandably and justifiably worried about our revenue earnings by saying, “We doing good, but if we not doing good, it is not our fault.” Imagine that, Mr. Deputy Speaker. That is the quality of information we have coming from the other side. If it is good, it is us; if it is not good, it is somebody else. And that is what we are left to deal with as the population of Trinidad and Tobago.

On the face of it, Mr. Deputy Speaker, we understand that there is a benefit to our nation for creating an environment for investor confidence. In fact, Mr. Deputy Speaker, it was under our People’s Partnership Government that foreign direct investment flows crossed over US \$5 billion. [*Desk thumping*] So we on this side absolutely understand the importance of improving investor confidence.

But, Mr. Deputy Speaker, this Government has not boasted of any net FDI flows in the billions. In fact, they have never focused on foreign direct investment. And therefore, the question stands, which company stands to benefit from this measure? I know the Minister named the six companies but—that benefited the last time—but as we are going forward, who stands to benefit? And how much money in exemptions will be given? What has been the total revenue position of these companies over the past three years?

It is important to assess the size of the exemption in relation to what is being given out, in relation to the largesse that they have taken. What is the expected contribution to our economy over the next two years for these companies, in relation to their past contribution on over the past two years? This is important information for the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago to become stakeholders in our energy industry. You see, you want an informed population. An informed

population is desirable because that way you have a more participatory democracy, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Now, I would like to turn—I know the Minister of Trade and Industry said that there were a number of incentives, a number of incentives that she will not mention here today simply because it is not relevant to the debate. But it is relevant information for the people of Trinidad and Tobago. Natural resource transparency requires the Government to have an inclusive and comprehensive national strategy for the management of resources. Inclusion results in the maximum benefit for the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago, in participation with your natural resources.

The actions of this Government in managing our natural resources displays no commitment to transparency and no demonstrated public oversight of operations. There was no clearer example than today, during Prime Minister's question time, when we had to ask as to the status of the Patriotic Energies deal, and no answer was given, no deadline was given and we have to keep begging for an answer in the state of billions of dollars of energy assets in Trinidad and Tobago. And that is why we say there is no demonstrated transparency and accountability from this Government when it comes to our energy and energy industries, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

There is an unwillingness to empower citizens to become informed stakeholders in the energy sector. And why is that? Because the people who control the information—if you control the data that means you spoon-feed us what you want, and there is no clearer example than that, Mr. Deputy Speaker, than when I listened to the flip-flopping on the gas negotiations.

You know, one day it is, “the Prime Minister successfully led gas negotiations” and because of sheer confusion going on that side, I am very well aware that the next speaker is intending to start his contribution on the gas

negotiations. And I would advise him very clearly to change the first page of his speech. [*Desk thumping*] Because on one hand, you are saying, “We are responsible for these gas negotiations, the Prime Minister is responsible.” And a quick Google search will show you at least four or five different articles where they are saying the Prime Minister was not responsible for the gas negotiations. Again, it says, if it is good, it is us; if it is not good today, it was not us, it was somebody else. And it was not the argument—if you look at January 28th:

“PM’s office clarifies ‘misrepresentation’ on energy negotiations” March 28, 2019:

“PM did not negotiate gas prices”

It goes on and on with articles flip-flopping on whether or not they negotiated or they did not negotiate. And that is what I say, when they do not wish to give the population accurate information.

So while it is commendable, the PNM’s message discipline is admirable that they will come here day in and day out and say they are responsible for everything good in the energy sector, what is not so admirable is their distance from the truth, Mr. Deputy Speaker. It is of grave concern to us how far away from the truth they will stray to prove their point. [*Desk thumping*] So I would advise, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that as we proceed in debating this Motion, it is imperative that for us to keep the wheels of this economy turning. It is time for the Government to come to the Parliament with information, with the details and the reports that inform the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago to participate in making informed decisions. That is our job; that is our role in this Parliament. There is a role for scrutiny and accountability.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, it is important for us to understand that this House is not a rubber stamp and it is not sufficient for us to say, as a maturing democracy,

that because we did it for X number of years, we will continue to do it so, and there will be no accountability to whether or not it was efficient, it was effective and it redound to the benefit of the people of Trinidad and Tobago.

It is time for us, as a nation, to grow up and give citizens the information that they deserve to make decisions that directly impact all of us. And, Mr. Deputy Speaker, when you are talking about an energy sector that is in good hands, remind the population that there has been no new bid rounds, no road shows in 2019, an amazing lack of any significant seismic exploration. Upstream activity has been such that we placed all this hope on this BHP Broadside and when it was drilled dry, that it was a huge concern to the energy sector.

Mr. Deyalsingh: Mr. Deputy Speaker, most respectfully, Standing Order 48(1), please.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Again, tie in the point quickly, Member.

Ms. A Haynes: No problem.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Tie in the point. I will give you some leeway.

Ms. A Haynes: Thank you. And so, I raise that to say that in her contribution, the Minister of Trade and Industry said, “We have nothing here to worry about. Let us continue with these exemptions. This will be enough incentive for the energy sector. It will take us where we need to be.” And quite respectfully I am saying, if over the last two years with these exception in place this is what we saw, that cannot be accurate. And that is the point that I am making. [*Desk thumping*]

And therefore, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I say to those opposite and to all the people of Trinidad and Tobago, in debating Motions as simple they may be on face value, we as Trinidadians and Tobagonians must demand accountability and transparency in government affairs. You must come here prepared to give us details and not rhetoric. You must come here to give us information and not

propaganda, and we will stand for nothing else, and I thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Deputy Speaker: I recognize the Member for San Fernando East.

The Minister in the Ministry of Finance (Hon. Brian Manning): Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I would like to apologize for my earlier miscommunication. Usually both of these Motions are brought together but due to the efforts of those on the other side, today, they were separated. So I am back again for the first time. [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Deputy Speaker, this Motion seeks to extend the benefits granted pursuant to section 56(1)(a) of the Customs Act from 1st of January, 2021, to the 31st of December, 2022. This conditional exemption reduces operational cost on offshore exploration by eliminating import duties. Now, the previous speaker spoke about what is the Government's position in terms of incentives. Mr. Deputy Speaker, let me say in front of the national community that we have four incentives, but incentives with oversight, [*Desk thumping*] not the free for all that occurred under the former UNC administration where we had our national gas company buying fete tickets to the Hyatt carnival party. She was very concerned about oversight and exactly what are these exemptions, how do we protect these exemptions from being abused? Well, let me list some of the oversight for you, Mr. Deputy Speaker

One, conditional exemptions are granted with certain conditions. The Minister with responsibility may stipulate conditions which may include mandatory obligations to keep accounts and records, bonds or bonded warehouses. Two, Minister's licence. These are granted by the Ministry of Trade and Industry for a certain period of time, and with certain conditions and obligations. Licences can be revoked by the Ministry of Trade and Industry. Three, Customs and Excise

Division under the Customs Act, section 37, has the responsibility for monitoring the use of any good brought in under a conditional exemption to ensure conditions are being complied with.

So now that I have listed that, Mr. Deputy Speaker, let me also speak of the benefits of this exemption. One, a supporting increased employment through the creation of industry. Two, growing economy by providing and making means of production easier to access. Three, supporting small and medium-sized businesses and reducing the cost of goods and services by reducing the cost of production.

As we know, Mr. Deputy Speaker, the energy sector is the lifeblood of our economy and exploration is the lifeblood of the energy sector. It would be remiss of me not to highlight the importance of this offshore exploration sector and by extension, the energy sector.

The energy sector, Mr. Deputy Speaker, is just as important to this administration as the agricultural sector. So I was surprised to hear earlier, Members speaking about this Government trying to intentionally damage certain industries, especially after we have invested so much and added so much stimulus to the agricultural sector. [*Desk thumping*]

It is to the testament of this PNM administration, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that activities in the exploration and extraction subsector remain on the front burner. This sector continues to be attractive to many upstream investors who are committed to their exploration and capital investment projects, even against the backdrop of this pandemic. This resolution provides the context for major upstream oil companies in Trinidad and Tobago to commit to development projects. And now, I am going to read out some of those projects to assist the former speaker in her quest for information.

The fiscal year 2021 budget statement outlined that in September 09, 2020,

and because of continuing negotiations of gas-related issues, BPTT received a 10-year extension on 92 of its exploration and production licences in the Columbus Basin. As a result, the State will reap a financial benefit of US \$250 million over the four year period 2021—2024.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, these discussions have been taking place for some time. The Government completed phase one of the discussion in December 2018. BPTT received a 10-year extension to its South East Galeota licence as well Teak, Samaan, Poui and East Mayaro licences. In return, the State received a sum of \$1 billion for settlement of legacy issues. When we talk about legacy issues, Mr. Deputy Speaker, you know exactly what we mean.

These renewals of exploration and production licences, as well as the cash payments to Government, have been mutually beneficial and have placed the energy sector on a more solid and sustainable footing. Activities in the exploration and extraction subsector remain promising. According to the *Review of the Economy 2020*, foreign direct investments from oil and gas companies in this sector are estimated at US \$2.2 billion for the calendar year of 2020. So when the hon. Member for Tabaquite was saying that she did not understand what was going on or what investments were being made, I just explained it to her. This exemplifies the continued faith and confidence that international energy companies have in our economy.

Additionally, two energy manufacturing companies also benefited from duty exemptions over this period. These manufacturing companies were in turn able to export products cumulatively valued at approximately TT \$17.1 billion. So, Mr. Deputy Speaker, it is clear that these exemptions are benefiting our energy sector and therefore, benefiting the people of Trinidad and Tobago.

Further, significant investments are also being made further down the energy

value chain and on major renewable energy and energy efficiency initiatives. Mr. Deputy Speaker, I have no doubt that we will continue to be an attractive location for investment in the oil sector for years to come. The latest crude oil audit prepared by Netherland, Sewell & Associates for the year ending 2018 indicated proved crude oil reserves of 220.1 million barrels, 10.3 per cent more than the 199.5 million barrels in 2012. Probable reserves rose to 99.7 million barrels, 16.6 per cent higher than 85.5 million barrels in 2012. We are witnessing, Mr. Deputy Speaker, the result of onshore, undeveloped opportunities.

Let me close with the rationale for the renewal of this existing resolution. Now more than ever efforts, as exemplified in this resolution, are key to supporting oil and gas companies' decisions to reinvest and further explore upstream activities despite the uncertainties. Let me mention a quote by a Canadian author, entrepreneur, and philosopher, Mr. Matshona Dhilwayo, he once stated:

“A muddy diamond is better than an unsullied pebble.”

After all that we have been through, all of the adversity, all of the collapsing oil prices since 2014, and the global pandemic, Trinidad and Tobago and its economy remains the diamond of this region. And that is due to the careful management of this PNM administration, Mr. Deputy Speaker. [*Desk thumping*]

In the context of so many uncertainties, this PNM Government will continue to grasp the challenges as they come, mindful of the risk, and work tirelessly for the benefit of all citizens of Trinidad and Tobago. Mr. Deputy Speaker, I thank you. [*Desk thumping*]

6.00 p.m.

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

Mr. Rushton Paray (Mayaro): Thank you very much, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I join in this debate to carry on from where my colleague from—the Member for Tabaquite ended and I am a bit amazed by the contribution from my honourable colleague for San Fernando East, because if the Member had done a bit of research and looked at the *Hansard* from 2015, the hon. Member would have realized that this Motion was split in two. So this is not the first time that the Motion is being split in two. It has been debated as two separate debates in the past. And, you know, the hon. Member spoke about the NGC, and I find it a bit strange because under the People’s Partnership, the NGC never made a loss. So it is very strange that he speaks about the ability of his Government to make the right decisions in the energy sector. And lastly, I was amazed with the Member’s position on the importance of oversight, where it was only last night we sent oversight to the cemetery, Mr. Deputy Speaker. [*Desk thumping*] So I find it very strange that the Member will speak about oversight.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, the Minister of Trade and Industry has come today, again, with Motion No. 2, asking the House to extend a series of benefits in the offshore petroleum sector. Now, in order to give that blessings, the Parliament, the Members of this House, it is important, and as said by the Member for Tabaquite, we cannot as an Opposition just accept what you say. We must have the ability and it is our duty to question the efficacy of the exemptions in delivering the objectives of the Government.

So, Mr. Deputy Speaker, this position that one feels that the Opposition is only here to object to Government’s policy, the fact of the matter, we are here to punch holes in everything that the Government does with the intention that when the holes are punched and there is some opportunity to fix it, then the Government does better and we all as a people, all as a nation, improve the quality of our lives. So it is important that we as an Opposition come here every time and we debate to

the fullest of our capacity every single Bill, Motion or any other item that comes before this House.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, how do we measure the efficacy of the exemptions that are before us today in this Motion No. 2? And while the Minister basically shrugged the whole conversation about other exemptions and so on, and this was not an energy debate, I want to bring you back to two bits of information here that we can judge whether these exemptions have worked for us in the past. So, when the Minister presented this very similar Motion in December of 2015, the Minister said, and it is on *Hansard*, that oil production was at its lowest, 81,000 barrels a day. Fast forward to October 05, 2020, Mr. Deputy Speaker, the Minister of Finance in his budget debate, he said that oil production has been rising steadily and it is projected to reach 60,000 barrels per day by the end of 2020. Now, if we were at 81,000 in 2015 and we are rising steadily to 60,000 barrels a day then, to me, something is wrong with that math. It means that the concessions that are being offered in the format that it is, it is not achieving the desired results to ramp up the expected amount of oil production.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, the story is very similar in the area of natural gas as well because we are looking at incentives in the offshore petroleum sector which we do mining for both crude oil and natural gas. Again, in the contribution of the hon. Minister in 2015, she indicated that gas production was 3.86 billion cubic feet per day. Fast forward to the budget address of the Minister of Finance, he said natural gas production is expected to average 3.2 billion standard cubic feet per day in fiscal 2020. Again, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I question, if we have these concessions in place, why it is that we have not seen a measurable improvement in the volume of gas being extracted at the end of the day?

So, where is the evidence? The Minister did not come here today and present

any evidence that the concessions are working. And like the Motions before, which I would not go into, but the intention is to improve investment, improve business, improve new exploration and if it is not doing that, well then it must be revisited. The Minister ought to have come here today and say, “Look, why are we just going to rubber stamp and repeat this. Let us change this. Speak about some new initiatives that would allow for the objective that these concessions in Motion No. 2 have set out to do.” So, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I really question the Minister whether, her Government under took a critical review of the worthiness of this incentive in the energy sector in the format that it is presenting to us today.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I have a few questions, how do these exemptions tie in with Government’s strategic objective for the petroleum sector? Perhaps the Minister in her wind up, she can perhaps share that information with us. With respect to energy, did the exemptions from January 01, 2018 to December 31, 2020, which is a couple weeks from today, what was the direct financial benefits in the offshore exploration and production sector? That data has not come before us today, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Mr. Deputy Speaker, what has been the value of investments in the sector for each of those years that we have used these exemptions? What is the value of investments that is being forecasted for revised period over the next two years? These are important questions that must be answered if we are to explain, as a Parliament, to the people of Trinidad and Tobago where we want to go.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, will these concessions have a direct tie in into the resultant increase in energy sector jobs? Which areas can the people of Trinidad and Tobago expect to see some growth and opportunity in the job market? This is pertinent information that I feel, Mr. Deputy Speaker, would be so important to be able to educate our citizenry as to what are the benefits for having these duties and these

concessions.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I also want to ask if these exemptions are expected to provide any benefits, not only in crude oil and natural gas exploration, but how are these customs exemptions going to play a role in what we call the downstream energy commodities? What if any, in light of the current state of the Point Lisas Industrial Estate and more so, the concern about the Atlantic Train 1, how would these concessions benefit or deal with some of those issues? And I say that in the most respectful way, Mr. Deputy Speaker, because while many of us may have a better understanding of the energy industry than the average man outside there, it is important for the Government to come and lay out some of these objectives in simpler terms, simpler forms, so at the end of the day, the Government will get some support and buy-in when they bring these measures in the form of this Motion to the House to get it stamped and approved by the Members of Parliament.

So, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I took note of a comment that the Minister of Trade and Industry made when she indicated that the People's Partnership was out of control during its tenure in 2010 to 2015 with regard to the energy sector. But, Mr. Deputy Speaker, if that is so, the government which was led by the Member of Siparia, being out of control, we were able— we were able to amend the fiscal regime which led to five successful bid rounds, [*Desk thumping*] a total of 21 production sharing contracts and nine deepwater blocks were licensed. So, Mr. Deputy Speaker, if that is what you can get by being out of control, I plead with this Government to get themselves out of control and put some activity back into the energy sector.

Mr. Deputy Speaker— it was the very same, the Minister also mentioned about some error on our part with regard to tax write-offs. And I have heard this

for five years, in terms of the accelerated capitalization for the investments in the sector. But the fact is that incentive in 2013/2014 is what put gas in the pipelines in 2017 and 2018, [*Desk thumping*] and that is a fact, you cannot argue with that. And just to clear up one more thing on that issue with the tax incentive, Mr. Deputy Speaker. There was a hue and cry that the People's Partnership gave away tax money by those incentives. But you know what is the fact, Mr. Deputy Speaker? The energy companies were happy with the incentive. They invested their money in Juniper and TROC, and all these other fields. The gas came out in time, but you know what? The energy prices were so low that they did not make any money so they could not write-off any taxes. [*Desk thumping*] So what happened, Mr. Deputy Speaker, the energy companies ended up investing their money in infrastructure to bring the gas out and they had no opportunity to claim it back because no money was made, [*Desk thumping*] so we did not lose a dollar. The country did not lose a dollar out of that but we got gas to put it in the pipelines, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and I would leave that conversation there.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, the Motion speaks again about offshore petroleum investment; it speaks about concessions in equipment machinery for any sort of offshore exploration and development. I was hoping that the Minister may have used an opportunity to speak about how are these concessions going to assist, according to the Prime Minister, our new direction in terms of how we are going to deal with, let say the Loran-Manatee project, which is a huge offshore project that, according to the Government and the Prime Minister— he had indicated that it is the intention of this Government to decouple elements of that project. In other words, Mr. Deputy Speaker, the Government is moving away from the partnership with the Venezuelan Government for whatever reason, that was the original plan. However, what they are going to do is to decouple it and make it a full Trinidad

and Tobago-owned project, nothing is wrong with that. My question is, Mr. Deputy Speaker, how would these concessions work towards landing us where a project like that benefits the people of Trinidad and Tobago, get investment going, looks at foreign direct investment and how does it turn up to bring revenue into the coffers of this country?

Mr. Deputy Speaker, are these concessions going to be directed to support the capital infrastructure for the execution of this project? I just use that as an example, Mr. Deputy Speaker. When the Government brings these types of Bills to Parliament, they must be able to tell the country how it is going to affect, how it is going to drive these types of projects going forward? So, Mr. Deputy Speaker, not wanting to go any further on this, because it is not an energy debate, I just want to remind all of us inside here is that like the Motion before, we have no objections with the intentions. We have— it is a procedural Motion where we are extending and giving life to the concessions, but it is always important that we must account for the stewardship of the concession, whether it has worked or not and if it has not, what new can be brought forward? Because we all want to see Trinidad and Tobago prosper, and I have no desire to see this Government fail because my children are involved in it as well. It is for all our future. So we, as a loyal Opposition, have a duty and our duty here today is to punch holes in anything that the Government does [*Desk thumping*] with the hope of they making it better for all our survival and success. Mr. Deputy Speaker, I thank you. [*Desk thumping*]

6.15 p.m.

The Minister of National Security and Minister in the Office of the Prime Minister (Hon. Stuart Young): Thank you very much, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Mr. Deputy Speaker, my job here this evening is a simple one. My job here this evening is, through you, to let the population of Trinidad and Tobago know firstly,

what exactly it is this Motion is about, to put it into context and then, as the last Member requested, provide some information to the population—it is basically repeat information, not repeat as what was said today, but repeat as to what has been said on numerous times before with respect to the stewardship of this administration in the energy sector.

First of all, because listening to the debate—and I was not scheduled to speak—but listening to what was taking place here this evening, I ask the hon. Member who is visiting us and piloting this Motion, to see the Motion, because I was simply confused as to the type of conversation taking place, and through you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, to tell the population exactly what it is this Parliament is being asked to do here today is simple. It is to:

“...provide that any class of goods specified in the Resolution shall be exempt from import duties of Customs if the goods are imported or entered for use by any person for any purpose specified in the Resolution...”

In layman’s language, what we are being asked to do here today is to pass from the 1st of January, 2021 to the 31st of December, 2022, a two-year period to put all of the equipment and materials and supplies imported for use in offshore petroleum exploration and petroleum operations to be exempted from customs duty. So it is simple. No customs duty to be applied for any materials, equipment and supplies for use in the petroleum sector—“petroleum” here meaning both oil and gas sector of Trinidad and Tobago.

So to listen to what was taking place, I was a little astounded. The reason for this is simple, but before we even get to the reason, this has been applicable for time immemorial in Trinidad and Tobago. It is absolutely not new. It was there way before the 2010 period. It was there from the time, really, when we wanted to become more competitive in the global environment in oil and gas. So the first

thing to understand and appreciate is you are competing globally with every province in the world for capital by these multinational companies in the oil and gas sector. So this is a pillar that is necessary if you are going to call yourself an oil and gas province, and that is really where the debate should end.

For anyone to make a suggestion that this exemption should not continue, do not use the word “patriotic”. Do not even suggest that you want Trinidad and Tobago to succeed, because the first step for us to be competitive, globally, is that you have to allow an exemption on customs duties in the oil and gas sector for the importation of equipment and supplies. Understanding the sector—and I am a little surprised by the contributors before—the kind of equipment that comes in on a daily basis to keep the oil and gas sector running needs to be exempt from customs duty. Can you imagine every rig coming in, every supply vessel coming in, every bag of hydraulic cement to go down the well, every bit for drilling, every pipe has to attract customs duties? Is that what the Opposition is suggesting? It cannot be.

So as a starting point, this is a given, respectfully. It must be a given, because for anybody to suggest any item being brought into Trinidad and Tobago, because we do not manufacture any of these items, to compete globally, it has to be exempt from customs duty. Because the next point we need to understand—and this goes directly to the Member for Mayaro. One of the questions you asked is: Why is production not going up? Why we are not seeing coming out of this incentive—this is not an incentive. This is a foundation of any oil and gas province. Why there is not an increase in production in oil and gas? Again, the analogy that came back to me, is not too long ago in a budget debate, we had a Leader of the Opposition, who is a former Prime Minister, not even knowing the country shareholding in Atlantic LNG. So if that is the type of emphasis placed by the Opposition on the oil and gas sector then 2010 to 2015, I understand it now.

We are a mature province. These are extractable liquids and gas, meaning that when you extract every barrel out of the ground, it is not coming back. So the days when we used to produce almost 200,000 barrels of oil, then down to 150,000, then down to 100,000, there is no magic in what is happening now. We are a mature province. We have been doing this for over 100 years. It does not grow. The same way they thought that the dividends, the retained earnings at NGC—the \$16 billion that they took out of NGC that now has hamstrung NGC, so that NGC cannot even reinvest in projects that it needs to, they thought that would just continue growing?

So to sit here and to listen to persons who say they have an interest in the energy sector and the type of ignorance in terms of asking: Why has production declined? Because we are a mature province. So for us to stay competitive, and for us to maintain what they call a plateau of the production, you need to encourage the sector. We are competing globally with other provinces with a lot more natural resources than we have. So this is a necessity, and anybody to suggest otherwise, it just shows the plain ignorance and lack of understanding.

Now, let us get to what we came in and faced in 2010 to 2015. But before I even get there, as you talked about NGC, and had the audacity to say between 2010 and 2015 NGC never made a loss, the worst gas contracts that NGC has been saddled with—the two worst gas contracts that are going to be a burden on NGC's back—and I say it here today without fear of contradiction—were negotiated by UNC governments. The first was a contract negotiated under the Basdeo Panday administration where they did something that is unheard of. For a downstream company, the Basdeo Panday administration negotiated a contract, giving a company, through NGC, an option to renew gas supply at the then price. So a price in the '90s, early 2000, late 1990s, a price of gas, at that time, they said, when you

are ready to renew in the future, we are giving you an option to renew at the same price. Unheard of. We took it to arbitration to fight it, to try and break it, and did not succeed. So now, that company is getting gas from NGC at a 1990's price, sinking NGC, costing NGC hundreds of millions of US dollars. That is their legacy.

The second legacy item that they talk about, the only project they negotiated in 2010 to 2015 almost sank the whole energy sector, CGCL. And, ironically, it is that same CGCL deal that helped made NGC lose the arbitration I just referred to. Because, of course, it being a mature province, there being no proper exploration and further production of gas projected beyond 2015, what happened is the arbitration was lost because they said, well, if you have given a new gas contract to CGCL—they did not even know where the gas would come to supply CGCL from—if you have given a new gas contract there, how could you say that you have declining gas? So the two worse gas contracts that are saddling NGC today are those two; both negotiated by UNC administrations. Let us start with that.

You want to talk about the state of the energy sector? When we came in in 2015—and it is a story worth repeating—there were billions of dollars of claims against the NGC, because it was unable to supply the gas that they were contracted to, to the downstream, because they were not getting the gas from the upstream. But you know what is worse? Every single contract that they renewed, every single gas contract that they talked about—I just heard the Member, I think it is from Mayaro, again, talk about successful bid rounds. Every single one of those licences—the Production Sharing Contracts and the E&P licences—they gave away what we were entitled to. The Minister's share of gas, they gave it to the upstreamers and said, you could have it. If we had that Minister's share of gas today, NGC would be in a better position. They did not put anything in a

Production Sharing Contract or an E&P licence for that whole period of time that helped Trinidad and Tobago. But we are came in in 2015, and that is what we have been fighting for, because we refused to accept status quo.

The CGCL contract, when came in, there was a greenfield gas policy that they did as a Cabinet, secret. Nobody in the country knew about it. We, the population, had no clue. You know what that was? They basically changed a policy at Cabinet. This is the Opposition who is in Government that say they know so much about energy, and in one fell swoop of a Cabinet pen, what they did is they gave new projects priority to gas. Where were the lawyers in that Cabinet? Where were the two self-appointed senior counsels in that Cabinet? Because what you immediately did, is you opened up the claims, because now somebody who had a contract in downstream, all of the companies who stood with us over time, that had written contracts for a supply of gas, were now being told: “Aye, you are not getting the gas any longer. The new company that we have just agreed—a new contract, new plant—with, they will get first priority on gas.” That is illegal. It is unconstitutional. So that is the first thing we had to unravel in coming in, Mr. Deputy Speaker. And let the country remember that.

The one thing that the Member for Tabaquite said that was correct is, the Prime Minister did not negotiate any contract. But what the Prime Minister did is, he provided leadership. That is Dr. Keith Rowley, the Prime Minister, the Member for Diego Martin West [*Desk thumping*] and he left the negotiations up to those who have the wherewithal. But when negotiations were stopped, he stepped in and I was there. He told the powerful people at these multinationals, I must do what I have to for the shareholders that I have, who are the people of Trinidad and Tobago. And every single meeting I have accompanied him to, whether it in The Hague, whether it be in Melbourne with BHP, The Hague with Shell, London with

BP, EOG in Houston, as the upstream companies, the Prime Minister dressed the part—he is a geologist, himself and Minister Khan. They know what they are talking about. We went into those meetings and we demanded mutual respect, not like some of the stories you heard about the meetings that took place in London before 2015—2010 to 2015—in hotel rooms, et cetera. That never happened and what we managed to do is unravel the legacy of bad contracts. [*Desk thumping*]

But, furthermore, what we are doing and what we have done, but it has to be put in context—no matter how much they scream and cry and decry Trinidad and Tobago, we are part of global economy, and it is undeniable and irrefutable that all of the commodity prices have crashed. In the last few months— in this year alone, in the last few months, we saw something that I do not know when is the last time it happened. People were paying—the United States—WTI is the benchmark in the United States for oil, it dropped. Minister Imbert, the Prime Minister, myself and Minister Khan were monitoring it. It went to a dollar, it went under a dollar, it went below zero cents, which meant that people were paying people to take the oil, and that is the truth.

Now, we hear a nancy story from the UNC, time and time again, that during their time and under Basdeo Panday, the price of oil went below—untrue. Anybody could go and do a research as to historical price of oil, and under them, oil was never \$9. So to come here and say, you want to know how this is going to assist—by minimum and at minimum, what this does is it keeps us in the game. It keeps us in the global game.

You want to talk about FDI? After that first trip to London and to Houston, the Prime Minister, the Member for Diego Martin West, came back and announced US \$10 billion taken—decisions to invest US \$10 billion by two companies; BP and Shell. That is FDI. You then had, by a visit to Melbourne—when we went to

Melbourne, BHP is a global company, but they are really minors. The petroleum portfolio is a small portfolio. What happened in that meeting in Melbourne is a conversation that took place to convince BHP to do what has not happened before, the deepwater drilling. And to stand here and to listen repeatedly to, “Them down cry Broadside. Oh, Broadside crash. Oh, you are trying to make a big deal out of Broadside.” Well, if they do not know, it is hit or miss. It is hit or miss in oil and gas. Sometimes you score, sometimes you do not. But why would they think that is the Government? It is not a PNM administration that drilled Broadside. It is the people of Trinidad and Tobago who suffer when we do not hit gas through a BHP.

But I remember, I remember seeing a photograph in the newspaper, again, in that period 2010 to 2015, with the then Chairman of Petrotrin, standing up with the then Prime Minister and the then Minister of Energy, holding up an empty jar of oil and saying: “We have scored, 30,000 barrels.” It has raised nothing. It has raised nothing. However, under this administration, convincing the same BHP—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Please, Members.

Hon. S. Young:—to continue their programme, there is something that is coming on stream, hopefully next year, called Ruby, and the Ruby project is going to produce an additional 13 to 16,000 barrels of oil a day. Great for Trinidad and Tobago. But these are the things that are taking place. So we came in 2015, CGCL, a complete disaster, one of the worst negotiations ever in the energy sector, that today is an anchor around the legs of the NGC—billions of dollars in claims, a change in the gas allocation policy that is unconstitutional that we had to reverse.

I had to go to meet with the Government of Japan on a two-day turnaround trip to convince them to ease us up and to change the contract, otherwise it would have sank the whole industry. Not a single downstream negotiation of a contract during that term. All of that is being settled, but settled in very difficult times, Mr.

Deputy Speaker. Because right now in the global energy economy—the global economy of energy, commodity prices have gone down. When prices were being negotiated—

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

Hon. S. Young: Thank you very much. When prices were being negotiated based on ammonia and methanol, at the time, the methanol price projection was over \$400 a tonne. We have faced a \$150 to \$180 a tonne. So it is not a PNM administration. In fact, this administration has done tremendously well just to keep it afloat. [*Desk thumping*] On a weekly basis, Minister Khan and myself are interacting with the board rooms away to convince them to do their turnarounds. They would have been thrilled if Train 1 shut down. They do not even know what is the shareholding of Train 1. They did not even know that there was also a shareholding in Train 4. All they do is stand up, make up things whilst they are speaking—complete lies, fabrications, untruths—and they want Trinidad and Tobago to sink, and I take umbrage to that. Right? If NGC still had that \$16 billion, they would have been in a better position today. [*Desk thumping*]

So, Mr. Deputy Speaker, in closing, there is not a single, honest parliamentarian who understands anything about the energy sector that can raise any objection to this Motion here today [*Desk thumping*] because this Motion is necessary and all it is doing, is the same thing that every oil and gas province in the world has, which is no customs duty on the importation and use of equipment and supplies in the energy sector.

So, I say, through you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, to come here and to listen to what we have listened to and to anticipate the next speaker as well who knows nothing either about energy, is a great disgrace, and I thank you for the opportunity. [*Desk thumping*]

Dr. Roodal Moonilal (*Oropouche East*): Thank you. [*Laughter and desk thumping*] Thank you very much, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Mr. Deputy Speaker, let me begin by saying that I am equally qualified as the former speaker on the issue of energy. [*Desk thumping*] In fact, if you look at our CVs, you will see that as far as it relates to energy, we have the same level of qualification, and I am sure if I read two petroleum economics books, I would get the language as well. But, Mr. Deputy Speaker, we have listened attentively to the Minister of National Security, aka, the security expert on the other side, and I do know in fact, in coming in and out of the House—as he is prone to do, because he is an extremely busy man—in coming in and out of the House, he may have unintentionally been absent to hear the Member for Mayaro indicate that we are in support of this Motion. [*Desk thumping*] And I shudder to think what would have been his level of anger if we were against this Motion. But we assure colleagues opposite that we are in support of this Motion, and his anger is somewhat misplaced, but then his position, of course, is a very frustrating position to be in at this time.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, we live in very disturbing times, and it is a very difficult and challenging time in the world and the Government has taken a particular approach, post August 10th, to continue with their narrative and to continue with their story of blaming the former administration. And I must say, not the former administration now but the former, former, administration, for all their problems. And if a visitor would be in the House as we had in the old days, pre-COVID, they would believe that the period 2010 to 2015 caused all the headaches of the Government and caused the collapse of the economy and caused the collapse of the job market and caused the collapse of business and caused the collapse of collapse, because this Government has approached this challenge that we face today, and they are a Government that is very slippery with the truth. It will slip

out that we have had a dramatic change in commodity prices. We have had dramatic changes in the price of the commodities that we sell, and that has been responsible for our revenue position. It has been responsible for several of the economic challenges that this economy faces, and it will slip out because they have to come back into their default mode of blaming the United National Congress.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I have, I think of all the speakers here, I am in a good position, enviable position, in that, I did have the opportunity to serve in the administration 2010—2015 and for a short time, I believe, I was a member of the sub-Cabinet committee on energy, the energy sub-cabinet committee. When I held the responsibility, I believe for environment, I was there. So I understand somewhat some of the issues and can correct the record and, certainly, the Minister who spoke before on some of these matters.

You see, Mr. Deputy Speaker, the Minister began by saying he was confused and I thought that shaped and defined his contribution, because the Minister would not know, and I do not expect him to know, that in terms of NGC, in 2010—I just want to put this on the record—NGC made a profit of 2.1 billion; in 2011, 4.6 billion; [*Desk thumping*] 2012, 4.0 billion; 2013, 6.5 billion; 2014, 4.5 billion; 2015, 0.6 billion; 2016, 0.7 billion; 2017, 1.3 billion; 2018, 2.3 billion; 2019, 376 million and then 2020, I believe, a 300-million loss.

Now, I tell you this to tell you that the period 2010 to 2015, if you look at this period, Mr. Deputy Speaker, the NGC made profits in excess of \$16 billion. And the Government at the time, as did the Government before—the Patrick Manning administration, where they are now some remnants of that administration lurking around—but there are people who were in that administration— would tell you the NGC was always involved in social work, in cultural work, in sporting activities, in community development. [*Desk thumping*] And when we came into

office, the NGC was already involved in significant community projects and so on, and spending the money that belonged to the people. [*Desk thumping*] They were not borrowing money to spend.

When we earn this type of profits and so on, Mr. Deputy Speaker, they spent on the people. And if six years later you cannot find one wrong, one project—you cannot find one example of a project that was done outside of the law, outside of policy, then what are you saying? I mean, I do not have the other type of language and I cannot use it here, but what are you saying? NGC operated according to the law. If they spent—we continued a policy of the Manning administration in investment into community, into cities and towns. In fact, in San Fernando East, I believe, there is a significant project in San Fernando, a multimillion-dollar sporting complex built by NGC in San Fernando East. [*Desk thumping*] So, Madam Speaker, the Partnership continued a policy position of the Government before.

Then the Minister of National Security and his Prime Minister would tell us something and carry a narrative that is fascinating. It is only with the coming into being of another Government that we will get an opportunity to look at this story. Everywhere they go on earth—and they move like Marco Polo all over the earth—everywhere they go, they report on the good job. But do you know there is no public record, there is no ministerial note, there is no report at a Ministry that tells you what happens when these Ministers and Prime Minister travel? They come back to the country and say we had a good meeting. We renegotiated. In fact, let me put the thing into perspective.

There is a political and a legal angle to that. When they want to politically boast, they say the Prime Minister negotiated gas prices, and when they understand the legal implication of that, they say, he did not negotiate really, you know, he

helped. He helped to push it along, because there is a legal issue involved in that, in that, a Prime Minister or a Minister cannot negotiate gas prices. They cannot. [*Desk thumping*] And this is why, as the Member for Tabaquite indicated earlier, they jump. They hop and hop and hop around the place with negotiations. But if you go at the Ministry of Energy and Energy Industries and ask for one record, one report, of where the Prime Minister went to Houston with another Minister and what transpired there, the Ministry of Energy and Energy Industries does not have a clue. But we take their word. We have to take their word. They say trust them. They go to Australia, Germany, all over, meeting people—there is no Permanent Secretary, there is no attorney from the relevant Ministry, there is no technical and scientific support staff, but they come back and report, we had a brilliant meeting, all is well.

They must be the most unlucky administration this country has ever seen, because since they came into office, everything collapsed, but due to no fault of their own. [*Desk thumping*] That is what they will tell us. It collapsed because of the former administration. It collapsed because of prices. It collapsed because of this. It collapsed because of that. I think it was Norman Christie, I believe it is, the energy sector leader, local energy sector leader, who, in statement— in a quotation said, to the effect of: the contraction in the energy sector was related to some of the deals that was struck post-2015.

6.45 p.m.

And if there was any boom, as the Member for Naparima said, any boom that took place between '16, '17 and '18, certainly, it was due to the work of the Partnership administration in this matter. [*Desk thumping*] So, Mr. Deputy Speaker, when they have to explain themselves they quickly jump onto the bandwagon of the former administration, and the former administration did this, the former administration

did that.

[MADAM SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

In an article, “NGC records \$2 billion drop in profit”, dated September 02, 2020—I believe it is the Trinidad *Guardian*—the very chairman of NGC is reported here as saying that the collapse had to do with some of the issues of legacy and gas negotiations. The very people at NGC will admit that the pricing, the issue of pricing recently negotiated led to some of the fallout with other firms in the sector. And that is something maybe one day we should have a commission of enquiry into this energy sector to determine what happened in Houston, [*Desk thumping*] in Germany, in Australia that led to the firms closing up. Between 2015 to today, notwithstanding the global environment, and we understand that, we have had a process of this investment. We have had the close down, the shutdown, the creation of iron scrap ghost towns between Couva to San Fernando. Between Couva to San Fernando is a scrap iron ghost town, and why? What led to that?

So, Madam Speaker, what led to that, it is not the actions between 2010 and 2015, when admittedly prices were more favourable, admittedly, but when you earn revenue you spend. I remember in 2008, coming to this Parliament and the Minister of Works and Transport, now Minister of Finance, there was a Motion, an Opposition at that time was arguing that they were overspending money and overheating the economy and it had inflationary effects. The Minister of Works and Transport was Leader of Government Business—they had fired Diego Martin West at that time—and he stood up and said, “The money the country earns as a result of the good fortune of the energy sector must be spent on the people”. So when you earn money as a country you invest it in the people. And this is what we were talking about all evening, capital investments; in education certainly, in technology, in job-creating sectors.

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This Government is building two headquarters for two Ministries, Ministry of Health and Ministry of Foreign and Caricom Affairs at a cost of more or less a half-a-billion dollars, while you cannot open a school that requires \$10 million more. [*Desk thumping*] One is your investment—

Madam Speaker: Member for Oropouche East, while I understand how we have got here, I think we are going very much astray in terms of what is before us. So I would ask you to bring us back to the debate, please.

Dr. R. Moonilal: Madam Speaker, I would fly back to this matter before us. And the matter before us is the continuation of these incentives, and these are incentives that have been there for years and years, but I want to indicate too and speak from my own experience to let us know that when you come to the Parliament and you are speaking of continuation of incentives through customs and so on, you are correct. You are right to ask questions as to the sector itself because incentives are given to a sector and you are hoping that that sector will enjoy those incentives and it will redound to the benefit of the sector, the country, employment, income, revenue and so on. That is the purpose of what we do today.

This is why we are in agreement with this, as the Member for Mayaro placed on record earlier. But we are entitled to raise issues of the management of the sector because your incentives are part and parcel of your economic management of a sector, otherwise why do you give incentives. You give incentives—I think the Member before said it—because you are trying to not just attract but to keep—

Madam Speaker: And the fact that you are telling me that the Member before said it, means that you are quite cognizant that you are traversing ground that has already been traversed.

Dr. R. Moonilal: Sure.

Madam Speaker: I have not been sitting here all the time but I have ears, and, you

know, the other Members have spoken about the sector and developing the sector and the benefit for the sector. So I would ask you at this stage of the debate if you could fly, in your own words, to another point. Thank you.

Dr. R. Moonilal: Madam Speaker, I will now close—I think it is time as well. Yeah. I will now close by indicating for the record once and for all, these are measures that come every two years or so, we are in support. But I would just ask my colleagues opposite that it is a debate for critical appreciation of a sector and I think the Opposition is entitled to raise those matters. Madam Speaker, I thank you. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker: The Minister of Trade and Industry.

The Minister of Trade and Industry (Sen. The Hon. Paula Gopee-Scoon): Thank you, Madam Speaker, and I am not going to be long at all. I think enough has been said. I want to thank in particular my colleagues, the Member for San Fernando East, Member for Port of Spain North/St. Ann's West, both are very knowledgeable. Minister Young in particular has been of extreme assistance on energy matters on behalf of the Government of Trinidad and Tobago. Again, I mean, I could understand the chit-chat on the other side, they are trying to redeem themselves. I mean, over the last days they have been subjected to some heavy punching, I could understand how they feel and they feel it is their time to talk and try to make some impressions on the national community, but not in the discipline of energy. They are totally unfamiliar. [*Desk thumping*]

And do not come here and tell us anything about oversight, not with the kind of representation that the then Prime Minister of Trinidad and Tobago, Member for Siparia, made in terms of leadership in the energy sector; unpardonable, unforgivable at all, especially when you do not even know, as Minister Young had said, you do not even know who comprises the—who makes up the shareholding

of the Atlantic LNG. I mean, that is really so basic. And then you were entertaining energy executives in an overcoat in a bedroom abroad; I mean, totally, totally, totally—[*Desk thumping*]*—totally lacking of an understanding—totally lacking the understanding of what it takes to be prime-ministerial, an understanding of who you are meeting with in terms of the energy tsars of the world and really, really, no, no diplomacy at all. That is just not the way things are done.*

So there was nothing to report. I cannot respond to anybody. I said it is just a lot of banter here and there really not meaningfully making any sense at all. [*Desk thumping*] They do not understand the industry. We have come here, the hon. Prime Minister of Trinidad and Tobago, the Hon. Keith Rowley, he has taken charge of the sector, and together with our very able Ministers, the energy sector is now going somewhere. [*Desk thumping*] We are happy. I do not want to hear anything about energies from your side. The only thing you must come and tell us is where the \$16 billion is, the people of Trinidad and Tobago need their money. Okay? [*Desk thumping*]

So I came here, Madam Speaker, to do one thing—two things, but this is the second part of the proposition which is to speak to this particular Motion. And, Madam Speaker, I have been very clear. I have spoken to the benefits. I have spoken about the other incentives, the myriad of incentives, the capable hands under which the sector is now in. There is not very much I can say again. This is a very, very, very simple Motion. It is about ensuring that there is this incentive which is under section 56 of the Customs Act where you would not pay any duties for any of the importation of equipment, material and supplies imported for use in the offshore petroleum exploration and petroleum operations. I spoke about the fact that, yes, it was for a three-year period before, it is now for a two-year period, and why, because the Ministry of Energy and Energy Industries really wants to

take the time to have a look at all of the circumstances around it, whether or not the incentive is doing what it should be doing and they wanted to have an in-depth view of whether the total package of incentives really works for them.

Somebody raised the point about this being a very difficult time in the sector; yes, it is a difficult time in the sector not only for Trinidad and Tobago but it is for the entire globe. We are subject to the vagaries of the international market, energy market and so on. So, again, we have come here for one purpose, I can only emphasize to the population that the activities in the exploration and extraction subsector in the—why the energy sector really does remain promising, a lot of activity continues. But of course when you are dealing with this type of industry from time to time it is not always going to be the way you want it, but, again, once you remain in control of it you are going to be able to massage and put it in the right direction with the right incentives, and so on.

I am very, very happy about where we are going. The energy sector is still a substantial earner of foreign exchange and contributor to this economy and it remains an integral part to the long-term growth and development of Trinidad and Tobago. And as I said before, contributing significantly to our GDP and revenues and of course foreign exchange, and so on. So, Madam Speaker, I am quite pleased with the contributions that have been made on our side and it is now left to me to commend this Motion and I beg to move. [*Desk thumping*]

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved:

That the House of Representatives, in accordance with and subject to the provisions of section 56 of the Customs Act, exempt from import duties of Customs the class of goods specified in the First Column of the Schedule, being goods imported or entered for use for the purposes specified in the

Second Column for the period specified in the Third Column, but that this Resolution shall cease to have effect in respect of any class of goods specified in the First Column that is manufactured in Trinidad and Tobago:

SCHEDULE

FIRST COLUMN	SECOND COLUMN	THIRD COLUMN
Class of Goods	Purposes for which goods are to be used	Period of Exemption
Equipment, material and supplies	Imported for use in off-shore petroleum exploration and petroleum operations	From 1st January, 2021 to 31st December, 2022

this Resolution shall come into effect on 1st January, 2021.

Madam Speaker: Thank you, Minister of Tourism, the Minister of Trade and Industry. Leader of the House.

ADJOURNMENT

The Minister of Planning and Development and Acting Minister of Housing and Urban Development (Hon. Camille Robinson-Regis): Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, I beg to move that this House do now adjourn to Friday the 11th day of December at 1.30 p.m. On that day we will be doing the Finance Bill. We will also do the amendments to the procurement Act—*[Crosstalk]* And, Madam Speaker, if I might be allowed to put the Motion—and we will also be doing the amendments to the Novel Coronavirus. Thank you.

Madam Speaker: Hon. Members, before putting the question I just wish to advise that the four matters which are listed on the adjournment, by agreement these matters are deferred to another sitting.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjournment

2020.12.09

House adjourned accordingly.

Adjourned at 6.58 p.m.