

Appropriation Bill (Budget)

Tuesday, October 26, 2004

SENATE

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The Senate met at 1.30 p.m.

PRAYERS

[MR. VICE-PRESIDENT *in the Chair*]

**APPROPRIATION BILL
(BUDGET)**

[Fourth Day]

Order read for resuming adjourned debate on question [October 21, 2004]:

That the Bill be now read a second time.

Question again proposed.

Mr. Vice-President: Hon. Senators, those who have already spoken on the Bill are: on Thursday, October 21, the Minister in the Ministry of Finance, mover of the Motion; Sen. Wade Mark, Sen. Mary King, Sen. The Hon. Rennie Dumas, Sen. Roy Augustus, Sen. Basharat Ali, Sen. The Hon. Mustapha Abdul-Hamid and Sen. The Hon. Satish Ramroop.

On Friday, October 22, those who spoke were: Sen. Robin Montano, Sen. Prof. Ramesh Deosaran, Sen. The Hon. Christine Sahadeo, Hon. Penelope Beckles, Minister of Public Utilities and the Environment, Sen. Dr. Jennifer Kernahan, Sen. Dana Seetahal, Sen. The Hon. Howard Chin Lee, Sen. Bro. Noble Khan and Sen. The Hon. Knowlson Gift.

On Monday, October 25, those who spoke were: Sen. The Hon. Hazel Ann Marie Manning, Sen. Parvatee Anmolsingh-Mahabir, Sen. Carolyn Seepersad-Bachan, Sen. The Hon. Martin Joseph, Sen. Magna Williams-Smith, Sen. Dr. Eastlyn McKenzie and Sen. Joan Hackshaw-Marslin.

Sen. Dr. Tim Gopeesingh: Mr. Vice-President, I consider it an honour and a privilege to be afforded this opportunity to contribute to this debate in the Senate on the Appropriation Bill for fiscal 2005.

The health of all peoples is fundamental to the attainment of peace and security in any country. The desire for a better life and a better world in which to live our lives and to raise our families, is common to all peoples and all generations.

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In this early part of the 21st Century, the world significant medical pioneering work and technological advances should enable us to be more optimistic about our future than, perhaps, at any stage in recent history but, today, it pains our nation and our people to see the daily horror stories in the health sector in Trinidad and Tobago, whilst the rest of the world's health system is continuously being improved and life expectancy is increasing. The life expectancy in Trinidad and Tobago is 72 years for men and 75 years for women, while in the developed OECD countries it is 79 years for men and 82 years for women. Our infant mortality rate, perinatal mortality rate and maternal mortality rate, all characteristic indices of how a population's health status is, are way too high, as compared to First World countries. We rank low in the human development index and our poverty level is extraordinarily high at 30 per cent. This is totally unacceptable, for poverty is inexhaustibly linked to poor health. However, we need to recognize that increased longevity, without quality of life, is an empty prize and that health expectancy is more important than life expectancy. We are slowly learning that one of life's most precious lessons is not just how to live longer, but also to stay longer in good health, with less disability and, therefore, less dependence on others.

Therefore, the main issues are, Mr. Vice-President, how are we, as a country, to meet the health challenges of today? The attainment of health evokes strong, moral and emotional responses and health policies and health directioning must not be developed in a moral vacuum, as is quite evident in this budget. Citizens have come to consider health care as their inalienable right; something that they should receive when they need it. Justly so, no individual should be denied their right to proper and equitable health care, for health is one of the cornerstones and forms the ventral pillar of any civilized society.

When we analyze the total 2005 budget statement, health occupies just two of the 52 pages in the Minister of Finance's statement; pages 21 and 22. This indicates how relegated health is in the minds of this administration. One-twenty-sixth of this document is on health; the low prioritization that has been given to the health sector, the lives and well-being of the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago, by the Prime Minister and his Government. He indicates that by 2006, this country will enjoy a health care system that will set new standards of quality and accessibility. We ask how.

The Prime Minister, in closing the debate in the other place, said it is a "mauby budget". I say it is a "maybe budget". Quoting from the *Sunday Guardian* of October 24, 2004, it states:

“Vision 2020 missing

Country lacks proper leadership

The results are in, the majority of people in T&T are vastly dissatisfied with the 2004/'05 budget...”

The question was asked: “How satisfied are you with the 2004/2005 budget?” Fifty-eight per cent were not satisfied. Asked if they believe the majority of promises made in this year’s budget would be realized, 68 per cent said no. That was two-thirds of the people polled. They were asked: “Do you think this year’s budget will help Trinidad and Tobago reach developed status it aspires to?” Sixty-one per cent said no. Another question was: “Do you think the budget will help to fight the eradication of poverty in Trinidad and Tobago?” Sixty-eight per cent said no. In the McAL poll, 500 people were polled randomly; a real realization of the country; how people think. Therefore, two-thirds of the people polled are not satisfied with the budget, do not believe the promises and that the budget will not help to eradicate poverty. This is the population telling the Prime Minister and this administration that two-thirds of the population do not believe this Government.

Our health care system comprises 107 health centres and when completed, eight district facilities and 10 hospitals; approximately 7,000 workers in the public service, including the vertical services; and 3,500 in the RHAs, with approximately 2,500 professionals, medical nursing and paramedical. The budget statement on the health sector does not suggest that health has been given the priority it urgently needs, despite the horror stories we see daily in our print and electronic media.

Within the last three years, the health sector has been characterized by unnecessary problems besetting a seriously wounded health sector; doctors’ impasse spilling over from 2002—2003, when the junior doctors’ contracts expired on December 31, 2002 and a critical fumble and mess of their contracts for over one year; doctors staying away from hospitals; senior doctors then refusing to teach, supervise, or accept medical responsibility for junior RHA doctors employed; outpatient clinics at Port of Spain were closed; emergency departments at Port of Spain and Eric Williams Medical Sciences Complex accepting only emergency cases; public patients being referred to private institutions and Government paying the cost. On what basis? Who authorized them? Where is the bidding and the tendering process for it? MPATT was refused to negotiate for the junior doctors and the labour minister ended the protest by the

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doctors when he was granted an ex parte injunction, prohibiting doctors from taking industrial action at any time—a heavy highhanded, big stick approach; a jail-the-doctors approach. Can you get the doctors working after they have been subjected to this type of thing?

Minister Imbert told the Senate on July 09, that the amendment was an interim measure until the Medical Board Act was repealed. That was only an excuse. Has the Medical Board Act been repealed; the one that is 49 years old?

The Cuban doctors had to be sent for English Language training; though the Ministry had lied about the Cubans having a high level of English. Sixty United Nations volunteer doctors were brought in at a cost of \$75 million for a three-year period; a cost higher than what we would pay for our own doctors, considering other benefits they receive. That is grossly wrong and grossly unfair. You can treat your own citizens one way and bring the UN volunteer doctors into your country and pay them more than your own people. The UN volunteer doctors are not good. They worked with me. My colleagues work in the institutions and they are not good!

1.45 p.m.

Mr. Vice-President, I am an external examiner with the University of Guyana Obstetrics and Gynecology Department. I have seen Cuban professors who are not worth their salt in Guyana. There is a two-tier system of medicine in Cuba, one that would look after the Prime Minister, and the barefoot doctors—one in 60—and these are the ones that they have sent to Trinidad and Tobago. I had to say it a long time and I am glad that I have the opportunity to say it now.

We were told that these doctors would form specialized teams for surgery. In the general hospital there is a 75-year-old volunteer doctor working in the neurosurgery area. Would you want that doctor to be operating on you or your family? We were told they would reduce the backlog of surgical cases. Yet, today, that figure is greater than 10,000 persons waiting for surgery.

The main reasons for postponement of surgeries were the shortage of theatre clothes, air-conditioning, nurses shortage and lack of theatre equipment. All of which this administration could provide for the doctors and nurses working in these institutions, but they are not providing it.

In Port of Spain, there is a waiting list of 1,850, and at the end of 2003, the figure was reported to be 5,187, but the Ministry of Health official has put an up-to-date figure for the country at the end of May, as more than 10,000. The records

are so inaccurate that at the last joint select parliamentary meeting in San Fernando, the Quality Control Division was unable to say how many operations are outstanding. There are much more than 10,000 operations outstanding. The surgical waiting list goes on and on.

In 2003, in San Fernando, the surgery waiting list had 2,802, and in February, just a few months later in 2004, this figure had climbed to 3,455.

An amendment to the Medical Board Act was forced on the doctors—an erosion of their democratic process in this country and it smacks of totalitarianism. When this Government is incapable of dealing with a situation it uses the big stick approach, high-handed and autocratic. They formed a parallel medical board to issue temporary licences to whomever they want to bring in as doctors, regardless of their skills, competences and qualifications, imposing the Cuban and United Nations volunteer doctors on an already suffering population, bypassing the constitutionally appointed medical board, once more, eroding the Constitution and the democracy of our nation state at their whims and fancies.

Have these additional 130 doctors made any impact on the health sector? In fact, the health sector has deteriorated even further. So, the Government is paying \$75 million to the United Nations volunteer doctors; and much more than that to the Cuban doctors, and they have not made a single impression upon the health sector in Trinidad and Tobago.

Have these doctors been working in surgical teams? No! Have they begun reducing the backlog of surgical cases? No! In fact, the surgical waiting list is climbing daily, and patients have been given appointments for 2005 for their surgery and they can die of their problems before their surgery is being done.

Yet, the budget statement of 2002 promised to clear up the backlog of operations at the hospitals, for example, hernia operations. That was two years ago. Has the backlog cleared up? It has become worse.

Mr. Vice-President, kindly permit me to illustrate the faults and broken promises made by this Government year after year. I will justify empirically, why in the polls, two-thirds of the population do not believe that this Government can keep its promises. This Government is incompetent; it is non-performing; and governing with only unfulfilled and broken promises.

In 2002, it was said that the Ministry of Labour and Small and Micro Enterprise Development, through the passage of the Occupational Safety and Health Bill, would establish an occupational safety and health authority. That was not done. Broken promise!

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They had promised to clear up the backlog of operations at the hospital, and two years later the backlog is increasing. Broken promise!

There was supposed to be the establishment of a cancer programme. Not one clinic was established. Broken promise!

The South West Regional Health Authority was promised a considerable sum of money to upgrade its programme for cancer screening. No cancer screening is being done at that hospital. Broken promise!

A new Oncology Centre was to be established at Mount Hope. I will come back to this matter. That was not done. Broken promise!

They had promised to expand and continue this anti-retroviral programme all over the country. This was not done. Broken promise!

The number of ICU beds was to be increased by more than 100 per cent and not one bed was put in the ICU. Broken promise!

Mr. Vice-President, within three months, we built a sophisticated state-of-the-art 10-bed ICU unit at the Port of Spain General Hospital with \$6.5 million. In the 1980s that unit was supposed to cost—Boland Amar was alive and he said that he was going to give an ICU unit—\$12 million and we built that unit at a cost of \$6.5 million in three months. [*Desk thumping*] This is the type of performance that we give. When we were about to open that unit they tried to stuff towels in the washbasin to flood the place so that the equipment would be short-circuited.

Mr. Vice-President, we had 70 cases of sabotage within three months. Are you hearing about sabotage now in the hospital system? I will come back to the ICU unit. Do you know what is the cost for an average poor person to be in an ICU? The cost is almost \$100,000, because the average number of days is 16. If we did not have that facility at Port of Spain, do you think that the poor people of Trinidad and Tobago would have been looked after in an ICU? Since that ICU unit was built we have saved hundreds of lives. [*Desk thumping*] The poor people who cannot afford to go to St. Clair Medical Centre and other institutions; you can now see them at Port of Spain. This Government has been in office for three years and it cannot even increase the ICU beds by one.

Sen. Mark: What are they doing?

Sen. Seepersad-Bachan: They are designing.

Sen. Dr. T. Gopeesingh: The Prime Minister said that the Government will be putting a burn unit and a lab in San Fernando. Two years later, he is saying the

same thing in this budget. The same promises year after year. You just cannot believe the promises of this Government. That is why I say this is a “maybe budget”.

The Prime Minister said that the Sterilization Department would be returned to the Port of Spain General Hospital, and years later the Sterilization Department is just as bad as it was.

The Prime Minister said in 2002 that he would upgrade all the systems at the Eric Williams Medical Sciences Complex, because the Government recognized that the Mount Hope Maternity Hospital was built 20 years ago and the Eric Williams Medical Sciences Complex was commissioned 17 years ago. They said that they were going to do work on these facilities.

One year after the Minister of Health said that he was going to move the Mount Hope Maternity Hospital across to the complex, because of the enterobacter; to date this has not been done. Today, the Government is still speaking of moving the Mount Hope Maternity Hospital following enterobacter outbreak.

Sen. Seepersad-Bachan: They are going to finish it in the next 10 years.

Sen. Dr. T Gopeesingh: The Mount Hope Maternity Hospital is the Hospital that Emile Elias built in the 1970s, and as soon as the hospital was about to be commissioned—I can tell you because I was there. I started working at Mount Hope in late 1970s—when the taps were turned on and there were floods all over the hospital. Emile Elias built it and there was a six-month delay in opening because the plumbing had to be sorted out.

Mr. Vice-President, wherever that gentleman goes, there is a problem—the Mount Hope Maternity Hospital was built in the 1970s; St. Lucia Car Park; Guyana’s Highway from the Airport to Georgetown—persona nongrata—the Grenada Stadium and now the Scarborough hospital.

They promised to refurbish the Sangre Grande Hospital. In 2002, the Prime Minister said that the Government would be spending over \$50 million to upgrade that facility which treats people from the whole eastern seaboard from as far down as Mayaro up to Toco. Broken promise! Nothing was done in Sangre Grande.

In 2002, the Prime Minister said that the Government was going to build a new hospital in Point Fortin, and in 2004 he is saying that he will be building a new hospital in Point Fortin commencing in 2005. When Mr. Larry Achong was

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an Opposition Member, he said that as soon as the PNM Government got into power they would ensure that they build the hospital within one year. Three years have gone and there is no new hospital for the people of Point Fortin. This Government said that it was not leaving out anyone. So, the construction of the new Point Fortin Hospital will start in 2005. How can the people of Cedros and Point Fortin believe these false promises? When are they going to get the hospital?

Mr. Vice-President, the Prime Minister said that the Government is going to look at the Mayaro District Health facility which the Government had to complete. He said, as I said on the campaign trail, we are going to see whether we can add some beds to that facility so that at least persons who have critical problems will be able to overnight in the Mayaro Health Facility.

Mr. Vice-President, since their election campaign in 2002 that promise was broken. That is why many persons have lost faith in this administration. Do you fault them for this? The Government's credibility is at stake. The reason for people losing faith in this Government is because of its lies and broken promises, as well as its mismanagement; incompetence and its non-performance in health, education and, particularly, national security.

Sen. Seepersad-Bachan: And corruption. [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. Dr. T. Gopeesingh: The Prime Minister said that the Government would be looking at St. Ann's Hospital. I do not know if he wants to go in there or whether he is still looking at St. Ann's. Over the last three years, nothing was done to that hospital.

The Prime Minister also said that he would sort out niggling issues with the medical practitioners. He said that he believed that people must be properly paid and compensated for the work that they do. Three years later, they have not settled the junior doctors' contracts far less the senior doctors. The Government's inability to settle these niggling issues has caused unnecessary loss of lives; lives are cheap in this country. Your life or my life could be snuffed out in a moment because of incompetence in the health sector.

Mr. Vice-President, can you therefore see the reason for the exodus of at least 50 per cent of our UWI graduates and scores of doctors holding top positions in overseas hospitals in different specialties, applying to return and serve their people are being denied. Their applications are not even being acknowledged because of the Government's dirty politics. What a democracy! What a Government! What a Ministry of Health. Useless and incompetent!

The Prime Minister said that the Government would increase primary health care and health promotion activities. Sen. Dr. McKenzie asked about disease prevention and health promotion. The Senator would realize that these promises were made in 2002, and two years after they have done nothing. They simply cannot implement anything. Implementation seems to be a bedeviling word beyond their capability.

That National Oncology Centre for cancer patients will expand its cancer treatment capacity. Where is the National Oncology Centre? Over \$20 million was spent on that National Oncology Centre and people are receiving salaries of up to \$50,000 per month, and the construction was given without any tendering. They are talking about transparency, accountability and probity. The Prime Minister repeats this many times in this budget presentation. Let him take that for transparency and accountability.

Recently, there was an advertisement for the National Oncology Centre—invitation to bid. When I saw that advertisement I thought it was for the National Oncology Centre, but it was an invitation to bid for a site office. So, there was no open tendering for a site office, and the National Oncology Centre was not tendered for. What a shame and disgrace! That is transparency and accountability for this administration—\$120 million for this centre.

Starting this year and continuing for the next five years the Government will spend \$500 million on all aspects of the campaign against HIV/AIDS. Sen. Seetahal asked about this matter. The Prime Minister went on to say that the construction of a world-class testing facility will begin in Tobago in fiscal year 2003. He also said that there would be a walk-in service which would provide the results of an AIDS test within a very short time.

In this budget allocation for HIV/AIDS, less that \$50 million is to be spent. From the Government's track record from 2002, little will be accomplished while 30,000 affected citizens with HIV/AIDS will die yearly without receiving treatment, because of the blundering of this Government. There are thousands more contracting this deadly disease annually. There is only lip service. What about the promise with respect to the AIDS testing facility that was supposed to be constructed in Tobago?

The Government boasted about providing anti-retroviral drugs for patients suffering from HIV/AIDS. No one could tell us how many persons are receiving treatment with anti-retroviral drugs. Our information is that just over 200 persons out of the 30,000 persons affected with HIV/AIDS are being treated with anti-retroviral drugs, and the Government is talking about programmes for HIV/AIDS.

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Mr. Vice-President, I will now like to turn our attention to the lack of transparency, accountability and lack of probity in the conduct of the affairs of the Ministry of Health.

Recently, the hon. Minister of Health commissioned CT scanning equipment, MRI equipment and mammography equipment worth nearly \$53 million. Our understanding is that one particular company won a contract to supply the \$53 million worth of equipment. That company is Bio Medical Technologies Limited—that is to be recorded in the *Hansard*—to the complete exclusion of another company with equally or arguably even better equipment.

Mr. Vice-President, the same company which was awarded a \$53 million contract for the imaging equipment of the CT scan, MRI and mammography machines has again been selected as the successful contractor to supply another \$22 million of angiography equipment for the cauterization lab at the Eric Williams Medical Sciences Complex, while equally efficient equipment was tendered by another company which bid \$12 million. So, \$10 million less was overlooked of equally efficient equipment. To worsen this, the said company which was awarded the contract for \$53 million and again \$22 million, it is our understanding that for the third time, this said company is being awarded a three-year contract for the two renal dialysis machines to a value close to \$70 million. That same company was awarded close to \$70 million in imaging equipment, angiography equipment and dialysis equipment.

2.00 p.m.

Mr. Vice-President, we must not fool or delude ourselves into believing that because these contracts were sent out for tender, there was transparency in the process. We all know that specifications to suit one type of equipment in preference over another can be doctored in these contracts; that is so easy with medical equipment. We know that there is an evaluation process that takes place after the tenders have been submitted and there are certain names that appear on the evaluation committees with alarming frequency. When you have doctored the specifications and your person is sitting on the evaluation committee, what else can you ask for?

We on this side are calling for a full-scale investigation into the award of these \$53 million, \$22 million and, approximately, \$70 million contracts for imaging equipment, angiography and dialysis. We are demanding that this be sent before the Commission of Enquiry into the health sector headed by former Speaker, Mr.

Hector McClean. [*Desk thumping*] We also request that the Joint Select Committee headed by Sen. King investigates this matter and report back to Parliament.

This is the tip of the iceberg. It is our understanding that an international chain of pharmacies will be operating in Trinidad shortly. We understand that it is the Walgreen chain and that, approximately, 10 pharmacies will be opened: one in the Westmoorings area, where McDonald's was bought out; one in downtown Port of Spain, where McDonald's was; one in South Valsayn, on a southwestern property at the corner of the Churchill-Roosevelt Highway and South Valsayn Road—it is being cleared now, opposite the service station; another in Price Plaza and another in the yet to be constructed Plaza Mall, on the San Fernando Bypass.

The person who owned it did not get permission to develop the piece of land at the San Fernando Bypass; he was squeezed into selling it. As soon as he sold it to a particular person, that person got the approval and now a mall is going to be built on it. That is transparency and accountability. [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. Seepersad-Bachan: That is PNM style!

Sen. Dr. T. Gopeesingh: They know that it is connected to people in the health sector. It is widely spoken that a close relative of the present Minister of Health is one of the major investors in this Walgreen project, together with a conglomerate company, which is presently supplying about 50 per cent of the millions of dollars in pharmaceuticals to NIPDEC; hence the country's public and private pharmacies; the latter with the Chronic Disease Assistance Programme (CDAP), worth another \$50 million. We on this side ask the hon. Minister to indicate whether he has knowledge of this and, if so, will he come clean on this issue? [*Desk thumping*]

We have seen, repeatedly, public cases being referred for surgery and management at private nursing homes. By whom? Who has the authority to use our taxpayers' money to unilaterally transfer cases to private institutions, when these cases can be done in our public institutions and hospitals, by the same doctors who will be doing them privately? I work in the public sector as a university lecturer at the Mount Hope Women's Hospital; you cannot take a public patient and operate on him or her privately; that is fraud. The people doing that are the people causing it to be done and they are perpetrators of fraud. Bringing public patients to private nursing homes is a practice fraught with nepotism, corruption and a lack of transparency and accountability.

Who owns these private nursing homes? What are the friendship ties in such health and financial transactions and the transfer of patients from hospitals to

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private nursing homes? Who owns them? Are there links? One cannot decide to also attempt to reduce the backlog of surgical cases to private nursing homes, without an open and transparent, advertised, bidding process. The non-transparent, non-advertised, non-open bidding process, for surgical and medical procedures, is occurring with increasing frequency. Why must taxpayers' money be corruptly spent like this? We request that the Ministry of Health and the Regional Health Authorities conduct its business in an open and transparent manner, with accountability, and that these contracts be reviewed immediately for probity by the Joint Select Committee headed by Sen. King. [*Desk thumping*]

In explaining the decision to appoint the Commission of Enquiry into the Public Health Services, the Prime Minister cited intensifying complaints about inadequacies in the delivery of health services and attendant care. These "intensifying complaints" have led to calls for investigations into a number of questionable incidents. I wonder if the Prime Minister knew about these incidents occurring at public health institutions, including some which have resulted in questionable deaths. This is the Prime Minister admitting failure in the health care system. Surely it should be the urgent and bounding responsibility of the Ministry of Health, the RHAs and the medical health directorate of each institution, to investigate such incidents and to resolve them to the satisfaction of those involved and to the interest of the public at large, who are paying tax money.

The south hospital—while it is en vogue to talk about Trinidad and Tobago becoming a First World nation, the reality is that it is a dream and more remote than before, when the health sector is examined: The shortage of staff contributing to patients dying; wards are overcrowded and patients, including children who require specialized care in designated areas, are treated on general wards, which increases the chance of complications developing. While wards in 1950 were designed for 15 beds each in two male and female wings, 50 patients are now placed in each ward. Studies done by the Journal of American Medical Association in 2002, an audit commission, show that the higher patient to nurse ratio, the higher the patient deaths. Increasing the patient to nurse ratio by eight to one, increases mortality by 30 per cent. In Trinidad and Tobago, the patient to nurse ratio is 30 to one, contributing to emotional exhaustion, greater job dissatisfaction, the stress that the struggling nurses face and the resultant preventable loss of life. On admitting days the wards are so crowded that extra beds are squeezed onto the medical ward, with little or no room for staff movement around the wards.

In a headline recently it was stated:

“Hospital of creepy crawlers”

The 62-page Pan-American Health Organization (PAHO), World Health Organization and the Inter-American Development Bank (IADB) report was a very damning report on the state of the health sector, but it was kept hush-hush, and secret; but I will return to it. This is the PAHO report. [*Sen. Dr. Gopeesingh lifts document in the air*] I wonder if the Minister of Health will tell the nation of its findings? The country and the people must know. It confirms what you, the citizens, have been saying. The health system is in a mess, a sorry state. It is only public relations the Minister is going along with and millions are spent to promote himself, while people are denied good health care, unnecessarily, on a daily basis.

The ministry still has 500 workers, although it was supposed to reform itself under the IADB Health Sector Reform Programme to have 100. It attempts to manage the day-to-day functions of the RHAs; while that is their primary responsibility. They are incapable of fulfilling their primary responsibilities, which are policy formation, policy-making, monitoring and evaluation. They want to interfere with the day-to-day administration of the RHAs. It is, certainly, a pathetic, pitiful, miserable and inadequate attempt at improving and reforming our health sector.

This recent report of PAHO and the IADB is being kept secret by the Government, the Minister and the Ministry of Health. I will like to read to you the conclusions on pages 47 and 48 of this report:

- “11. There is poor supervision in the hospitals leading to indiscipline, demoralization, and poor personnel performance. This is due in part to the organization structure, which allows for the dual placement of the Ministry of Health and RHAs staff in the same facility. According to some staff spoken to, RHA staff in most instances refuse to be supervised by the Ministry of Health staff, which have seniority.”

The report also said:

“There is seemingly limited involvement of the Regional Health Authorities in the management of the respective Regions health care facilities...”

What are they doing?

This led the consultant, Dr. Una Reid, to conclude:

“...there is a lack of responsibility and accountability in the health care institutions.”

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The infection prevention and control committees and nurses are inactive. That is why you see cockroaches and vermin all over the kitchen at the San Fernando General Hospital. There is a lack of technical knowledge in respect of the areas covered. There is an urgent need for policies with respect to laundry, waste management and hospital sanitation. None of the three major hospitals: San Fernando, Port of Spain General Hospital and Eric Williams Medical Sciences Complex, has a proper waste disposal system. The report is available for the media to see, because I will give it to them.

The report continued:

- “12. There is inefficient management of wards/units, agencies, and institutions.
- 13. There is poor hospital sanitation and hospital compounds are laden with discarded furniture, etc...
- 15. There are too many outdated and/or non-functional equipment such as incinerators, washers and dryers for laundry and instruments, kitchen equipment, etc...

The findings suggest that patient care management is poor as is evident by the poor infection prevention and control practices. There is an urgent need therefore to improve management of patients, care units, and institutions.”

There were many more findings on that PAHO report.

Let us look at scholarships for the St. George’s Medical School in Grenada. What are the qualifications for award of these scholarships? Who forms the scholarship selection committee? On what basis are these scholarships awarded? Do we have the list of individuals who were awarded these scholarships? Why must these students go to St. George’s, when our medical faculty at the University of the West Indies (UWI) and the Eric Williams Medical Sciences Complex can accept these students at less than the cost of training at St. George’s?

We admit nearly 120 medical students per year; 30 veterinary students, 30 dental students and about 30 pharmacists. Only 50 of the medical students are from Trinidad and Tobago at the medical school. We can absorb these students right here in our medical school. Why are they being sent to Grenada? Is there a reason for that? These questions must be answered by the Minister of Health and the Minister of Education.

I want to talk about the enterobacter. In August 2003, the Medical Chief of Staff at Mount Hope Women’s Hospital confirmed that 15 babies had died, many

of whom tested positive for enterobacter. In September, 10 babies died; in October, 13 babies were confirmed dead from enterobacter; in November, 24 died, the highest in seven months at the institution. Out of the 24 deaths in November, 13 died from enterobacter and 10 more were inconclusive. That was just November alone. Doctors were advising would-be patients at Hope Women's Hospital, to go elsewhere to have their babies, "Please, do not come to Hope Women's Hospital."

I was ashamed to be a doctor at Mount Hope. Patients did not want to come because of the enterobacter in the neonatology ward. A week-long assessment was done in September by former Health Minister, Mr. Imbert, and completed by a team from the Pan-American Health Organization at four hospital neonatal units, but there was a cover-up. A second investigation carried out separately by the North West Regional Health Authority (NWRHA) board-appointed committee, was also kept secret, under wraps, while countless babies were dying on a daily basis. The truth was being hidden from the population. Such was the cover-up by both Ministers, the Principal Medical Officer, at that time, the Permanent Secretary and the Minister of Health; all were equally guilty and culpable for causing the loss of lives. [*Desk thumping*]

While they covered up, babies died. There was a callous loss of lives, while they hide their cover-up and collude to fool and hoodwink the population. The parents of the 11 children who died at the Mount Hope Women's Hospital have already contacted their attorneys about legal remedies for the medical negligence. There is going to be a class suit against this Government, but the people are poor and some type of legal aid should be given to them for redress. [*Interruption*]

It is not one person to be blamed. They fired one person, Jenny Gobin; a low person in the quality control department. The NWRHA, the Ministry of Health and, ultimately, the Minister of Health, should be responsible for this. The Chairman of the NWRHA said in September last year that stringent measures had been reinforced, with respect to access to the units and delivery of health care, and assured that the unit was fully operational, open to the public. In November they were re-opened and Aneesa Ramdial's seven-week old baby and Nazima Hosein's nine-week old baby died of enterobacter. Such are the things that go on in that type of institution: Chairman saying, "Open back up;" enterobacter still there and babies lose their lives.

Minister Rahael said that there would be no cover up. He announced big plans to relocate the Mount Hope Women's Hospital to the Eric Williams Medical

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Sciences Complex, more than one year ago, yet it is still a dream. There is still talk of the hospital's relocation in this year's budget.

On December 23, 2003 the ministry released the findings of PAHO and Dr. Petronella Manning, the sister of the Prime Minister—Dr. Manning is one of the best neonatologists in the Caribbean; she is extremely competent; a woman of tremendous integrity—her report highlighted how poorly prepared, equipped and maintained the nation's neonatal/ICUs were. What is the Minister of Health doing? Only flashing himself in the newspapers. The Minister likes grandiose photograph-taking with new equipment and so on, and people suffering and dying. Dismissed mismanagement and nonperformance by this administration have caused so much heartache. As a doctor, I feel the pain of the people. You can imagine the pain for scores of mothers whose babies have died from the enterobacter.

2.15 p.m.

Whose heads rolled? He said heads will roll. Not one head, but a poor lowly-rat quality control officer they are after and she has filed a lawsuit against the State.

Is this another St. Ann's eggnog case where 12 patients died from food poisoning a number of years ago and it was covered up with no one held responsible, and the flippant attitude to loss of lives by successive PNM administrations? They simply do not care.

Big headlines, Mr. Vice-President, "\$106 million Tax Scandal, Heads Will Roll". "Rahael gets scandal report". "Tax money scandal". "Where has \$106 million in NWRHA deductions gone?"

Rahael says something has to be done with his management which is going to be responsible for the debt. There will be no cover-up in this matter, everything has to be transparent.

He said it was brought to his attention that the NWRHA was using the money to pay wages. Months before there was a \$24 million debt to T&TEC and a source at the Ministry of Health said the ministry gave them more than \$89 million last year to pay its creditors, and the allocation for 2004 was increased by \$40 million.

In addition, they were given another \$32 million to finance another shortfall. The Minister of Health, the Permanent Secretary and the Communication Specialist refused to comment on the \$109 million tax scandal. Another big cover-up by this administration. He said heads will roll. Whose heads rolled?

In addition to the \$106 million tax scandal of the NWRHA, they stated that the ministry had already financed the 2002/2003 shortfall of \$32 million to meet PAYE and health surcharge arrears.

Mr. Vice-President, the health surcharge arrears for 2002/2003 was paid. So this \$106 million seems to be for 2003/2004. He said increases in the establishment by employing 164 persons have caused an increase in the personnel emolument. There are 56 administrative and support staff who are being paid exorbitant salaries and allowances, party hacks brought in as party groups in the hospitals are being paid large sums of money. It pains me to hear these things. So the people who were supposed to have their Board of Inland Revenue (BIR) payments taken out were not paid.

Where is the Auditor General? Where is the Attorney General? Where is the police investigation here? Where is the DPP? Where are the handcuffs? Headline: "New Auditors combing NWRHA Tax Scandal with a completion date of September 30". Today, October 26, 2004 where is the completed audit? Whose heads have rolled for the fraud and corruption with the \$106 million tax scandal? [*Desk thumping*]

We demand that this investigation be completed and presented to Parliament or be referred to the Commission of Enquiry into Health and a joint select parliamentary committee.

Mr. Vice-President, you have a tremendous job, it is in *Hansard* and we want to have investigations by a joint select committee into these areas we are speaking about.

Perpetrators of this fraud and corruption must be brought to justice. A \$106 million tax scandal, not a head will roll. We hold the Minister of Health responsible. He must be questioned by the joint select parliamentary committee, not the workers, because he is ultimately responsible. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Vice-President, while all these irregularities are occurring, we see daily commentaries, and horror stories in health and the deep, excruciating and emotional pain experienced by the citizens, particularly the poor and underprivileged who are being denied their right to proper health care.

Major headlines like: "Major Surgery needed, Mr. John Rahael". Despite opening a new Urology Ward with much fanfare, conditions are primitive elsewhere in the hospital. The kitchen is closed because of poor conditions; the pathology department, including the laboratories of chemistry, histology,

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biochemistry, bacteriology, and haematology are dilapidated. These areas are infested with vermin like rats and cockroaches and buildings are reported to be unsafe.

The pathology department staff is exposed to HIV-infected blood and they have been asking for something to be done over the last two years to no avail. Basic services and equipment are sadly lacking and the list was given to the Regional Health Authority (RHA) over the past two years but nothing was done.

This is an example of the callous disregard by the management of the RHAs about such acute problems. Once the new Urology Ward opens—

Mr. Vice-President: The speaking time of the hon. Senator has expired.

Motion made, That the hon. Senator's speaking time be extended by 15 minutes. [*Sen. W. Mark*]

Question put and agreed to.

Sen. Dr. T. Gopeesingh: Thank you, Mr. Vice-President and Members of the Senate for allowing me 15 more minutes.

I will like to highlight to Senators a few of the horror stories: "SWRHA orders enquiry into death of 19-year-old"; "Man waits 5 hours to see doctor Dead The Day After"; "1,250 complaints reach ministry"; "Hospital kitchen shuts down"; "Baby Delivered Outside Hospital"; "Hundreds leave without medicine"; and John Rahael is saying a "Shake-up coming in NWRHA Brass".

Where is the shake up? "Painful memories of 'standpipe tombstone'; "Son says Mom not given chance to live..."; "Not enough Beds in Sando ICU"; "After four years eagerly awaiting to become a mother...Baby born dead"; "10,000 wait...and wait...for surgery"; "Doctor banned in UK Practices in T&T"; "Kidney Trouble"; "Doctors query kidney transplants in Pakistan".

That is because of failure of this administration to pass the Tissue Transplant Bill. When we demitted office in 2001, that Bill was almost ready to be passed.

"Couple borrow \$20,000 to have baby". They do not want to go to the public hospital; "I screamed...I knew my baby was alive"—health horrors. "Spinal Injection Puts Leg In 'Spin'"; "Doctors Sick Of Nurses"; "Surgeons/nurses row could stop surgery"; "Don't Go Patients Warned"; "Rahael Wants Debt Scandal Report Monday"; "Tax Scandal Where has \$106m in NWRHA deductions gone?"; "NWRHA \$106m short on payments to BIR".

Mr. Vice-President, I can read to you horror stories day by day, but I want to state that this health sector and the hospital make one sick. [*Desk thumping*] One can enter a hospital relatively well and come out sick.

The Prime Minister announces that he is going to open up the Eric Williams Medical Sciences Complex (EWMSC), Mount Hope and here on Monday, October 26 2004, he is already starting to backtrack. John Rahael says that finding additional nurses to staff the EWMSC is the hardest nut to crack to accomplish the budget 2005 projections of free medical services by January 01, 2005.

He said he believes that the Finance Minister, Patrick Manning's budget promise of opening up the complex from next year will be accomplished. It will be on a limited scale at first, a phased introduction of the services at no cost.

Mr. Vice-President, when we were opening up the medical school in 1988 under the NAR regime, the NAR told us we cannot open it until we are self-sufficient as a medical school. It was predicted that it was going to cost \$300 million to run the Eric Williams Medical Sciences Complex, now \$36 million is derived annually from the revenues, the Prime Minister says in the budget that it is going to cost the State only \$20 million.

So in 1988 to run the complex was costing \$300 million, 16 years later how much do you think it is going to cost, not \$500—\$600 million? It shows the lack of thought and planning by this administration. How can the Prime Minister make a statement like that? He is fooled by the Minister of Health and his technocrats; it is unrealistic.

Mr. Vice-President, before I make my contribution as to what we will do as an alternative government, I will like to raise some issues. We are not convinced that even in the face of the assurances given by the Minister of National Security yesterday that a death squad does not exist in the Trinidad and Tobago Police Service.

We believe that the time has come for an independent commission of enquiry to be held into the execution of the 21 citizens who have been murdered by police fire [*Desk thumping*] and not the normal bureaucratic route of the coroner's inquest which takes an inordinately long time.

There are to be two death squads in the police service: one to execute alleged criminals and the second is a reputation death squad. That death squad wants to assassinate people's character and their reputation which people have sought all their lives to preserve and protect. [*Desk thumping*] That reputation death squad

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which falls under the direct political control of the Attorney General is publicly known as the Anti-Corruption Bureau of Investigation and we know by whom it is headed.

Its main aim seems to tarnish and maximize damage to the reputation of outstanding citizens. I am a victim of it. I had been thrown into it and for what reason? When it reached the Magistrate's Court, the magistrate said Dr. Gopeesingh has not committed any offence. They even took it to the High Court for judicial review and the judge said it should not have been there at all.

What is happening to the outstanding citizens of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago who are not members of the PNM? This Anti-Corruption Squad is politically motivated, headed and controlled by the Attorney General of this country.

Mr. Vice-President, one of the Caribbean's premier entrepreneurs whose reputation spreads the globe had his character assassinated yesterday by people going into the privacy of his home and searching. He has fallen victim to this political group of henchmen masquerading as police officers. [*Desk thumping*] Obviously an expedition backed and supported by the full entourage of media personnel.

How did the media know they were going there? They called them. They did it at Carlos' home, they did that at the Leader of the Opposition's home, this so-called Anti-Corruption Bureau. They sought to divert the population away from the stench of corruption emanating from the staterooms of this present administration.

How come the same so-called Anti-Corruption Bureau has not conducted similar raids in other people's places like Dr. Rowley's home? Why have they not gone into the home of Mr. Romain or Emile Elias? It is one thing for one side and another for the next.

How come the DPP, after being handed a 1,000-page document on the LABIDCO deal, almost 18 months ago did nothing? How come the Project Pride has not been investigated? How come the \$22 million write-off for Lenny Saith has not been investigated? They have failed to conduct raids on all these areas. Different strokes for different folks.

I wanted to raise these issues and I now want to return to the situation on the health sector. I did not want time to run out before making those statements.

2.30 p.m.

What we would do from this side, as an alternative government, is look critically into the health sector from a primary health care responsibility, health

promotion and disease prevention, as Sen. Dr. Eastlyn McKenzie spoke about. We have 107 primary health care centres. We would staff them with doctors, nurses, pharmacists; we would equip them so that they would be opened to 8.00 p.m. and some would be opened for 24 hours. The people close to the 107 health centres would get their medication and everything.

The hospitals would be equipped with the infrastructure and equipment to make sure that doctors work. Training would be provided for at least 500 nurses. This Government stopped the nursing training programme in the 1990s. We had to bring it back up to 300, and if we were there, we would have taken it to 500. We would make sure we have post-graduate training for the doctors so we would keep them. We would make sure that the enrolled nursing assistants move up the ladder. The Nursing Council Act has to be changed so that we could have nurses moving up the ladder. What you have is a roll-on, roll-off system now. Some of those who have retired are taking senior positions in the RHAs, preventing the nurses from the upward mobility.

We would ensure that we build the national oncology centre. We would have prevention programmes in cancer, diabetes and hypertension. We would educate the population on diet and exercise. We would make sure that we decant St. Ann's Hospital where there are over a few hundred patients who are living there for 30 years, and bring them to private sector organizations which would build institutions for them. [*Desk thumping*]

We will decant the 80 patients who are in the St. James Infirmary, who have been there for 20 years and causing a problem there. We would move them to private-sector-led groups. For years we had the national oncology system with archaic radium and treatment, and so on. We cannot continue that anymore.

We could give this administration lots of advice on the health sector, but they do not want to listen; they would not take our advice and, therefore, we, as an alternative government, know what we can do, and we know what we did, because we met—basically the Port of Spain Hospital was stinking when I took over in mid-1997. The equipment was dilapidated. We did 482 infrastructural projects because we had a management team to look after them on a daily basis. We built almost 40 health centres which they opened. [*Desk thumping*] In three years they are building 12 health centres. We built three district health facilities. In their time they built one and a half—the half in Mayaro. They said they were going to close down the Point Fortin Hospital. We were the ones who went to the IDB and said we must reopen the Point Fortin Hospital, because they wanted it as a district health facility.

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The Prime Minister says in his budget speech that they are going to train radiation oncologists and pathologists—nothing is happening; post basic education training—nothing is happening; shortage of medical practitioners—not being addressed. He wants to send them back to Jamaica. Do you know it was Eric Williams, the late Prime Minister, who had enough of the University of the West Indies in Jamaica dictating to us and said we must open our own university? This is why we opened the University of the West Indies, St. Augustine Medical School. My good friend, Prof. Norris Melville, and others, worked hard to make that self-sufficient. [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. Seepersad-Bachan: This is what PNM is about; “douendom”; backward!

Sen. Dr. T. Gopeesingh: The Prime Minister spoke about additional medical practitioners, and so on; Chronic Disease Assistance Programme—I gave you the instance about how there is collusion in that. If you spend \$50 million on the Chronic Disease Assistance Programme, (CDAP), it means \$100 per person, so it means one prescription with 10 items, and that \$100 is taken up. So where is the other money coming from?

Renal Dialysis: I gave you an exposé of the renal dialysis. He spoke about the charitable cataract surgery programme. Imagine you are being charitable to old people when you have to fix their eyes and give them new lens. And you are being charitable? That is a wrong nomenclature. So people are begging to have their eyes done?

We have 700 operations being done a year in the public hospitals. At least 2,000 new cases come on the list. So when you say you are doing 1,600 and 1,800 a year, you have not touched the tip of the iceberg. You say you are going to bring in the UNDP doctors to open a health centre at Mount Hope, it has not been done. He spoke about providing open-heart surgery—very good for the indigent population. They ought to be congratulated on that.

So we have lots of assistance and help that we can give as an alternative government. We can help to direct the improvement of the health sector at the moment. I have raised a number of issues in my contribution. I hope that it would be taken seriously and that commissions of enquiry will be held on these matters.

In closing, I would like to say that it is the desire and the wish of all of us here to have a health care system where we ourselves can go into a public institution at any time and not be afraid that something will happen to us. It must not be so. The poor people must not be denied their inalienable right of proper health care, with equity and with a degree of respect and decorum. What is happening now is a

sorry mess and things have to be improved, because this administration seems incapable of doing what they are supposed to do.

I thank you very much. [*Desk thumping*]

The Minister of Housing (Hon. Dr. Keith Rowley): [*Desk thumping*] Thank you very much, Mr. Vice-President, for the acknowledgement.

As one who started his parliamentary career in the Upper House, it is always a pleasure for me to come to this place. Last year it was my intention to participate in the debate in the Upper House, but I was told that there were so many speakers and I was not given that opportunity. This year, even if I had intended not to come, circumstances conspired to ensure that I must come and participate in the debate.

Sen. Mark: Mr. Vice-President—

Mr. Vice-President: Sen. Mark, we had an entire contribution for one hour and I sat here and I looked at the Bench on this side, nobody did this. Please let us maintain that kind of civil behaviour.

Sen. Mark: Mr. Vice-President, we are not prepared at this time to listen to Dr. Rowley. We believe that he should resign from the Government and we will not be listening to his contribution.

Sen. D. Montano: On a point of order, where are we?

Opposition Senators depart Chamber.

Hon. Dr. K. Rowley: Thank you, Mr. Vice-President.

Considering that in this budget debate of 2004/2005, the Ministry of Housing and its activities probably was the focal issue of the debate, I thought I owed it to Members of this House—

Sen. King: We are not hearing the Minister.

Hon. Dr. K. Rowley: I thought as Minister responsible for the portfolio of Housing and given the number of issues raised surrounding the housing portfolio, that I was duty bound, out of courtesy and out of other considerations, to come to this House and, at least, bring Members of this House into the real picture with respect to the Government's housing programme, and I hope that is what I will manage to do this afternoon.

In Trinidad and Tobago today, we are embarked upon a programme to treat with one of the chronic ills of the country. Insofar as we have indicated as a

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Government that it is our intention to make Trinidad and Tobago a developed country by the year 2020, we acknowledge it is not possible to achieve that goal without treating with problems like the housing problem. That is why we have committed ourselves as a Government, as a people, to build approximately 100,000 houses in Trinidad and Tobago during the period before 2020.

How did we arrive at this figure of 100,000 houses? In 1993 there was a study done by a group called PADCO, which indicated that we would require about 10,000 units per annum for 10 years to treat with the housing demands of all the income groups of the country. Seven years later, a review of this document showed that the same figure, approximately 10,000—in this case they talked about 9,800 units per year—was what was required. In 2000, another study was done by an individual—a review. This guy is called Angel, and his study showed that maybe the number is not quite as high as that, but if we can build 6,000 units per year and, in fact, if we embark on that programme in the first 10-year period, we could build about 6,000—7,000 units per year and thereafter build about 3,000 units per year, and the country's housing needs would be met on a sustained basis.

Then we had the Central Statistical Office (CSO) data of the 2000 census, and what we did in the Vision 2020 exercise, was that we have a housing subcommittee which took all this information on board, including the CSO data, in the context of the existing population, the existing housing stock, the population growth rate, the size of the households and the need for replacement, and we came up with a work programme with respect to tackling the housing shortage.

While we may disagree with a lot of things in this country, I am sure the one thing that one would be unlikely to get disagreement on is the fact that regardless of whatever income group you belong to in Trinidad and Tobago today, getting affordable housing is a problem. That is because for a number of years—in fact, I would say at least two decades—there has not been an effective housing programme in the country. The economy has improved; earning capacities have improved and the demand has grown, far outstripping the supply, resulting in the unavailability and, in fact, the unaffordability of even a modest rental unit. In the western part of Trinidad it is virtually impossible to buy or rent, unless you are very well off. In the East-West Corridor, the problem is probably much the same.

In summary on this point, the total demand for housing in the context of our Vision 2020 as outlined by these studies, is 98,200 units. Because the programme effectively started, say, two years after we kicked in, in early 2002, the effective creation of units—a 10-year period; they were looking up to 2010—we are saying if we embark on

a programme of building about 7,000 units for 10 years and after that 3,000 or so units per year, the problem would be licked well in advance of any long-term time frame that we may have. We do have the ability now; we do have better financial circumstances in the country to tackle this problem once and for all.

Let me just give you an idea as to the age group of people who are looking for housing in the country. We have a database at the NHA, of approximately 50,000 applicants. These are people who are looking to the Public Sector Programme for housing. But we acknowledge that there may be duplications of some of those applicants, because in some instances, in true “Trini” style, trying to beat the system, the husband applies, the wife applies and the son applies. So we are trying to screen that down. But let us, for argument sake, use a round number of 50,000 applicants. From that base, 29,200 of those are persons under the age of 39. Then we have another 15,000 in the age group 40—60. What that tells us is that a lot of young people, many of them just starting a family, just married or just looking for housing and cannot find housing; and the others who have worked up to age 40—45, the prime of their life about to pass, and they cannot even enter the marketplace to rent decently, far less to think of a mortgage.

So this is the problem we are looking at. What are these people earning? What is the earning profile? Approximately 65 per cent of that 50,000 had persons earning less than \$4,000 a month. In today’s economy, \$4,000 a month is, in fact, low income. And as the housing programme seeks to treat with the problem to build houses to accommodate these people, the Government is going to have to consider what level of contribution the State will make in the form of subsidy through infrastructure, through mortgage financing, and so on, because the demand is that the bulk of the persons are looking to the Public Sector Programme and that programme is to treat with people who are earning less than \$4,000 a month.

If I give a little more data on that, you would see that 6 per cent of our database are persons who are earning less than \$1,000 a month; 16 per cent earning between \$1,000 and \$2,000; 26 per cent earning between \$2,000 and \$3,000; 17 per cent earning between \$3,000—\$4,000. Then, of course, in the group who are earning between \$4,000—\$9,000, we have one-third of the applicants to the NHA. Of course, \$9,000 is not a lot of money. Two public servants, a nurse and a soldier—a mid-range public servant and a nurse, that is \$9,000. Those are the people who are looking to the NHA for housing in Trinidad and Tobago and have been looking for quite a long time, and the housing programme of the State, right now, provides the only opportunity to house these people.

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As we say, if we do not house our population properly, we cannot attain developed country status. I need not say, as people are improperly housed today, there are a series of social problems associated with poor housing, even in supposedly high-quality neighbourhoods. There are thousands of families living in conditions that you would not want to see. Those of us who represent people in constituencies, we see it first-hand and we know the impact that the National Housing Programme will have on ameliorating or eliminating the effects of poor housing in Trinidad and Tobago. So the Government has committed itself and some of our national resources to treating with this problem. This is one problem that we could tangibly, measurably attack and eliminate as we seek to change the landscape of our country, and that is being done.

2.45 p.m.

As we do that most persons are happy. Some are petrified. In fact, some would put obstacles in the way. While we in the PNM see the provision of housing as treating with a national need, there are those who only see how the beneficiaries will vote. They have a problem with the National Housing Programme from the point of view of how these people will vote some time in the future. I can tell you, that as Minister, a number of obstacles are placed in our way, but we will overcome them one by one.

Where in the country are these needs? With respect to how and when the persons apply, we ask them to indicate which area they would prefer in the first, second or third category. From that database we see that 39 per cent of the applicants, over 16,000 persons who applied to NHA have indicated that they will like to live somewhere in the Tunapuna/Piarco area; 5 per cent, over 2,000 persons have indicated that they want to live in the Sangre Grande area; 3 per cent, about 1,500 applicants indicated the Laventille area; 2 per cent indicated the Port of Spain area; 6 per cent in Diego Martin; 5 per cent, Arima; 3 per cent, Penal/Debe; 1 per cent Point Fortin; 12 per cent Princes Town; 1 per cent, Rio Claro; 6 per cent, San Fernando; 1 per cent, Siparia; 8 per cent, Chaguanas; 7 per cent, Couva/Tabaquite/Talparo. That is the profile that we have to work with at NHA. We look to see how we can satisfy these needs given the availability of land and the suitability of building in these areas. We are guided by the database in this respect.

I come back to Port of Spain. In 1990, the population of Port of Spain was over 90,000. Today, the population of Port of Spain is about 43,000 persons. Similarly, the population of San Fernando has fallen to 28,000. This means that over a period of time our two major cities have become depopulated and largely dead. You only have to walk through Port of Spain on a Sunday evening and you

will realize that it is a dead city. As we look to treat with the housing issue we have to understand that if 15 years ago the infrastructure and services available in Port of Spain could have supported 90,000 persons and in some situations those services and that infrastructure have been improved, today, it is supporting only half as many persons. It points us to an opportunity to repopulate our capital city and subordinate cities. That is one way that we could attack this problem of housing the national population. Our Urban Renewal Programme will form a major part of our initiative from here on in.

Sen. Prof. Deosaran: Could I ask the Minister to clarify a point? The population figures you listed are people who reside in those areas. In accounting for the services used, you have to take into account the increased population who shop and take part in the commercialization of those cities. You cannot look at those figures in a static way. There is traffic in and out of the cities that far exceed those numbers that you called. You have to be sensible about it.

Hon. Dr. K. Rowley: I am saying that at that time there were 90,000 residents, plus persons were still coming in. Even if you repopulate the city, persons will still come in, but maybe, not in the same way. You have had deterioration.

I was making the point to say that we do have an infrastructure in our cities, especially in Port of Spain which can support a higher density than exists today and the utilization of land space. What I discovered when I became Minister of Housing is that many years ago the Government of Trinidad and Tobago in seeking to treat with this issue had acquired significant properties in Eastern Port of Spain under a Slum Clearance Programme that never got off the ground. It is our intention now to treat with that issue and bring those available lands with good services into modern housing for Port of Spain and its development.

In summary, I am saying that we are looking at a need of 98,000 units of which lower income units are supposed to be in the order of 55,000; middle income units about 30,000 and high income about 12,000. That is the programme we are looking at, at the national level.

How have we treated with that so far? The first year or two much planning went into it and the groundwork was being laid. To make a point with how the previous administration sought to deal with it, acknowledging in the same way that there was this shortage, the previous administration had an approach of making serviced lots available and leaving it to *laissez-faire*—in some cases unserviced lots. That did not work because while we had the tremendous shortage and associated problems, in 1996—2001, there was a delivery of only 3,200 units in the Public Sector Programme.

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In the last fiscal year, we have built and have available 3,283 of which 986 were houses that we built on the Infill Programme. That is, houses built on vacant lots that were lying idle in built developments across the country. We built 2,097 units in the other programme. The proposed programme for 2004/2005 is 8,045 units, of which the Infill Programme, that is those vacant lots in existing developments, we expect to build 712 units on those vacant lots. The NHA will build 6,336 under the NHA Programme; UdeCOTT will build 947 and the Sugar Industry and Labour Welfare Committee will do 50, for a total of 7,333 plus 712 for 8,045. That is our work programme.

I want to tell you where this will be done. Our friends on the other side have been trying to give you the impression that we are focusing on some areas for political purpose. Nothing is further from the truth. The National Housing Programme runs from Roxborough in Tobago to Point Fortin; from Mayaro to Diego Martin and Chaguanas to Arima. [*Desk thumping*] Under the Infill Programme for 2004/2005, the areas are Edinburgh 500, Cunupia, Couva North; Malabar Phase I; Malabar Phase IV; Union Hall; Grayham Trace; Strikers Village, Point Fortin; Harmony Hall; Plaisance, Mayaro; Charlieville; D'Abadie; Valencia; Rio Claro; Debe; Santa Cruz; Bon Air West; Bien Venue and three sites in Fyzabad.

Under the Joint Venture Programme where we are dealing with the bigger contractors and sites, we have the areas to experience housing construction. Some have started; some are on the drawing board; contracts are to be awarded for some and some contracts have been recently awarded. The work programme is as follows:

Location	Units
La Horquetta South	1,680
Cleaver Woods	360
Goya Trace, Tunapuna	200
Karamath Street & Caura Road	100
Santa Margarita	148
Barataria	48
Carlsen Field	250
Edinburgh South	700
Edinburgh South B	700
Corinth	250
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Corinth C	275
Harmony Hall	160
Retrench	300
Golconda	350
Debe	360
KP Lands	80
Mount Hope	100

UdeCOTT will be doing some smaller projects in La Romain, Piarco, Tunapuna, San Fernando, Mayaro, Arima, Castara, Blenheim and Roxborough. Those are the sites that we are currently engaged in and other sites will come into the programme as it progresses.

That is the summary of what we are trying to do. We have managed to do something last year which did not happen before. We have removed the burden of funding this programme from the national Treasury. While the Treasury will make a considerable contribution, last year, we called the local banks and pointed out to them that they have a significant role to play as custodians of the country's financial resources. We wanted them to change their approach with respect to lower income housing, an area in which they have not shown an interest so far.

Given the need that I have outlined, with 60 per cent of our people looking for housing and earning less than \$4,000 per month, the banking community had to play a role and not say that they were not interested in this. They took the point. Our four local banks have formed a consortium and provided \$2 billion for the construction programme. [*Desk thumping*] Along with other agencies like the Home Mortgage Bank, they put together another \$1 billion to support the Mortgage Take Out Programme. While we are talking about this major construction programme, you will not see all or most of it in the national budget because we are funding it by the private sector, by the arrangement of mortgaging working with the banks. In the budget you will see the Government's contribution to the programme which is a small part of the overall programme. We see a new role for NHA. We will come to the Senate with respect to the creation of a housing development corporation to replace NHA. The legislation is drafted and we are now at the LRC stage. Very soon I hope to come back to you for your support on that matter.

That is a summary of what we have embarked upon. Recently, we have been providing keys to a number of persons across the country such as in Sangre

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Grande, Diego Martin, Caroni and San Fernando. You only have to be there to see the satisfaction and pleasure on the faces of those young couples when they receive their keys to know that this public policy is positively impacting on the lives of people of Trinidad and Tobago. Before that you had to look at the country from Charlotteville to Bon Accord; Diego Martin to Arima; Malabar to Edinburgh; Point Fortin to Pleasantville to see that without a public sector involvement in the National Housing Programme, the landscape of Trinidad and Tobago would have been completely different.

In the PNM we take the position that there is a major role for the State in the construction of houses. It is only when that role is played that we will be able to treat with our housing demands and needs. The PNM makes no apologies for a housing programme that treats with our social programmes and a backlog that I have described.

3.00 p.m.

Sen. Seetahal: Mr. Minister, I do not know if you are going to wind up but before you do, I want to ask a couple of questions.

Hon. Dr. K. Rowley: Wind up?

Sen. Seetahal: You sounded as if you were about to, Minister. In any case perhaps you could deal with the couple of issues that I want to raise. You mentioned 98,000 families who needed houses because rather than singles, I imagine people would be like in fours; not one person would want to have a house for themselves. You said 50,000 families are looking to the public sector, and then you came back and spoke about providing 98,000. If it is only 50,000 who are looking to the public sector for housing, my first question is: Why are you providing 98,000? If you go on to 2020 by then you would have 100,000 houses if you carry on with your numbers. What about all of those people who are privately building houses?

The second point is you mentioned the urban renewal thrust; that people are not living in the city and you wanted to get them into the city. One of the reasons that people are not living in the city is that vagrants are living in the city. When I come to the city on Sundays I see vagrants all over the place. That is a second issue that you will have to consider.

Finally, a lot of these new houses are condominiums—from what I gather looking at the buildings—and we do not have a Condominiums Act and people are already not paying heed to what they should do. I have asked the question

twice and I have gotten no reasonable answer: When are we going to deal with the Condominiums Act to make it law?

Hon. Dr. K. Rowley: Let me answer the last question first. What we are trying to do now are a lot of things that we have not done before. I started by saying that a lot of things that were not happening at the National Housing Authority (NHA), with respect to its discharging of its responsibility, including getting people to pay for the units in which they are living; we are attacking those problems. We know that there are problems there; my job and the Government's job now is to solve those problems.

With respect to the Condominiums Act, very soon we expect to have a look at it. You are correct. Because of the shortage of land space in the area where there is the greatest demand, we have to maximize the use of lands so we cannot afford to build single storey bungalows for persons in the East-West Corridor. Land is just too expensive and, therefore, we have to be more efficient, therefore, the Condominiums Act will come into play. Very soon you will hear something about that.

With respect to persons paying their rents, I can tell the Senate that we have seen a significant increase in the payments from persons simply because the NHA is doing its job more efficiently.

With respect to the numbers—my colleague, a former minister of housing whispered to me—it is a moving target. I do not have the time to go into the details with you now because I have a few more things I want to say, which I must say this afternoon. I promise you that I will come back to this Senate some time, when I bring the housing company development bill and I will go into a bit more detail with respect to the numbers. Suffice it to say that whatever the number is: whether it is 40,000 or 80,000 it is a big problem that needs to be addressed. I look forward to the day when we will be building too many houses.

Sen. King: Mr. Vice-President, if I may, before the Minister recommences his address. Minister, could you give me an idea as to how you managed to encourage the four banks to fund such a large housing project? Have we given them any guarantees? Did the Government have to give them letters of comfort or guarantees?

Hon. Dr. K. Rowley: I am a charming guy. [*Laughter*]

Sen. King: It had to be more than that.

Hon. Dr. K. Rowley: I suspect it had something to do with that. But to be serious, we were able to impress upon the banks that there was money to be made

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in it; that we could conduct our business at the NHA in such a way to ensure that mortgage takeout can be done. We were also able to demonstrate to them not to sell the poor folks short; they have as good a record in paying their mortgages as those in the upper income brackets. [*Desk thumping*] There is no Government guarantee provided. The guarantee is that when we build that house we will have somebody there who will take a mortgage. In fact, we are pre-qualifying persons for the mortgages. Even as I am calling the names of these sites now where construction is taking place, we are pre-allocating and pre-qualifying those persons at the mortgage end, so as soon as the contractor has finished building, we should be in a position to have a mortgage executed and the money becomes available.

We are making the National Housing Authority more efficient. It is a new development and we hope that it works well. We have also impressed upon the banks—for me, most importantly—that they have a social responsibility to apply the capital of the people to solving the people's needs. That is what we did, Mr. Vice-President. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Vice-President, I was not here in the earlier debate but I had the opportunity to read the newspapers and to read the *Hansard*. I would like to join the debate as described by some Members on the other side. As Minister responsible for the Ministry of Housing: I am a politician; I am in the kitchen and I have to expect the heat, but I was mortified to see the direct attack or the insinuation of attacks on public officials who are doing the job and who are not here in the Chamber to defend themselves when they are attacked by recklessness coming from my colleagues on the other side.

Sen. Robin Montano, carrying out the UNC's strategy, which should be clear to all of us by now that the beleaguered UNC has taken a position that the best method of defence is attack and whatever trouble they may be in the best way to deal with it, is to go on the attack against all and sundry. I heard Sen. Robin Montano tell hon. Members here, that in support of their corruption allegation, he named me and my party as having allocated a number of projects to Emile Elias—I do not know what they have with Emile Elias but Mr. Elias can fight for himself; I am fighting for my staff, whom I represent. I am duty bound to defend my staff. When the Senate is told that the Customs building, the multi-storey car park, the BIR building, the Ministry of Legal Affairs, the Ministry of Education to a tune of \$900 million have been allocated to Emile Elias, I have come here this afternoon to tell the country and hon. Senators, who have remained, that that is a total patent falsehood; an absolute falsehood!

In fact, if you go down the street you will see the multi-storey car park under construction and you will see a sign board there saying that the project has been awarded to and is being carried out by an international company called Johnston International. Mr. Vice-President, I can tell you that the Ministry of Legal Affairs has not even gone to tender; far less to be awarded. The Ministry of Education building is only a drawing; it has not gone to tender. I fail to see how a garrulous Member of the Senate, representing the country's Opposition, could come into the debate and tell unsuspecting Senators that corruption is taking place in the PNM and that Rowley and the PNM, in cahoots with Elias, have awarded \$900 million. He went on to add the Tobago Hospital. He said:

“When I add the \$134 million plus the \$901 million, that is \$1.1 billion to one contractor, the PNM financier, Emile Elias.”

Mr. Vice-President, that is mischief of the worst kind and all I can say is that the UNC, feeling lonely in the wilderness of corruption, is looking for company. [*Desk thumping*] If they are afraid of the police, it is because of something they have done. This attack that they have launched on everybody is to make persons afraid to act against them. But the PNM party and the PNM Government do not lock up anybody in this country. If you break the law the police will lock you up, PNM or no PNM! We are not afraid of their allegations. What we are going to make sure is that what goes on parliamentary record is the truth and that is why I am here this afternoon also, to correct the record as it has been distorted by Sen. Robin Montano and others on the other side.

What did he say, Mr. Vice-President? I saw the most horrible behaviour of a Senator. Sen. Robin Montano raised this document of which there is no record in the NHA and my advice from the NHA staff and the record is that this document called, “Land Assembly Coordinator” writing to the Chairman reporting about a meeting and talking about voter padding and so on, is dated February 26, 2002. In the record of the NHA this document is absent. The NHA has advised me, as Minister, that this document is a fraud and forgery. Mr. Vice-President, not to mention the fact that the chairman at that time—a bit of an interregnum—in February 2002, there was no chairman of the NHA. Mr. Andre Monteil was appointed one month later. What they would have us believe is that one month before the chairman was appointed he was operating at the NHA to have conducted this.

Mr. Vice-President, what is the story? An individual tried to blackmail the NHA into paying \$600,000 to leave his job. The NHA refused. He then threatened the CEO of the NHA that if he was not paid the \$600,000 he has goods on the

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chairman; goods on the CEO; goods on the Government and he will make them public. He was told which lake to jump in. So he went to his legal advisor, Sen. Robin Montano with the story and Sen. Robin Montano prepared an affidavit on the basis of this fraudulent memo and on this one too, dated April 23, where the same individual purports to have written the chairman advising him of voter padding. Imagine that, a little flunky; a briefcase carrier wrote to the chairman and told him that he objects to voter padding in the NHA.

Mr. Vice-President, these two documents form the basis of an affidavit, which was filed in the court where the NHA has been sued by this individual claiming \$1 million now. The legal advisor who filed the affidavit and represents the guy who filed the writ is none other than Sen. Robin Montano. Mr. Vice-President, I am not a member of this Senate but I want to draw to your attention as a Member of Parliament of Trinidad and Tobago; and as I stand in defence of my staff, Deborah Cheeseman, whose name has been bandied about in this Parliament, I want to draw to your attention, and I quote from the documents of Parliamentary Conduct, the sub judice rule. It says:

“Subject to the discretion of the Chair...matters awaiting the adjudication of a court of law should not be brought forward in debate.”

It is important to note that whereas the rule is strictly applied to criminal matters; it is also relevant in civil matters, if it appears to the Chair that there is a real or substantial danger of prejudice to the trial of the case.

Mr. Vice-President, here you have a sitting Senator, who prepares an affidavit, files a writ, brings it to the Parliament, stands in the Parliament, prosecutes the case, presents exhibits and the Vice-President in the Chair is unaware of that. I have no doubt, Mr. Vice-President, that had you known that he was acting in the interest of his own client, you would have intervened.

There is another rule which is the advocacy rule, which goes like this:

“No Member shall advocate any matter on behalf of any individual by means of speech in Parliament in consideration of any fee direct or indirect.”

[*Desk thumping*] Mr. Vice-President, do you understand why they could not stay here this afternoon? Do you understand why they had to go away? It is because they have brought our Parliament to the depths of where it should never be. The time has come for decent people to stand in this country and tell the UNC, enough is enough! [*Desk thumping*] On the basis of what I have just said, I am calling on my colleagues on this side of the Senate, if there is any decency left in

this Parliament to move this matter in your House to ensure Sen. Robin Montano is brought before the disciplinary committee of this Parliament for these breaches. [*Desk thumping*]

3.15 p.m.

One who claims to be a “bush” vet and should have stayed so, has come to this Senate and told the Senate that I have some project in Tobago—which has been very popular with them recently—that I have in conducting this project, a housing development programme, that I have received from the Trinidad & Tobago Electricity Commission free electricity services and from the Water and Sewerage Authority free services.

Mr. Vice-President, that matter excited them to the point of orgasm last week. I have no problem with that except that I said from the first minute they started, that I am prepared to subject myself and my family’s affairs to the competent authorities, be it the Integrity Commission or any number of commissions of enquiries that they want. [*Desk thumping*] I have nothing to hide. We have nothing to hide and we welcome the enquiries. But in the meantime, they are so uncivil that they will not wait for the enquiry because it is all politics. They want to descend into the arena of politics so they come to the Upper House where one expects that a certain amount of improvement in the civility will be, and what do I hear from the Senate?

Sen. Dr. Jennifer Kernahan, a “self-style bush vet” came to this Senate and has implicated the staff of T&TEC and the staff of WASA in corruption. Because, Sen. Montano, he had no difficulty in putting on *Hansard* that “Rowley thief”, and in the “thieving”, in Tobago according to him, I received these facilities from T&TEC and WASA, totally oblivious to the fact that by making that allegation he is also saying that the staff at T&TEC and WASA are involved in corruption with the Minister. They do not care whom they tarnish; they do not care whom they destroy; they do not care which institution, including the Parliament, they might bring down for their own narrow political survival.

Just to make sure that they do not go any further on this matter and that the public is no longer misled, I believe that this matter has gone far enough. This evening, while I have decided to wait on the enquiry and the enquiries and the enquirer to look into the affairs in Tobago, I think I owe it to Senators in this Senate, especially the Independent Senators, because all of my colleagues had no difficulty getting up and defending me instantly. I understand that my colleague, Minister Beckles was here and without knowing anything about this matter, she

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could have got up immediately and said that is not true, because that is the confidence they have in me and that I have in them; because we are PNM Members of Parliament. We rise to a higher order. If they want to stay where they are, do not look to the PNM for company.

Mr. Vice-President, I pass this copy of a cheque so that you could see it, and this is a cheque dated June 21, 2004 made out to the Trinidad and Tobago Electricity Commission for \$83,282, paid to T&TEC and is signed by Sharon Rowley to pay for her services on her project in Tobago.

Mr. Vice-President, that is the project that a Member of the Senate came here and told the country that my wife and by extension, my wife and I, received from T&TEC free services. WASA does not provide reticulation construction on people's development. What WASA does is when you need the connection you pay WASA for the connection and I can inform you and I have my wife's permission to inform you, that there has been no connection on that project so therefore there was no money owing to WASA. What you have to ask yourselves then, is why are these honourable gentlemen and ladies coming into the Parliament—they did not do enough in the Lower House but they will come and soil and sully the Upper House with this naked fabrication and they see me come here today and they know I will make them out for what they are, so they run out of the Parliament. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Vice-President, I have also seen it said in the debate that—the thing gets more fantastic by the minute—I have borrowed the Agricultural Development Bank (ADB) money to do a housing project, to do a cattle project which was converted into a housing project in Tobago, and I heard Sen. Dr. Gopeesingh say today that they should have searched my house. I have said it in this Parliament before when I was on the other side. I was sitting on that same chair and I will say it again. Any time the police come to my house they come to lime with me because I have plenty friends and schoolmates in the police service, or they come to ask direction to their house. Given the quagmire they have found themselves in they are looking for a ladder to climb out on, and they expect that they will find that ladder in my direction; I want to say that they are looking in the wrong direction.

Mr. Vice-President, through you, I ask them to look at me because “like they ain't make me out.” The Senator is asking the police to search my house.

I have been accused of “tiefing” a load of sand and bricks and whatever. Maybe, I have it under my bed. They are asking the police to come and look. I

have no control over the police activities; however, as they look in my direction probably they know my name.

My name is Keith Christopher Rowley. The Keith means that I have been named after the great, Keith Miller who died last week at age 84 years. The Christopher means that St. Christopher carries me on his back and Rowley means, I from Mason Hall in Tobago. And there, where I got my upbringing at the Mason Hall Methodist, the Mason Hall Adventist and the Bishop Anglican School, the one thing they taught us there is “thou shall not steal” and if they had a little exposure to those institutions and that upbringing, maybe they would not be where they are today.

I want to say something to Sen. Mark, who joined the debate to accuse me and my wife of having the benefit of free T&TEC services.

Mr. Vice-President, I am fortunate and indeed blessed to have a wife who can provide me with love, strength and resources as and when required. [*Desk thumping*]

I raise these matters if only to correct the parliamentary record as it has been so misrepresented by my hon. friends on the other side. I leave all the rest of this issue to the assignment that would be handed to the various investigators and stand ready to co-operate with one and all.

Thank you, Mr. Vice-President.

Sen. Prof. Kenneth Ramchand: Thank you very much, Mr. Vice-President. The theme of the budget is “Ensuring our Future Survival.” Mr. Vice-President, when you read the budget and when I listened to the budget, it is quite different from survival. The budget title evokes, or the word, “survival” suggests a threatened and beleaguered time when all that you can hope for is just to survive.

There is not anything in the budget that indicates that the Government feels there is a crisis in the country. I happen to believe that the world is in crisis. The horrors in Iraq, genocide on the instalment plan in the Gaza strip, and all the evidence around us that the world that our island is, our world, Trinidad and Tobago, has my problems; it faces many dangers. There is the looming threat of diminution in the food supply; there is chaos in education; there is crime, poverty; there is the wretched state of health and above all, people are going around almost as if they are suffering from a sense of a lack of meaning in their lives. It is a malaise in the air. Old people feel it, young people feel it. They do not know what

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they are here for. We do not know what life is about. It is a philosophical problem, some existential problem but I am sure it affects nearly everybody.

Mr. Vice-President, I do not intend to enter into too many particular criticisms of elements in the budget. I think it is superficial and it does not address the deeper issues. It offers to deal with symptoms but it does not penetrate the causes. I want to talk today about some of the issues that I feel are causing much unhappiness and much trouble in our country.

The first thing I find and it may seem nebulous and it might not seem to matter to some people, is that the bond between people and place, between our people and their place, that bond is dissolving. I know I am planted here and that we are planted here but when I look at the younger generation I feel that we are making it too easy for them to pick up themselves and go, shaking the dust off their feet into the lorries of contractors and land developers.

When you look round you will see that the country is doing many things that we might say are being done in the name of progress. There are housing projects everywhere, government and private individuals, roads are being carved, old estates and assassinated acreages like Caroni (1975) Limited are just languishing. There is squatting. There is the denuding of forest; there is bandit quarrying; there is soil erosion; there is a transformation and I would say a heartless, stony transformation of the city of Port of Spain into a commercial hub, a new ugly square where buildings are going up; historic buildings and historic sites are falling apart or giving way to these new schemes.

We are looking for tourist numbers and we are not creating space for them and our space is being trampled upon. A land can only take a certain amount of traffic. There is pollution; there is the dumping of waste. We have land being sold to foreigners. I have to say it here, that the most wicked act ever perpetrated by any Government of Trinidad and Tobago, perpetrated against the future was the Repeal of the Aliens (Landholding) Act. I find that one of the most devastating things that has ever been done against the people of Trinidad and Tobago, and I urge the Government to return to the Aliens (Landholding) Act and organize a system that any foreign company or organization or embassy which wants to buy land in this country should get it on a lease basis.

3.30 p.m.

I think we should lease our land to outsiders, not sell it, Mr. Vice-President. More than ever, we in this country need an overall blueprint about the land,

setting out what is reserved for forest, what is reserved for agriculture, what is reserved for official buildings and where we would put roads when we have to. We need an overall guide about how to develop and expand in an orderly manner consistent with the preservation of flora and fauna and the natural beauty and natural resources of our place; to remain a landscape with character, a landscape to which the people want to belong. We are becoming placeless, even as we stand in our place.

I am leading up to an appeal to the Government to bring back to the Parliament the Planning and Development of Land Bill. Week after week, month after month, since 2001, I have been asking where the Planning and Development of Land Bill is, and there is no answer and there is no action.

Mr. Vice-President, as you know, after a lot of work—a lot of strenuous effort by people like Prof. Spence, Prof. Kenny and various subcommittees—a Planning and Development of Land Bill was tabled in 2001. It has lapsed, but I would like to read the explanatory note in that Bill, just to drive home the necessity for this kind of regulation. The explanatory note reads:

“The purpose of this Bill is to reform the town and country planning laws of Trinidad and Tobago by establishing a system of planning and development approvals which is designed to secure predictability, simplicity, promptness and transparency...

The Bill therefore establishes a National Physical Planning Commission and endows it with relevant powers to achieve the overall objective of the Act...The Commission would work with the Environmental Management Authority to ensure preservation of the environment as an integral part of the planning process.

It also provides for decentralization of certain decision making powers to local government.”

Mr. Vice-President, the only plan that we have that the country is working on, the only legal guide that we have, is the National Physical Development Plan of 1984 and that plan requires a review every five years. Such a review has taken place only once. Technically, successive governments with their development plans have been breaking the law. A lot of development that has taken place and a lot of development that is projected, does not follow the 1984 plan, which obviously is outdated and obsolete. So we really want the Government to come with a Planning and Development of Land Act, update everything, let the country know that things are not helter-skelter; that things are not being done for private

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interests; that things are not being done simply for commercial interest; that there is a vision of what this country is and what has to be preserved.

An attempt was made by the previous government, and we in the Parliament were all given two CDs; one, a National Conceptual Plan and the other, a Couva Land Use Plan. We were given those, but they were not brought to Parliament. This plan, which was put together by UK engineering consultants, Halcrow, UDeCOTT and PCA of Trinidad, cost the country \$14 million. I do not want to go too far into it to say that it was not produced through conventional tendering procedures. In fact, it was never put out to tender and it was fast-tracked by the Minister concerned.

The main point is that it was not brought to the Parliament, so we are still operating under the 1984 plan. So, I am begging the Government, before we proceed further, before the country falls more and more; suffers more and more from the deprivations of mindless, unguided architects, to let us please have a Planning and Development of Land Bill.

I appreciate what Sen. The Hon. Joan Yuille-Williams has done for culture, especially the folk culture of the country. I am glad to see the Government continues to give subventions to NGOs and cultural groups and that it continues to provide funds for Carnival, calypso, et cetera. But, Mr. Vice-President, both the budget and the Public Sector Investment Programme (PSIP) are innocent of any thinking about culture in general. I do not find anything in the budget to suggest that the Government is listening to widespread calls for a pan theatre; that the Government is listening to widespread calls for a national theatre; that the Government is listening to the calls for state-of-the-art recording facilities to help the artistes they say they are willing to help or that they want to encourage.

Many of our calypsonians and pan sides are playing great music. They just cannot get recordings done—they just cannot afford it. I think that the Government has a responsibility, maybe in conjunction with the Technical University of Trinidad and Tobago, to set up recording facilities, just as I think it might be their responsibility to set up a lab where inventors who want to experiment with sound, especially the sound of the pan, would have space and facilities to conduct their work. I really wish that the budget and the Government would consider these matters.

I am very involved in the Biswas House and I am involved in the Nelson Island project. For the last two years money has been allocated for the development of the Biswas House. Mr. Vice-President, if you know me, I do not

give up. I try hard. I push and push, and I have been pushing for years to get the Ministry to disburse some of the funds and we are not getting any. We are told that the PS has to sign it, or the Minister has to sign it, or this has to go to Cabinet. Year after year the money is allocated and goes back into the Consolidated Fund. I am appealing to Sen. Enill, please, this time make sure that the money allocated is disbursed. I do not know how he can do it because civil servants can run rings around you.

I think there is a mistake in the PSIP on page 7 with respect to the Nelson Island project where it is said that other works carried out in fiscal year 2004 included the restoration of one building and land clearing at the National Heritage site. No building has been restored. I do not know what they mean by restored, but the plan for the restoration was to restore those buildings to exactly how they might have looked in the period when they were in use in the quarantine station. I do not know how it can be said that one building has been restored. I am happy to see that the budget makes provision for funding for these two projects. I see the Minister looking a bit puzzled. I do not know if she would like to make a clarification. I really do not want to attack the Minister. I am just puzzled.

On health, I see there is an offer of free medical services to every citizen, but nothing is said about the training of nurses. It is one of my crackpot ideas that we have to divide this country into regions and in every region there should be a major hospital, which would be supported by a set of health offices. That major hospital would be the centre for health problems in that region and we would not see ambulances flying all over the place. Of course, we would spend a lot of money on the Mount Hope hospital and make sure that it becomes what it was intended to be—the premier place for serious operations in the whole of the Caribbean. I feel that we are wasting a lot of money and expelling a lot of hot, false breath if we talk about free medical services without thinking in terms of these major, efficient hospitals, for the present, in every county of Trinidad and Tobago.

On energy, there are lots of plans for energy, but year after year I talk about solar energy. People are talking about oil and gas running out and about pollution. Why should a tropical country not go into solar energy? I do not know. What is the reluctance? We have the technology. The University of the West Indies has produced many people who supply solar energy information and installation all over the world. I suppose we have world-class standing as far as knowledge and the use of solar energy is concerned, but we are not using it.

I am calling on the Government to make it mandatory that all buildings constructed by the Government have solar energy installations for cooling and

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light. It should be part of the design of the building. They should be designed for solar energy to provide the lights and the cooling systems. One of these days when a hurricane hits us and T&TEC breaks down and natural gas burns out, we will be glad. Hurricane does not stop the sun. Solar things are being recharged all the time and it might well be a part of hurricane preparedness to have a building code for Government buildings and to offer incentives to private citizens who are building houses. If someone is building a new house, they get such and such an incentive. If they have an existing house and they want to install it, there is an incentive also.

3.45 p.m.

Mr. Vice-President, I want to come to one of the most serious topics in my contribution. This has to do with agriculture. I have read the contribution of the hon. Minister of Agriculture, Land and Marine Resources, which was delivered in another place. I am sorry if I falter in my speech. I have a very bad flu and I am not feeling up-to-mark.

I have read pages 12—14 of the 2005 budget statement. I have examined pages 6 to 10 of the PSIP dealing with agriculture, forestry and fishing. It is a mamaguy. It is a fantasy. There was much about drains, roads, pumps, ponds; crises being averted in poultry and banana; infectious diseases being managed; things being refurbished, upgraded and commenced; items being purchased; contracts being awarded; markets being built; investigative studies and surveys being conducted, a whole set of research and development activities—much preliminary activity such as: man sharpening pencils, filling his pen with ink, preparing his desk, laying the scrap paper, laying the paper he would actually use to write, checking to see that he has rubber, checking to see that he has white-out and sitting, but never getting down to sitting, writing and composing. It is mamaguy!

There is no philosophy of agriculture, no vision of agriculture and no reconceptualization of agriculture in the budget. The figures tell the real attitude. In 2003, in the development programme for agriculture, they spent \$26 million. In 2004, \$61 million were spent. In 2005, \$52 million are projected. You want to tell me that you are saying that agriculture has a major role to play in the development of the economy and the society and that is what you are spending and have been spending on it? Mr. Vice-President, this is a case of serious neglect and serious lack of consideration.

Take the poultry industry. I do not have too many great griefs for the poultry industry, because I think it is more an assembly industry than a real industry. If it

is an assembly industry, let us do something about the fact that it is an assembly industry. Let us make it a real industry, do not sabotage it by subsidizing the imports of chicken parts.

Mr. Vice-President, if you have your PSIP, please take a look at page 12. I may have given you the wrong page reference. I am looking for the heading "Agriculture". It is in the budget statement. Please look at page 12 of the *Budget Statement 2005*. Can you make out the word "Agriculture"? Senators, turn back the page you would see "Tourism" is highlighted, "Venture Capital" is highlighted and "Small and Medium Enterprise" is highlighted. Every sub-item in this statement is highlighted, but we got a typo with "Agriculture". The typo is not highlighted. I would do like Sen. R. Montano and show it to the camera. [*Senator holds up document to the cameras*] This is a slip, which lets us know exactly what they think about agriculture.

Mr. Vice-President and Senators, I want you all to look at page 14, paragraph three, lines three and four, another telling, Freudian slip.

"The focus at this time is on provision of agricultural plots and residential lots to the former employers of Caroni..."

They mean it! We would have liked them to mean employees. Maybe they were thinking of employees. I wonder if the interest is really in the bosses than the workers. There is a kind of "simidimi" that goes on. The truth comes out by accident sometimes. This is yet another significant slip.

One of the greatest dangers facing this country has to do with the food supply. The importance of agriculture is that it helps us, obviously, to guarantee ourselves. Some of those big, bad countries can go all over and do what they like because they know they can feed themselves. That is why they can do whatever they like! Nobody could say: "We are not selling wheat to Russia and we are not selling sugar to the United Kingdom." Those "fellas" are big, bad and brave, but they are making sure they could do their bigness, badness and braveness all over the world, because their food supply is secure. The United States can give away food all over the place. A secure food supply is a basis for self-confidence and a basis for doing what you want to do in the world. If I borrow money from an international agency and it says: "I am lending you the money but you have to use our consultants, our designs and you have to buy raw materials from us," you know what you could tell them, Mr. Vice-President? You are a calypsonian. You could tell them where to go and what to do. Food is getting more than scarcer and more expensive.

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The more our oil and gas cost, the more those “fellas” who are feeding us, have to pay for transport, the more we have to pay for what they are selling to us. I am sorry that oil has gone up so much more. I will settle to take it in singles. Give it to me at US \$40 and they would not feel such a big shock and the prices would not increase. It has gone to US \$50 and everybody is saying hooray, but we are going to pay back for it. When you increase the price of fuel in this country, everything goes up. It is going to happen to us on a worse scale. We import so much of our food and so many other items. We are going to suffer.

Mr. Vice-President, even as we fail to focus on food production, we are destroying our capacity to produce food, by using our best arable lands for purposes other than agriculture. Our agriculture policy—I may differ from many economists in this because I am not an economist, so I have a right to differ—should be squarely directed at the production of food for domestic consumption. If we have any leftover, we export.

I have complained in this Senate. I cannot afford red fish or big shrimps. The best fish in this country is exported or sold to tourists in the hotels. I remember one year I complained that every time I passed by the fishmonger and I see the small red fish, I would not buy it. I have started eyeing the joshua. I was used to buying joshua for dogs, but I have started eyeing the joshua, because I cannot afford the shrimps and red fish. If I go to the supermarket I would have to buy someone’s half-rotten fish, which would have been frozen for three months. We are selling our good food and importing rubbish! I am looking at “bachine” these days. To me “bachine” is a good sport fish. “Bachine” would give you a nice pull and fight. I have never eaten “bachine”. I have given away “bachine”. Now I have to start eating “bachine” too.

Mr. Vice-President, the policy of producing food for domestic consumption should be reinforced by legislation concerning the use of land. In a small country like this, arable land is quite limited. I have been told that less than 16 per cent of our land is prime land for agriculture.

I join with former Sen. Prof. Spence, in calling for a moratorium on the use of agricultural land for other than agriculture. Prof. Spence’s idea is that we should create a land bank, which would function just as the Revenue Stabilization Fund functions. We are reserving, for future generations, the possibility of a revival of agriculture and something to fall back on, when the crash comes and we cannot afford to buy so much food. Hopefully, by that time, the education system would have kicked in and people would have learnt that they should change their

lifestyle. I honestly believe that our country can never change, if we do not change the inherited lifestyle and inherited tastes.

There is a phrase that is going around, abstract and unfeeling. I suppose it is invented to cover shame. It is called “intergenerational equity”. Intergenerational equity, my grandmother's chest! What we should say is that we want to leave the basics of our resources of our country for the use of our children and grandchildren. Agricultural land is one such basic resource. Do not give me this stupidity about intergenerational equity, just to cover the shame you are feeling, because you are not doing it; as if it is something you just thought about.

4.00 p.m.

Mr. Vice-President, there is no plan for the 70,000 acres of Caroni (1975) Limited lands in the budget. I know there was an intention to give two acres of land to a worker. I do not regard that as an agricultural plan, but a social gesture. I suppose the chap who is given the land will build a house on it, and with the rest of the land he will go into some vegetable production, some of which he will be able to sell. That is the most that you are going to do with your two-acre plot. So that is not a plan for Caroni (1975) Limited lands.

Several years ago, a number of professors from the University of the West Indies (UWI) were asked to produce a plan for the use of land in Orange Grove. That plan is called: Orange Grove Food Production Project. I want to talk a little about that plan. The case that was made for Orange Grove and the way in which these professors set about making the case, all the things that they thought about—this provides a model for the use of all agricultural land in Trinidad and Tobago.

I bring up Orange Grove, not just because the report exists, but because if the papers are telling the truth, the Minister of Science, Technology and Tertiary Education has said that the land at Orange Grove is going to be given to the University of the West Indies for a new campus of UWI. This is not a pure gift; it is a replacement for land that had been ceded to the Government by UWI earlier on. It was farmland that the UWI had ceded, but now we are hearing that UWI is going to be paid back; they are going to get Orange Grove land to create another campus of the UWI. That is prime agricultural land. That is what I mean by saying that we need a planning and development of land bill, and we will not get any such nonsensical suggestion that land like Orange Grove is going to be dedicated to setting up a new campus. I really hope that is not true.

There are practical reasons why this should not be done. It is wrong to set up a second UWI campus so close to the first; just as it was wrong to set up the

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University of Trinidad and Tobago (UTT) in Wallerfield. UTT should be in San Fernando, or within striking distance of the oil and sugar belt. A technical university of Trinidad and Tobago is going to conduct a lot of research into those parts of the economy. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Vice-President, coming back to Orange Grove, Orange Grove also gets my vote, because there is a company there called Penard which has 400 acres and they are growing things to export to Paris to make penard. That is all they are doing. So they lease a farm.

Mr. Vice-President, there is no local value added. That has almost nothing to do with us. Why do they not make penard here? Why they have to send it over there? Why can we not get a cut from the making of penard? Why do we not do a little agricultural espionage and see what it is they are growing? When their lease runs out then we could take over and supply them. Why is this happening? I will leave that matter there. I suspect there is an arrangement there. I will not call for another commission of enquiry but, certainly, a little investigation may be in order.

Mr. Vice-President, the final report of the UWI team, led by Professor Harry Phelps and Professor Lori Wilson, was submitted to Mr. Frank Rampersad, Chairman of the Orange Grove National Company, in 1985.

Dear Mr. Rampersad,

We take pleasure in submitting our report on a study of the conversion of lands of the Orange Grove National Company from sugar cane to food crop production.

This document supersedes the draft in that it contains two additional chapters on the detailed economic analysis, which was used to arrive at our recommendations for both small scale and large scale production.

Now, Mr. Vice-President, the members who produced this plan were four professors of agriculture, four professors of engineering, three professors in economics, including one in agricultural economics, and one in sociology. Mr. Vice-President, I am not an agriculturalist; I am not an engineer, but this thing makes perfect sense to me.

If I read some of the chapter headings you would see that they thought of everything: they thought of soil types; they thought of what crop is suitable for what part of Orange Grove; and they thought of what acreage was suitable for what crop. They came up with a detailed plan about acreages, crops, what you

have to do to the soil, agro processing, marketing, roads, water supply and irrigation. Everything that you could possibly think of is there.

They begin with an introduction with a description of the area; a description of climate and meteorological conditions. Then in one chapter there are: soils, land capability and land use. In their concern for Orange Grove workers, there is a chapter: a sociological profile of the Orange Grove National Company in which they look at employers and employees—the persons who were affected by the proposed plan. The project in relation to agricultural production and a national economy; prospects for livestock production; prospects for crop production and utilization; irrigation requirements and supply sources; mechanization of production and post harvest processes; prospects for agro industries; development of selected farm models; economic analysis; recommended production models and benefit cost analysis; proposals for development; sociological impact statement; and environmental impact statement.

Mr. Vice-President, the Senate is not a university, so I cannot give you a long lecture on this matter. I feel that I have said enough to offer the generalization that the kind of study and planning that was done for Orange Grove should be done for all arable land in Trinidad and Tobago.

Every year I come here and say that we should grow peanuts; we should grow channa; we should dig up cocoa; we should recognize the research that has been done at the UWI, which shows that we could cut our wheat bill, in the first instance, by 25 per cent, and by blending 75 per cent wheat flour with 25 per cent flour made from yam, cassava or sweet potato. You could give incentives to farmers to produce this and, in time, you could even change the blend and go up to 60 or 40 per cent and you would hardly notice the difference. Mr. Vice-President, wheat is going to get us into trouble.

Related to agriculture is the question of irrigation and flood control, and there is a good deal in the budget statement and the Public Sector Investment Programme (PSIP) about these matters. I want to look at a larger issue. It is not simply irrigation and flood control for agriculture.

At the time when the desalination plant was being smuggled into the economy, it was never discussed in Parliament. We just heard that there was a desalination plant. I found occasion to object to the deal that was being cooked up.

Mr. Vice-President: Hon. Senators, the speaking time of the hon. Senator has expired.

Motion made, That the hon. Senator's speaking time be extended by 15 minutes. [*Sen. Dr. E. McKenzie*]

Question put and agreed to.

Sen. Prof. K. Ramchand: Thank you very much, Mr. Vice-President. I objected to the desalination plant on the ground that we had a supply of rainwater that could provide all our needs, if we found ways of capturing and storing that water. A policy of reforestation and searching for locations for wells, lakes ponds and dams and, of course, some land would be a dual answer, because it would solve the problem of flooding and the problem of drought and we would not have to pay a set of money to any desalination people. I do not know if we are charging these people for using our seawater. If I am buying desalinated water from them, I will charge them for using my sea water.

On the subject of water, I really cannot stop lamenting the fact that a small country like this, cannot deliver clean drinking water to homes. I am appalled at the development of the bottled water industry—we are drinking that here now. Why this country cannot provide drinking water and cut out this foolishness—this parasitic industry? Half of the time you are getting water straight from the tap.

Mr. Vice-President, seriously, I feel steps should be taken to ensure that the Water and Sewerage Authority (WASA) delivers to homes a reliable supply of water for cooking and drinking. I do not see why it cannot be done. I heard that there is a device that you could attach to your pipe which does all the purifying that you need. If WASA has to buy that and sell it to the population, and then come and charge the population for installing it, they should do that.

Mr. Vice-President, I have to move very rapidly to education and training. Over the last 10 years, the amount of money allocated to education has been increasing by desperate leaps and bounds. The recurrent expenditure in 1995 was \$984 million; the recurrent expenditure projected for 2005 is \$2.8 billion. The development programme in 2002 was \$152 million, and the development programme projected for 2005 is \$294 million.

Mr. Vice-President, there is an allocation of \$152 million for education, and I am glad; \$28 million for agriculture; \$327 million for education, \$26 million for agriculture; \$258 for education, \$61 million for agriculture; \$294 million for education, \$52 million for agriculture. So, you see this disparity and the disadvantage of agriculture. I am making my point that the vote for education has increased phenomenally within the last 10 years and, yet, over the same period,

the perception is that the education system has been sinking further and further into crisis, and this seems to me to be a signal or symbolizes increasing violence and aggressive behaviours in schools.

4.15 p.m.

Mr. Vice-President, I tend to differ from analysts about violence in schools. I believe that violence or aggressive behaviour in school is, to a large extent, incubated in the family or home and that a reduction is more likely to come from improvements in home and community environment and better parenting and adult/child relationships than from security measures and intervention strategies being implemented, though I do not doubt the limited usefulness of the latter strategy.

I have argued, ad nauseam, in this place and in other places, that the foundation of human development and the bedrock of the educational project are located in the combination of home, family and the primary school. If you do not get the primary school right, you are building on sand. It is disastrous, with respect to the kind of person we nurture, and disastrous as education. In report after report, people, including me, have said the same thing: we have to go back to the primary schools.

Some years ago in 1992, a committee of which I was chairman, presented a report on making school books affordable and available. In passing, I questioned the role of the textbook in primary education, if we were going to re-conceive primary education, and then I argued as follows:

“Not many will disagree with the view that in the early school years the child should be given opportunities for self-expression, for the development of the culture of the feelings, and for learning through projects involving activity at home and in the school, in the classroom and outside of it. Such a regime would have less use for the textbook than the present one.”

The orientation towards the 11-plus examination gave a killing prominence to the textbook.

“It is worth considering that the money spent on text-books at this level would go a longer way and do more good if directed towards upgrading primary schools and creating in them an atmosphere encouraging emotional development and self-expression in forms like music, art, poetry, handicraft and other creative directions. Such an attitude to the question of early education would be consistent with the view that in countries like ours the primary school ought to be equipped to make up for some of the deficiencies in family life, and housing conditions, and to provide a certain degree of emotional sustainment.”

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Mr. Vice-President, our people are made in the primary schools and something is terribly wrong in our primary schools.

Before universal secondary education in the year 2000, it was usual for about 10,000 persons not to be placed in secondary schools. From 2000, everybody was placed. In 1999 and before, it was already clear that over 40 per cent of the students going into secondary schools made less than 40 per cent in English and Mathematics and they were not ready for secondary education.

The thing continues: In the Secondary Entrance Assessment (SEA) results for 2004, of the 21,000 who wrote, 2,600 children made less than 30 per cent and there were 7,000 to 8,000 below the 40 per cent bar. At least 40 per cent of those children were not ready for secondary schools. In a number of schools, there is a Form I-S where these children who are not ready for secondary school are being taught. I heard recently that the First and Second Primer have been sent to some of them. I also heard that we were wasting a lot of money with the textbooks, because a whole set of science textbooks were given to the primary schools and the SEA syllabus “doh” ask them to teach science; so they are just packed up there, until somebody “tief” them. I will like the Minister of Education to let me know whether I have been misinformed about the Form I-S and the 89 to 100 teachers hired to do remedial teaching.

Sen. Manning: I am so sorry that you were not here yesterday. You rightly quoted the statistics in 1999, but there has been a vast improvement between then and now, where examinations are concerned, because we have put a number of things in place. We have a programme called SET, where reading is now part of the system. There are master teachers, et cetera. I do not want to take up much of your time, but I need to say to you that we are past 1999’s problems.

Sen. Prof. K. Ramchand: Thank you. I have no doubt at all that we are improving, but the primary schools are still in a deplorable situation. We really have to see that as the bedrock. A whole lot of money is being spent on the Secondary Education Modernization Programme (SEMP) which, in itself, is not bad, but I think it is the wrong focus for this country; it is a wrong choice, given the condition of primary schools. I have to report that the way in which it is operating, does not breed confidence.

I have already said in this Senate that you cannot construct a curriculum year by year. A curriculum deals with a whole plan of education; it covers five years. You have to know where you are going. The piecemeal manner in which the SEMP has been conducting its work: you get year one now; you get year two next;

you are working on three now and the next time you will get four and five. That does not make for a curriculum; you are producing five different syllabuses. I see in the Public Sector Investment Programme (PSIP) and the budget statement, that they have abolished the difference between the two words, because they are calling every one of them “a curriculum”: First Form curriculum; Third Form curriculum. They are syllabuses. They are not curricula. A curriculum covers the full five years and you cannot do anything until you have conceived the five years. Then you will design your schools to match the curriculum.

If you are thinking of the curriculum as a five-year thing, you have to ask: Do I use the traditional subjects? There are about 99 subjects available now. How do I recombine the subjects and create a smaller pool of subjects? None of this has been done. It is all going helter-skelter. Ask the teachers in the schools what they know about SEMP; they do not know. They have taught the principals; the principals say that they are not going to act as supervisors, because they will get less money. Since the de-linking, supervisors are getting less money than principals. I think that SEMP was the wrong choice. The SEMP syllabus is bound by preconceptions emanating from the old and we have not used the opportunity to rethink education or the educational system.

I have one minute left, Mr. Vice-President. “Why yuh doh lemme stay until 4.30 and done and round it off to 4.30?” [*Laughter*]

I wonder if the Minister could make available the Poonwasie Report on SEMP that was done for the IADB in three volumes, which I understand was highly critical of the SEMP programme. I meant to go into great detail about my unhappiness with SEMP, but I have made my point. It really was a wrong choice and I wish we would go back to basics. The hon. Prime Minister won a government exhibition, at the hands of one of our great primary school teachers. The hon. Minister of Culture and Gender Affairs is the daughter of a distinguished primary school principal. A lot of us know the meaning and value of primary education and we know what is being lost. I plead with the Minister and the Government to look again at it. Let the money waste; just try, please, and re-conceive the educational system and begin with the primary schools.

Thank you.

The Attorney General (Sen. The Hon. John Jeremie): Mr. Vice-President, this is the first time that I am participating in a budget debate in this Senate. [*Desk thumping*] I intend to do so within very narrow confines.

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Given the lateness of the hour, however, I have to begin on a very unfortunate note. It has come to my attention that during my absence from the Chamber this afternoon—and that is unfortunate, in itself—that certain allegations were made against me and the Anti-corruption Squad, which falls under the purview of the Ministry of the Attorney General. As I understand it, the allegation was to the effect that the Attorney General was using the squad as a death squad, to assassinate the characters of important citizens. It is that particular remark which I wish to address, before we go to tea.

The Anti-corruption Bureau or the Anti-corruption Squad, as it is called sometimes, was formed some time ago by then Attorney General, Ramesh Lawrence Maharaj, in an attempt to deal with the difficulties posed by corruption, which transcended borders and challenged the police service, in terms of its forensic ability to deal with criminal activity; in particular, corruption.

The squad is under the purview of the Ministry of the Attorney General and it has been, since the time of former Attorney General, Ramesh Lawrence Maharaj. [Interruption]

Sen. Mark: That is not true! [Sen. Mark stands] Mr. Vice-President, on a point of order. [Crosstalk]

Mr. Vice-President: You both cannot stand at the same time.

Sen. The Hon. J. Jeremie: I am not giving way.

Sen. Mark: You must sit! You are misleading the Parliament!

Mr. Vice-President: Sen. Mark, you have been a Vice-President of this Senate and you know if you stand on a point of order that you must establish it.

Mr. Attorney General, I will allow you to continue, but I must stop you at 4.35 p.m. when we take the tea break.

Sen. The Hon. J. Jeremie: I am guided.

Sen. Mark: On a point of order, Sir. Mr. Vice-President, the hon. Attorney General is misleading the Parliament. He has just indicated to the Parliament that the Anti-corruption Squad was formed and from the former Attorney General, Ramesh Lawrence Maharaj's days, to the present time, it has always been under the office of the Attorney General.

The *Gazette* is clear that the Anti-corruption Squad was never an official function assigned to the Attorney General, until Glenda Morean became Attorney

General and it was under her. For him to say that it was under Ramesh Maharaj and then any other person after, is misleading. That is the point of order.

Mr. Vice-President: Mr. Attorney General, can you clarify that and continue?

4.30 p.m.

Sen. The Hon. J. Jeremie: Mr. Vice-President, the Anti-corruption Squad is a unit of the police service which operated under the office of the Attorney General, notwithstanding when the formal gazetting took place. It operated under the office of the Attorney General and, for this reason, it had to be provided with certain specific forensic skills which were not available to the police service generally. So it was created as a unit which was within the Office of the Attorney General.

It has continued to function within the office of the Attorney General but it has been manned by police officers throughout. It reports to the Commissioner of Police who gives the officers their direct marching orders. The Attorney General provides resources alone to the anti-corruption squad and this is how it has always been. [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Vice-President: Hon. Senators, we do not have to allow this debate to descend into what it is threatening to descend to. [*Interruption*] You have made that point a number of times; allow the Attorney General to finish his contribution.

Sen. The Hon. J. Jeremie: Do I get injury time, Mr. Vice-President?

Mr. Vice-President, the allegation, as I understand it, was that I was leading a death squad to assassinate the characters of prominent citizens. I say to this, that the hon. Sen. Dr. Tim Gopeesingh, who is a man I respect, has shamed himself this afternoon. Now, I do not propose to dignify—

Sen. Dr. Gopeesingh: Mr. Vice-President, I wish to ask the hon. Minister to withdraw that remark, please. He is imputing improper motives when he says that I have shamed myself. I ask for withdrawal of that statement.

Sen. The Hon. J. Jeremie: I do not propose—

Sen. Mark: Mr. Vice-President, on a point of order, the Senator has asked that you rule on this matter. You have to rule on this matter, you cannot allow the Attorney General to continue to talk. [*Interruption*]

Mr. Vice-President: Hon. Senators, there was no improper motive imputed. To say that one let down oneself—[*Interruption*] Sen. Mark, we have really had a

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good debate for the last three days, plus. We have had the incident where you left the Parliament—

Sen. Mark: That is my right and I would do it again.

Mr. Vice-President: I would like to suggest that you allow the Attorney General to finish what he is trying to say in the next minute-and-a-half. [*Crosstalk*]

Sen. The Hon. J. Jeremie: Thank you, Mr. Vice-President. Now to suggest that the Bureau operates in a fashion as suggested by the hon. Senator is to insult the hardworking and independent police officers who are trying their best in difficult circumstances.

Mr. Vice-President, it is also to denigrate the constitutional office of the Attorney General, not me personally, but the Anti-corruption Bureau which falls under the administrative portfolio of the office. I reiterate that the unit operates in an independent fashion. Because of its work, the unit requires specialized resources which they are provided with now, when they require it.

Senators may also wish to note that at the time the Leader of the Opposition was the Minister of National Security, the Bureau which they suggest might not have existed received absolutely no resources from the State and its work was stymied. I say no more on this. That is the first point. [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Vice-President: Hon. Senators, I have given sufficient time for the Attorney General to make the point he wanted to make. I have even given about a minute-and-a-half injury time, as he said. It is really a pity that we could not live up to the expectation that we would finish this debate without this kind of behaviour.

The Senate will break for tea now and we shall return at 5.10 p.m.

4.40 p.m.: *Sitting suspended.*

5.10 p.m.: *Sitting resumed.*

Mr. Vice-President: Sen. Jeremie.

Sen. The Hon. J. Jeremie: Thank you, Mr. Vice-President. Before the break, I had proposed to make two points but only one was completed and that is to say that the Anti-corruption Investigation Bureau is a unit of the police service which reports to the Commissioner of Police and is provided with resources—mainly forensic—from time to time by the office of the Attorney General.

The second point that I wished to make before the break but will make now is this. I say the obvious this afternoon that I am a man and I am subject to the fears of all men. Now, I can tell this honourable Senate today—this is not something I have spoken of before—that attempts have been made to threaten me by the very so-called respected persons in our society.

More than that, I say that attempts have been made to threaten those involved in the investigation of crime against these very so-called, prominent citizens; and I say more. Attempts have been made to threaten those employed by the State in foreign jurisdictions in respect of the investigation of crime against these so-called prominent persons. On that I will say no more.

I wish to remind this honourable Senate that a former Attorney General in the government of the United National Congress once described himself to be under threat of personal harm for looking too closely at so-called prominent citizens of this country. Again, I say no more.

Mr. Vice-President, my position on these matters is simple. I do not understand threats, whether they are made by ordinary persons, prominent persons or thugs. It is not because I am a particularly brave man; it is because I think that I have a job to do and an oath to maintain. I made a promise to discharge my responsibilities without fear or favour and I shall do so. [*Desk thumping*]

I wish to comfort this honourable Senate by saying that whether investigations have to be done in respect of so-called prominent citizens, ordinary citizens, or thugs, it matters not to me. The rule of law is no respecter of persons; and I say no more on that.

5.15 p.m.

Now, in respect of my substantial contribution to the debate, I think that I have dealt with the contribution made by Sen. Dr. Gopeesingh. I wish to begin with a statement on the thrust of the budget statement. The budget statement declares itself to be based on ensuring that the principles of equity, equality, participation, social justice, individual responsibility, empowerment and dignity remain key elements in the social development thrust of the Government.

I am happy to have this opportunity to outline the role of the Ministry of the Attorney General in achieving Government's objectives. As I say now, the ministry is not a major beneficiary of budgetary allocations and the reason for that is simple. The ministry is not one of the so-called delivery ministries. It is not involved in the delivery of health, education, social services or national security.

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The ministry is a service provider to other ministries and to the public at large and it is in those respects—and I wish to confine my remarks this afternoon to three heads: the legislative agenda, the administration of justice and the battle against corruption.

In respect of the legislative agenda, hon. Members will recall that only last month I outlined Government's legislative agenda for the year 2004/2005 to this Parliament. That has not been a feature of governments in the past. But a legislative agenda and a legislative timetable are not sufficient. It is a good beginning, but it is not sufficient. We can only be judged ultimately by what we produce in terms of actual legislation coming through the pipeline, and I look forward in the coming year to a steady stream of legislation. I have charged my Chief Parliamentary Counsel with the responsibility of ensuring that we provide an adequate service, as a service provider, to the population at large and to other ministries in this area.

With respect to the administration of justice, I can recall that in my very first weeks in office as Attorney General, I had to pilot two pieces of legislation: The Family Proceedings Act and the Mediation Act. Both of these were critical to the pilot family court project that commenced in May, 2004. That project is well under way and early indications are that it is going to be a resounding success.

In the criminal justice system, the ministry has worked towards implementing the various recommendations contained in the report of the committee appointed by the Chief Justice, under the chairmanship of Mr. Justice Mark Mohammed. That committee was asked to consider measures which could be adopted to shorten criminal trials in the Assizes and in the Magistrates' Courts and to consider the feasibility of setting up a Remand Court. Some of the recommendations contained in the preliminary work of Mr. Justice Mohammed's committee have found their way into legislation which is before the Parliament this year: The Summary Courts (Amdt.) (No. 2) Bill, 2004; the Criminal Procedure (Amdt.) Bill, 2004 and the Indictable Offences (Preliminary Enquiry) (Amdt.) Bill, 2003; in addition to the Administration of Justice, (Miscellaneous Provisions) Bill, 2004 have already been drafted and are ready to be taken up by the Parliament. In addition to that, during the course of this year, we have engaged a consultant to provide us with a thorough review of our criminal practice and procedure and it is hoped that this work will be completed during the coming year. In the coming year as well, it is proposed to bring the long-awaited Caribbean Court of Justice on stream to strengthen the office of the Director of Public Prosecutions, to fully computerize the ministry and to empower the Judiciary to do work in relation to the Magistrates' Courts.

I turn quickly to the question of corruption. Now, our debate today takes place against the backdrop of this country's continued decline in Transparency International's Corruption Perception Index. There has been a steady decline in that index which has now seen us drop to our lowest level, 53rd on the annual ranking. This is the fourth consecutive decline for Trinidad and Tobago in this rating since our first appearance in 2001, with a 5.3 rating, which has since slipped in 2002 to 4.9; in 2003 to 4.6 and now stands at 4.2 in 2004. While it may be tempting—and it is always easy to use such information to score partisan, political points, I think it is important that we should recognize that the survey which describes itself to be based on perceptions, sends a worrying signal about the country in which we live.

One of the goals which I set myself on assuming office was to separate fact from fiction on the issue of corruption and to distinguish perception from reality. What I mean by that is that I am attempting to determine what is, and what is not, evidence of criminal wrongdoing against the people of Trinidad and Tobago. So that while it might be easy for politicians to rise and say that the worsening in our position in relation to the perception of corruption may have come as a surprise, I see it as an inevitable result of the revelations that have taken place in relation to the conduct of some of the well-publicized prosecutions which are now under way, and in relation to some of the matters which are now under investigation, as we speak. The decline in our rating is an unfortunate consequence, but as more and more corruption-type crime is prosecuted, there shall inevitably be a greater sense of cynicism in the general population and a perception that much of what passes for government is inherently corrupt.

I have made it my solemn vow to ensure that not only the perception, but the reality of corruption in Trinidad and Tobago is reversed. This is a goal which the Government, as a whole, has also set itself. I recognize that the reversal cannot happen overnight and that the magnitude of the cases before the court and under investigation is adequate testimony to the monumental task we face as a country, but it is a responsibility which I shall not shirk.

Corruption is one of the worst cancers that can afflict a nation, since most times it diverts critical resources away from the poor who need it most, in favour of the rich and powerful. It is not solely a financial or economic problem, but one that has the potential to undermine the very democracy we cherish and which has the potential to lead to societal and economic ruin.

It is for this reason that my ministry has committed considerable resources to the investigation and prosecution of the allegations of corruption of which

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evidence of a criminal nature has been unearthed. I have heard it said on several occasions, and even in the other place, that this Government has wasted money on commissions of enquiry; that some of the matters being pursued are a waste of time and money and that we should simply drop these matters and move on. We dare not, and we cannot, and we shall not. [*Desk thumping*] When you steal money from the public purse, the public is entitled to an accounting. [*Desk thumping*] That type of reckoning comes to all who steal from the public purse.

The Leader of the Opposition has even accused the Government of wasting money by pursuing investigations in the United States, far off Liechtenstein and in London, while much more pressing issues, he said, need to be pursued at home. I say that the most disturbing signal that any government can send is to allow reports and allegations of corruption to go unchecked and without investigation. [*Desk thumping*] If evidence emerges without prosecution, that would be the first step towards the creation of the kind of corruption which has impoverished nations, even better off than ourselves.

The Ministry of the Attorney General has had to commit considerable resources to prosecute corruption cases before the courts. We have recruited forensic experts, investigators and attorneys from several jurisdictions as the legal and financial trail has taken us to the Bahamas, Florida, United Kingdom, Jersey, Guernsey and even to the tiny land-locked Principality of Liechtenstein. These facts are matters within the public domain, but are matters which, by treaty and convention, cannot be detailed if the foreign state is in cooperation with the requesting state, the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago.

5.30 p.m.

I think that I can say without fear of contradiction that every application made so far by the attorneys, on behalf of Trinidad and Tobago in all these multiple jurisdictions, have met with success. [*Desk thumping*] While I appreciate the anxiety of the public for a quick resolution of these matters, it should be remembered that many of the corruption cases before the court and under investigation, involved complex money transactions across multiple legal jurisdictions between a myriad of companies registered in practically every territory of the globe, against a multiple of potential accused persons, each accused person having the right to counsel and due process.

The good news is that attorneys acting on behalf of the State in these several jurisdictions have managed to secure considerable legal advances and no setbacks thus far. The Office of the Attorney General shall continue to diligently pursue the

people's interest whether those interests carry us to the courts of this country, United Kingdom, Miami, Florida; the Bahamas or, most recently, in the Principality of Liechtenstein.

The State must fight corruption because corruption is wrong. Ultimately the only way we can successfully purge this country of the cancer of corruption, is by investigating all reports of corruption and tenaciously pursuing prosecution wherever and whenever evidence is available. [*Desk thumping*] To do less would be to send the dangerous message that corruption is permissible and that protestations of its prevalence are nothing but political slogans. I shall not be a part of that. The Government shall not be a part of that. We shall pursue with equal vigour, all, and I repeat all reports and allegations of corruption and, ultimately, the State shall do its duty.

The budget presented by the Prime Minister and Minister of Finance allocates \$27.9 billion to be spent over the next financial year. The theme of the budget is, "Ensuring Our Future Survival". The messages announced are necessary conditions to achieve the goals that we have set. As laudable as these goals are, to truly ensure the very survival and prosperity of succeeding generations, the cancer of corruption must be totally eradicated and shown to be reprehensible to the people of Trinidad and Tobago. The Office of the Attorney General shall ensure that the people of Trinidad and Tobago are the true beneficiaries of this Appropriation Bill before us, so that the goals announced by the Minister of Finance are truly realized to the benefit of all the people of Trinidad and Tobago.

Thank you.

Sen. R. Montano: Mr. Vice-President, before he sits, would the Attorney General answer a few questions?

Mr. Vice-President: The Attorney General has completed his contribution.

Sen. The Hon. J. Jeremie: Mr. Vice-President, I am happy to answer the question raised by Sen. Montano. The question is: Have I reported the matter of the Landate Project to the Integrity Commission?

Sen. R. Montano: No.

Sen. The Hon. J. Jeremie: What is the question?

Sen. R. Montano: Have you sent the files dealing with the Minister of Energy and the Minister of Works and Transport to the Integrity Commission as yet?

Sen. The Hon. J. Jeremie: Mr. Vice-President, while I would be happy to answer questions of a general nature, I have made it my policy in this place not to

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speak to specific investigations. I can say that I have done what is required of me by law. [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. Sadiq Baksh: Mr. Vice-President, I have no reason to doubt the sincerity of the distinguished Attorney General. Based on the backdrop of hearing Senators on the other side cry voter-padding by the UNC, they were voter-padding. While they came here with crocodile tears to say that the UNC was voter-padding, they were laying the groundwork for doing exactly what they were crying out. We must be mindful that this administration invented corruption. [*Desk thumping*] This party refined it to a fine art.

Sen. D. Montano: On a point of order. He is misleading the Senate on voter-padding. He has presented not a shred of evidence. Insofar as suggesting that we invented corruption, corruption has existed throughout the centuries and the UNC mastered the art.

Mr. Vice-President: Senators, could we avoid letting fly on these sweeping allegations?

Sen. S. Baksh: The only government official to be charged and successfully prosecuted in Trinidad and Tobago happens to be a member of the other side. I did not plan to get into this.

We, the people of Trinidad and Tobago, find ourselves, once again, in a very delicate and challenging economic position. This is due mainly to our vast petroleum resources with which we are endowed. The manner in which we use this vast income would determine the future destiny of our nation. We are at the historical crossroads of probable socioeconomic success or failure. One leads us towards attaining the goal of economic and social development for all and the other, to a life of fear, insecurity, dependency, unemployment, under-employment and poverty under this party.

Let us examine in which direction this Government and budget will take us. You will recall that we were previously in a comparable situation. At that time, the then Prime Minister and Minister of Finance, made the famous or infamous statement that money was not a problem. Most of us recall the consequences of our earlier oil boom. Let us hope that in spite of the many limitations of this present budget, history will not repeat itself. It is difficult to resist coming to the conclusion that this budget will lead us in the same direction again.

We, the people of Trinidad and Tobago, have a lot to be grateful for. Our climate is among the best in the world. Our geographical location is such that we

are out of most of the seasonal natural disasters. Our population is composed of beautiful people, resulting from our rich culture and many years of social integration. The product of this fusion is our national rainbow face. All you need to do is to look around in this Chamber and you will realize that this national rainbow face is real. This has evolved over time as a result of the efforts and sweat of our ancestors.

Our unity in diversity cannot be taken for granted. It must be nurtured and maintained. We must continue to practise and promote harmony, national unity and integration. There must be no doubt our national persona can be undone. This is very likely to occur if as a nation, we give way to poor governance, intolerance, bigotry and discrimination.

Social deterioration is highly probable that this current Government that insists on using the apparatus and assets of the State to satisfy its politically partisan objectives—the actions of this Government can only compromise our nation's democratic principles. The PNM insists on claiming to create national programmes, particularly what it describes as social programmes. This Government delivers the programmes' outputs to one section of the nation's population. It concentrates its efforts in traditionally PNM constituencies and those described as marginal. I remind this Government that its responsibility is to the nation as a whole and not to its political supporters. [*Desk thumping*] The reckless and irresponsible action of this PNM Government has begun to forge deep social and ethnic cleavages in our society. The adverse consequences of such deliberate, divisive policies on our people will be many. Our social fabric is weakening. Our society is characterized at present by discrimination, marginalization and social exploitation. We will no longer be a people that pursue the goal of national unity. Instead, we will be a nation divided and diminished. This pursuit of national unity, the effort of many years will be replaced by disunity, hostility and hopelessness.

It seems that this Government has to be reminded again that all State programmes must be conceptualized democratically, demographically and made accessible to all. [*Desk thumping*] This Government's failure to do so will constitute a clear and present abdication of its basic responsibility to all our nation's citizens. We have to continue providing the social environment that enables the presence of all the major religious groups in our national community. Freedom of religious practice is not only a basic right, but also a characteristic of a civilized society. As a people we must continue to practise our exemplary forms of religious diversity and acceptance.

Our land is as diverse as its people. We have mountains in the north, south and central. We have a dramatic and beautiful coastline; intensely blue seas;

beaches, valleys, flatlands, rivers and wetlands. Our sunrises and sunsets are unparalleled in their beauty. Our topography allows for the cultivation of a wide variety of crops. In the past we have done this with considerable success, until the destruction of 77,000 acres of land at Caroni (1975) Limited and the homes of 9,000 families. There is every reason why we can successfully continue to cultivate our traditional crops and with the changing trends in eating habits, new varieties of crops can be introduced.

5.45 p.m.

Mr. Vice-President, both can be done in a financially viable manner where production is based on relevant market analysis so as to establish the aggregate effective demand for crops prior to production. We cannot do the same things we did in the past and do them in the same way and expect different results. We need to change with the times and we need to be more effective in the way we deliver things.

Our good fortune continues. We are also rich in proven deposits of hydrocarbons, oils, natural gas and asphalt. It is clear that the people of Trinidad and Tobago have most of the elements required for all to enjoy a high standard of living at an optimum quality of life. But in spite of all our efforts, our nation is in a state of crisis because of this administration. Crime and criminal activity are causing us to live in fear. Criminal activity is not gang-related, as the Prime Minister alleges, crime seems to know no boundaries and have no respect for anyone.

Mr. Vice-President, only recently, Sir Ellis Clarke and Mr. ANR Robinson were victims of criminal actions. The former President of the Senate, Dr. Wahid Ali was mugged and robbed. Little Vijay Persad now kidnapped for more than 150 days. Even our visiting tourists have been victims of crimes, kidnappings, murders, rapes and robberies. The list goes on and on.

The issue of drug-related crime is complex, brutal and devastating. How can we forget the fact that cocaine was found in our country's diplomatic pouch? This must be dealt with in an explicit and efficient manner. To date, this corrupt Government has done very little to solve the problem in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. To date little progress has been made in discovering who is responsible for drugs in the Trinidad and Tobago diplomatic pouch? [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Vice-President, there are numerous cases of kidnapping, rape, theft and extortion that go unreported. There are many reasons for this: fear and lack of

confidence in the system's capacity to protect and serve. It is true that the responsibility of the Government is diverse; however, the highest priority of any government is the security of its population. [*Desk thumping*] If you cannot guarantee the security of your population in your country, then you are losing the war.

In this regard, and based on all the available evidence, it is clear this Government has failed miserably and continues to fail in its primary responsibility to the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*]

This Government has failed to put a stop to the constantly increasing levels of crime. It has failed to put a stop to the increasing levels of criminal activity. In spite of the Government's claim that it is making every effort in its war against crime, it is losing that war; it has lost this war, and there are indications that the criminal elements have direct access to Ministers of Government. [*Desk thumping*] That being the case, Mr. Vice-President, it makes the Government a part of the problem and, therefore, it cannot be part of the solution.

Mr. Vice-President, it is even worse; we have a situation where the Minister of National Security yesterday told us that we have an increase of almost 100 per cent of the number of citizens gunned down by members of the protective services. What is even worse, Mr. Vice-President, the Government invited a foreign professor Dr. Stephen Mastrofuski to advise on improving the police service.

Mr. Vice-President, how can you expect a foreigner to come here and spend a short time—a mere few days—and receive a few documents, especially the reports of the Police Complaints Authority—I am a member of the Joint Select Committee of Parliament that investigated and received the reports of the Police Complaints Authority. We have studied it at length, but they expected this foreigner, who received millions of dollars, to spend a few days to review it and then to tell us what we already knew: that citizens of Trinidad and Tobago lack confidence in the police investigating themselves. Mr. Vice-President, do you know what that reminds me of; wanting to go to El Tucuche but taking a taxi to “douendom”. [*Desk thumping*] [*Laughter*] I cannot understand that!

Mr. Vice-President, this Government has the responsibility to manage the nation's business effectively. In doing this, we expect the Government to present the nation with a clear statement of its policy agenda. This is the only way the Government will be able to demonstrate its claim to transparency and accountability. This has to be accompanied by a well-defined mix of programmes that are geared to deliver the goods and services to the nation in a manner that is

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consistent with its policy agenda. Hopefully, some day the programmes will be clearly defined so that we will know what their objectives are; what will be the benefits and, above all, who will be the beneficiaries. If we do not have these things we will not know what is taking place, in which event there will be a basis for the Government itself to monitor its own performance.

This will also be an opportunity for the Government to demonstrate its new-found ethos of transparency and accountability. The absence of this basic policy and programme audit trail will make it impossible for the Government to monitor its own performance. What is even worse, Mr. Vice-President, we on this side will not know what is taking place and the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago will not be able to keep a check on what is taking place.

Mr. Vice-President, the Minister claims and I quote:

“My Government is committed to good governance, for us, this means putting systems in place to ensure transparency, accountability, the highest level of efficiency and effectiveness, equity and adherence to the rule of law.”

The following questions must be asked: Where is the evidence that this systems approach has been implemented; is implemented; or will ever be implemented by this PNM administration? There is no evidence; just words, no deeds; no actions—they talk a lot and expect it to happen. That is the PNM’s performance. They just think about it and “Shazzam!” it appears. That does not happen any more. That used to happen long ago. This is another instance with the Minister just being elegant with the rhetoric but bankrupt when it comes to delivery. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Vice-President, for this budget to make fiscal sense, it should relate the planned expenditure for the current fiscal period to the Government’s policy agenda. This is where the proposed budget is radically flawed. It is most certainly not predicated on a clearly defined policy framework. What is also very clear is that most of the needs of the majority of the population are not being addressed. This is in spite of a \$28 billion budget.

Mr. Vice-President, do you know what Sean Monsegue got from this budget? He got a bullet. We have a \$28 billion budget and all we had in it for Sean was a bullet. Do you know what we had for some of the poor citizens? We had an increase in the cost of rice. [*Interruption*] Well, cassava is too expensive. You cannot afford cassava. I would not even consider cassava. The price of cassava is higher than the price of rice, every time.

Mr. Vice-President, we just cannot go on like this. When you look at what is taking place in Trinidad and Tobago; when you look at the budget; when you look

at the lack of the systems to deliver these services, we are in trouble. We are, basically, a nation in crisis.

I heard my distinguished colleague, Sen. Abdul-Hamid talk about the delivery of social services—I have no reason to doubt him. I am satisfied that his intentions are very good and that the systems that he would be putting in place would try to make it better. I have no doubt about that. Mr. Vice-President, on Sunday morning I visited Vernon Bhall Bridgelal, age 57; blind for a year and a half; living at No. 156 Lalbeharry Trace, Monkey Town Barrackpore; a blind person taking care of five grandchildren ages 4, 6, 8, 13 and 14, with no social services available to that person—real people.

I know that the Minister in the Ministry of Finance cares for the citizens that were displaced from Caroni (1975) Limited. I visited a family—I will call her Parbatee for today, she worked in Caroni (1975) Limited for 30 years. She is currently 50 years old. She got her severance benefit in the vicinity of \$57,000. She owed the Sugar Labour Welfare Committee \$40-something thousand and she owed the credit union an amount that exceeded what she got as a golden handshake, an enhanced voluntary separation package. Mr. Vice-President, when she settled the housing mortgage and the credit union, she went away still owing \$14,000. Today she irons for somebody twice a week. She does not have the money to pay the remainder of the mortgage and she is facing homelessness because she does not have an income. She has fallen into the category of low or no income; she cannot fend for herself; she is facing eviction some time in the future but we are still hearing about \$28 billion budget.

Mr. Vice-President, we are still hearing about care for Caroni (1975) Limited workers. I heard my distinguished colleague speak about the Government being a government that cares for people. Well, show some more care: “lick” down some more houses in Union Hall and then say you care; “lick” down the squatters in Wallerfield and then say that you care; “lick” down the squatters in Cashew Gardens and show them how much you really care. Mr. Vice-President, that is the care we are talking about, you know. “Lick” down every vendor you find everywhere and tell them you care. That is the \$28 billion budget and that is performance. What foolishness are we really hearing? [*Desk thumping*] Mr. Vice-President, we cannot care and then treat people like that. That is just not possible.

This administration cannot fool all the people all the time; it is just not possible. During the period of the United National Congress we were committed to building the John Humphrey free-flow interchange at the Uriah Butler/Churchill-Roosevelt Highways. This year would have marked—if we were

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not unceremoniously removed from office—the fourth year of our second term in office. The Uriah Butler/Churchill-Roosevelt Highways free-flow interchange would have been completed by now. [*Desk thumping*]

We have to ask where that money for that particular project has gone. Mr. Vice-President, \$150 million was put aside to do that project. We heard the Minister of Works and Transport say that they are considering it; they have now decided they would build it, but they will not build a free-flow interchange, they are going to build an interchange with traffic lights. Have you ever heard that kind of foolishness? Could you imagine that? They have a design to build an interchange at Uriah Butler/Churchill Roosevelt Highways with traffic lights—a controlled intersection.

Mr. Vice-President, they have Vision 2020; they want to make Trinidad and Tobago a developed State but they still want to look for a Third World solution; an interchange with traffic lights! I really cannot understand that. It does not make sense! It is not just possible that we should consider such a thing.

6.00 p.m.

Mr. Vice-President, that is “duoendom”, looking forward and walking backwards. This is just not possible.

The United National Congress was committed, while it was building that interchange, that it would do the improvement works at Aranguez and El Socorro, then do the improvement works at the St. Ann’s River at Sea Lots and then build a third lane. We started the third lane from Barataria straight up to the National Petroleum headquarters and from NP, we would have built a third lane, widened the river at Sea Lots and go straight down to Colville Street over-passing the Light House, therefore, operationalizing the free flow, improving the mobility of the area and allowing citizens to have the kind of access that they deserve. We cannot allow the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago to suffer the way they are suffering now. From the ACU Convention Centre in Freeport to the Light House on a morning is jam packed; the largest car parking lot in the world. Could you imagine the number of productive man-hours lost because the PNM did not construct the free-flow interchange and do the improvement works at Aranguez, El Socorro and on the way to Port of Spain?

Mr. Vice-President, in addition to that, and simultaneously to that the UNC would have constructed the overflow at Curepe so that it would free up the traffic there and then continue the extension of the Churchill Roosevelt Highway from O’Meara Road straight on to Wallerfield in preparation for the science park that we intended to build in that area.

We clearly demonstrated that we knew the infrastructural deficiency that existed in Trinidad and Tobago. We did not only recognize that deficiency and we did not just speak about it, we converted those words to deeds. The improvement of the Western Main Road from Westmoorings to the northwestern peninsula down into Chaguaramas—UNC.

Mr. Vice-President, you will recall the problem there was coming into and out of Maraval. We did the improvement works at the round-about in Maraval next to Kapok Restaurant and now there is an easier flow of traffic into and out of Maraval. A simple solution, but while we did that simple solution, we had in place the mechanism to develop a policy. We were considering either the use of the Maraval River for another roadway or a First World solution tunnelling from Maraval, possibly under the Queens Park Savannah coming out on Dundonald Street and having a free flow in and out of Maraval. That was the kind of plans we had in place. Not Third World solution and wanting to go to 2020. Not at all!

One will recall that for 20 years we suffered at the St. Ann's Roundabout. Mr. Vice-President, you saw it. We did not talk about it. They spoke about it. We built it; a multifunctional roundabout to allow mobility. We had the largest roundabout in the world around the Queens Park Savannah. Just based on the energy savings on a daily basis, based on traffic count, we recouped that money that we spent—\$856,000 every three days, just based on the energy savings around the savannah. [*Desk thumping*] What we had was the practical application of solutions that benefited citizens, not “ol’ talk”, not “small talk”.

Mr. Vice-President, you would recall how unsafe the roads used to be from Maraval straight on to Maracas. We improved the roadway from Maraval to Maracas. It is possibly the most breathtaking sight. It is now a safe road and we had in place plans to continue the road from Maraval straight on to Blanchisseuse. We are now three years into their term in office and nothing, nada, no plans, zero!

Mr. Vice-President, without—I want to show you the “ol’ talk” only “ol talk”. Instead of improving the road from Maracas to Blanchisseuse they are talking about building a road that we envisioned from Blanchisseuse to Matelot, but after having discussions with the environmentalists we concluded that if we built that road from Blanchisseuse to Matelot, we would not have in place the mechanisms to sufficiently police the environment in the area, based on our current track record of not being able to enforce any law in Trinidad and Tobago, that it will have been building road for monkey to run. People will harvest every bit of lumber you could find; there could be much degradation to the environment. After consultation with the national community; we thought that we should discontinue

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the process of designing the road from Blanchisseuse. That was part of the consultative process. We see now an arrogant administration giving itself the authority to say it is going to build the road. No consultation or anything; but let them go ahead. The only thing I take solace in is that they will talk about it but they just cannot do it. “Ol talk” again. The environmentalists in Trinidad and Tobago could be comforted by the lack of delivery and the old talk of this administration.

The highway to Point Fortin. This is the third year in this incarnation. The highway to Point Fortin was under consideration by previous administrations since 1966, PNM. Since 1966 we have been hearing talk about this road. They have designs. They acquired lands from Oropouche, at the end of the Mosquito Creek area going straight to Point Fortin. It was under this administration—and the Cross Crossing Interchange was part of the vision of the PNM. The PNM planned that project. In fact, it went to Cabinet in 1978 and got approval on the same day. The then Minister of Petroleum and Mines, the hon. Errol Mahabir took to the Cabinet on the same day, a road to be built from Beach Field in Guayaguayare to Picton, along the gas line, making a lot of good sense. It got approval on that same day and up to today nothing. Plans and no action. That is still a Cabinet decision, to build a road along the gas line from Beach Field to Picton, and nothing.

Mr. Vice-President, during our six years we implemented part of the PNM plan to build the Cross Crossing Interchange that was envisioned when the current Prime Minister was the Parliamentary Secretary in the Ministry of Works and Transport. We were happy to take the PNM plan—it was a good plan and we implemented it.

I am one of the persons who said that the PNM, it is not 100 per cent of the things they did is bad. There are some good things they did. There are many things I supported and there are many things that I saw them do that enhanced living conditions in Trinidad and Tobago, but they could have done more with the resources that we had. That is the point I am making. Not because it was a PNM project we left it there. There are many projects that they are discontinuing because they were UNC projects. That should not be possible. We in the UNC recognized that all previous governments made tangible contribution to where we are today. When we return to office we must take all the things they left, improve on them and build from there. We are not about reinventing things for reinventing sake. If they did good things, we continued it, we appreciated it and we moved forward. Our task is not to look backwards.

Mr. Vice-President, you would realize that I could identify all the infrastructural deficiencies that we have in Trinidad and Tobago at present. I cannot allow the highway to Point Fortin which I know, this is the third year that we have money in the budget. I could only ask: where the money gone? They have nothing to show. We had in place the entire detailed pre-feasibility and feasibility studies and we were at the design stage for the highway to Point Fortin. We commenced the construction of the extension of the Sir Solomon Hochoy Highway from Tarouba to Golconda. It was completed. We had in place five roads to cater for the needs of the entire southern area.

The first road and what would have been completed at this time if we were not unceremoniously removed from office was the continuation of the highway from Golconda through Wellington Village, Ramiah Trace, Boodoo Trace, LalBeharry Trace, Patiram Trace, Katwaroo Trace and on to Clarke Road. From Clarke Road the road would have turned west, a second road leaving Penal going through Charlo Village, Murray Trace, St. John's Trace, Akbar Trace, Avocat and on to Berridge Trace. From Berridge Trace in South Oropouche it would then go south straight to Roussilac, Grant Trace, S-Block, Parrylands, Guapo and on to Point Fortin, and along that road you would have a spur road from La Brea on to the extension of the Sir Solomon Hochoy Highway, part of the Highway from San Fernando to Point Fortin and then another road that would cater all the way from Penal to Erin, a parallel road.

Those things were in place. We had everything ready to go. This Government, in fact, put money into the budget, did not spend it—they spent it out. They do not have the money anymore. I am sure they did not spend it on the road to Point Fortin. All we could ask is: where the money gone?

Mr. Vice-President, this is the same administration that wanted to build an airport for four decades. They did not build the airport. They could not build the airport. But to their credit they wanted to build an airport in Tobago and to their credit, we have a vast improvement because in Tobago, the Prime Minister turned the sod about a year ago and said that it would be on time and within budget.

Mr. Vice-President, we have an improvement, something to show. In Project Pride, \$116 million was spent and nothing to spend. In Tobago, there is a scar in the ground. The money is finished and there is a cost overrun. We do not have drawings for it.

Mr. Vice-President, you travel there so you know. I am not telling you the things you cannot see. You saw it. Where the sewer is there are different levels.

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The contractor is off the job at least six months now and that is on budget and within time. So there is an improvement and it is to their credit. I do not want to discredit them. I want to credit them, I am looking for every opportunity to credit them. They turned the sod, there is a scar in the ground, they have nothing to show for it, the money done, and there is a cost overrun and nothing to show for it. I know my dear friend, “Stretch”, cannot take me on, on that because it is the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth.

Mr. Vice-President, we looked at the air bridge and I know that with the wet leasing of both aircraft there is an improvement for the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago to travel to and from. No doubt about it, but I am sure, you are beginning to wonder whether the existing local airline would be able to survive, because whereas you could not have gotten space before, now the foreign crew, the foreign aeroplane is travelling and one is seeing half the capacity. You must know that it is about to crash. If the poor job on the runway does not cause it to crash you know that the intervention of a foreign airline on a domestic air route, something unheard of anywhere in the world—Nowhere in the world would one hear about a foreign carrier serving a domestic market. It is just not acceptable.

I challenge this Government to find any country in the world where your internal travel is controlled by a foreign carrier. It is not just possible. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Vice-President, as I said there is improvement on the route but it is just a matter of time before you will have to rely solely on foreign carriers on your domestic route.

6.15 p.m.

Our dear friend, the Minister of Foreign Affairs will tell you that it is not acceptable in any country’s foreign policy. I have no doubt that he is a career diplomat, not a political appointee; a political appointee on this occasion, but a career diplomat with the knowledge that you do not give foreign carriers your domestic route. The same money they spent to wet lease those planes, they could have given it to the local carrier to buy two additional planes.

I recommend to this Government that they take a look at establishing a proper national carrier. We support the Government in the amount of money it puts into BWIA. We support the Government in improving and assisting BWIA as a national carrier. We take a lot of pride in BWIA. We warned the Government when they wanted to privatize it. We warned them not to, because we knew the importance of having a national carrier.

I could go on, on infrastructure, but suffice it to say that I think I have made my point in a clear and unambiguous manner; that this Government just talks about things, expect them to happen; they do not happen, all the money has gone, so we have to ask where. However, we must also remember where we could have been, had it been managed properly.

The nation's current social and economic circumstances dictate that there is an urgent need for a well-defined social policy. The Government needs to develop a social policy with clearly stated objectives. At the macro level, the policy should identify, at least the following:

- what it is designed to accomplish;
- the cost of the given social programmes; and
- who will benefit from the proposed programmes.

There must also be a clear statement of what are the eligibility criteria for benefits. This must be made explicit in order that all eligible parties can successfully qualify. In the absence of a clear understanding of how to qualify for benefits, there could be ad hoc decisions on the part of those with the responsibility for delivering the programme benefits.

Old age benefits should be revised. They must be made available to all eligible citizens who attain the age of 65. As it now stands, if you own a little house or have some fixed assets, you are not eligible for benefits. Universal old age pension benefits are an important step in developing Trinidad and Tobago. This is clearly a form of economic discrimination. In other words, because you were thrifty, worked hard, paid more than your fair share of taxes and saved for your retirement, the Government denies you old age pension benefits. While the individual who is age 65 and has no fixed assets receives full old age pension. This must be an inequitable situation. It is unfair in our given circumstances, where we have windfall revenues from high prices of oil and natural gas. According to the Minister, we are all entitled to an equal share.

When someone attains the age of 65 and over, he needs his share. He needs it then. Many people, to be able to qualify for old age pension, end up giving away what they have, putting it on other people's names to be able to qualify. They lose that; they do not get their old age pension, and they are out in the rain. They are worse off after the event. There are people telling lies to be able to meet the criteria. It is happening daily. It should be that when you reach age 65 you qualify. You collect your money and whatever you do with it is your business.

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More than 20 per cent of our population is in the low- or zero-income earner bracket. These citizens are economically challenged and should be eligible for some kind of income support. There are numerous ways in which this can be accomplished.

PROCEDURAL MOTION

The Minister of Community Development, Culture and Gender Affairs and Acting Prime Minister (Sen. The Hon. Joan Yuille-Williams): Mr. Vice-President, I beg to move that the Senate continue to sit until the end of the debate on the Bill.

Question put and agreed to.

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Sen. S. Baksh: Mr. Vice-President, this Government is insensitive to the needs of the nation's poor. However, they are quite busy at creating ways to satisfy the wants of their own at the expense of every taxpayer. Trinidad and Tobago needs to have a national pension plan in which every citizen would be eligible to make contributions from the first day of work; a plan built on compulsory employer/employee contributions. This way every citizen would be guaranteed a minimum income upon retirement. There are numerous national pension plans to use as a model, for instance, the Canada pension plan is well considered.

Instead of presenting a visionary social policy, the Minister talks about some mysterious 26 new programmes and my dear friend, in her maiden contribution, spoke about them also—programmes conceived for the widening of the social safety net. As usual the Minister is vague about all these magic programmes. Just imagine, 26 independent sectors of Government administering a part of a social safety net, in addition to all the other programmes. This Government has no idea of what it is planning—be it long-term, medium-term or short-term. As a matter of fact, it appears that the Government's concept of long-term is really yesterday. Their long-term plan is looking at yesterday.

My dear friend, Sen. Dr. Kernahan understands it well—looking forward but moving backwards. They seem determined to over-consume at every opportunity and, in the process, make zero provision for tomorrow. It is a today thing.

There is an expression with which I am sure we are all familiar—"trust week". Not for you, Mr. Vice-President, but in case other people do not know, "trust

week” is the second week of the pay fortnight. During that week the individual’s family depends on the village shopkeeper for credit, without which the family may be unable to survive. That is how this inept, incompetent, corrupt PNM administration likes to govern—as if it is “trust week”. It is a government without vision or strategy. As I said earlier, wanting to go to El Tucuche, but taking a taxi to “douendom”. It is not possible. It is the wrong taxi stand—wrong place, wrong time.

With regard to reform in the public sector, we are in agreement with the Minister when he says, “An efficient and effective public sector is an important element of good governance”. We agree totally.

Mr. Vice-President: The speaking time of the hon. Senator has expired.

Motion made, That the hon. Senator's speaking time be extended by 15 minutes. [*Sen. W. Mark*]

Question put and agreed to.

Sen. S. Baksh: Mr. Vice-President, having agreed with the Minister, I want to tell him that this is not the first time that the PNM tried to make loud pronouncements with regard to the reform of the public service. It was one of the major promises made by the Manning administration, 1991—1995. The question of public sector reform, however, has not advanced. It is still in the “talking-about-it” stage, which is a new stage that the PNM invented. They talk about it from now until “Thy Kingdom come”. Nothing happens.

The Minister makes frequent references to operating the public service in an efficient and effective manner. The Minister also frequently reminds this Senate and the public at large that his Government is both transparent and accountable to the public for its use of every tax dollar spent. Very good, but nothing is further from the truth. To date, this Government has made no systematic effort to demonstrate accountability or transparency in its fiscal conduct—none at all. They talk about it, but they have done nothing.

A basic prerequisite for public sector reform is accountability. That is to say that every individual or group of individuals who are entrusted with the use of taxpayers’ resources must be held accountable for how those resources are employed, whether they are in the public service, whether they are in the Ministry of Local Government or the Ministry of Health. They must be accountable.

They cannot have the responsibility and the authority, but no accountability. That is not possible. Accountability delayed is accountability denied. We must

understand that. The system of accountability must be such that it enables the auditor to conduct both managerial audits and financial audits. There must be both.

Let me explain by way of example. The financial accounting system will show how many sacks of cement and loads of aggregate were purchased for the Scarborough General Hospital. The management audit component of the system will show beyond any reasonable doubt whether the cement went to the Scarborough General Hospital or some other place. It would expose the details of cost overruns. Surely, such a system will have the capability of making it explicitly clear what happened to the material intended for use at the Scarborough General Hospital. This would provide an objective response to the public questions that are being asked both in Trinidad and Tobago: Where has the cement gone? Where has the aggregate gone? Where has the material gone? Those are the questions that people are asking and those are the systems that would ensure that when you ask those questions, you would have answers. There would be credible systems in place to back up those things. They cannot talk about accountability, probity and good governance otherwise. Those will only be words, not deeds. Accountability is a key part of the reformation process. No accountability, no reform. That is basic. It is not possible to have reform without accountability.

What does the Minister mean when he very frequently speaks about making the public sector more efficient? What does he mean since he speaks about improved efficiency? He must be aware that in order to calculate the efficiency of any operation, there must be a clear definition of the output, which the operation is authorized to produce. He must.

6.30 p.m.

Mr. Vice-President, I should add legitimate output and legitimately authorized. It must! They are prerequisites. What did the Prime Minister mean when, in another debate, he claimed that he wanted to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of the police service? Is he admitting that our police service is less than effective and less than efficient? If he is saying yes, then he must have had an analytic basis for making this statement, and a clear plan for reversing the situation. You do not talk for talking sake! You talk because you have a plan, you want to change things, you want to improve and because you want to know. It cannot be that the Government raised the price of gas and did not do any study on the impact on the population, because of the increase. Everything has run away!

Prices have run away because the Government has done that and it still does not know. If the Prime Minister did that analysis, he should have understood that.

Prior to making any attempt to improve the efficiency of the public service, there must be a clear delineation of what every arm of the public service is intended to produce. He must know that; whether it is in the police service, the teaching service, wherever it is, you must know what you want to produce. The process must begin somewhere. This is a challenge. It is a serious challenge, but a surmountable challenge.

The UNC conducted some preparatory researches and we were going to initiate and undertake them, well within our second term. In preparation for that research, we conducted a limited pilot project. This was done under the auspices of the Inter-ministerial Committee, approved by Cabinet and chaired by the then Prime Minister, the hon. Basdeo Panday, with the consultation of the IADB. The focus of this committee was to make a tactical intervention, geared to improve the rate of implementation of externally-funded priority projects, and keep projects within the PSIP. I had the privilege to be a standing member of that committee. We were pleased with what we learned and the international lending committee was also pleased with the deliverables. Although the Minister referred to effectiveness on numerous occasions, in his budget presentation, he has never really spelt out what is implied by effectiveness. I hope it is not just another buzz word for the Minister.

Briefly, a measure of programme effectiveness is a measure of the extent to which the Government is achieving the objectives of a particular programme. However, in order to measure effectiveness, or claim to be effective, the Government must state, with clarity, what is the legitimate objective it is attempting to attain with our taxpayers' resources. That is a must! One thing is clear, there is not an instant in this budget, for that matter anywhere else, that this Government can state unambiguously what it intends to accomplish—none. Not one!

Equally important, is how will the nation know that the mission has been accomplished? The Government is setting goals, but nobody knows when they are finished. A wonderful example of this is the very ambitious nature of the Government, in terms of Vision 2020. The Government speaks about Vision 2020, as if it was an approved policy. To the best of my knowledge, the document has not been approved by Parliament. Hence, it may be a PNM document.

Research conducted by the UNC indicates that there are several well-suited management systems that may be readily adapted to assist in any planned reform

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of our public service. One of the management systems is the planning, programming and budgeting systems (PPBS). This system was, and still is, used with considerable public sector success in both the United States and Canada. The Minister claims that the Public Sector Reform Programme will result in improved efficiency and effectiveness. This is not the first time that this claim is being made by the PNM.

I wish to assure Senators that there is no chance that any of these public sector reform objectives will be attained under this, or any, PNM government, for the simple reason, they are incompetent, uncaring and, above all, incapable of delivering any legal programme outputs. [*Desk thumping*]

For these reasons they will never design and implement any system of public sector management that is based on the fine principles of probity, prudence, due diligence, efficiency and effectiveness. Such a system will have the capacity of demonstrating, beyond any reasonable doubt, the total incompetence of this misguided Government. Minister, you have the rest of this fiscal year to prove me wrong. All you have to do is to develop and implement a system of accountability in any one Ministry. I challenge you!

Mr. Vice-President, public sector reform, under the PNM, is definitely not an option. Under this administration, with a budget of \$28 billion, we have a new group in our society. We understand that the society is constantly undergoing change. The family unit has undergone dramatic changes. The extended family home is not as prevalent as it used to be. Individuals are required to commute further distances to seek employment. When a job is secured, a lucky person must travel long distances. There are many persons who have to travel from places such as Cedros to Point Fortin and pay \$20 per day. Some travel from Matelot to go to work in Sangre Grande. Some travel from Rio Claro to go to work in Port of Spain. It is not uncommon for them to have to spend four to six hours on the road. There is a significant cost associated with working. The true cost is more than financial. Time is lost. This time could be utilized with the family.

We have to look at the real impact. We said that inflation is at 4 per cent. The price of a house is much more than it used to be, mortgage or not. It is difficult for most households to keep things going. Taxi fares are higher. All forms of transportation prices are higher. That action has a ripple effect. The doubles vendors' prices have increased, even the mauby vendors have to increase their prices.

There is a new group of people called "the working poor", which is being cultivated under this administration. For this group to survive, they have to do

some extraordinary things. They need to work harder, try to save and get their act together. The most desperate of this group are the individuals who find themselves in a job and see no real option to move on. There are others trapped between low income and zero income. This Government, in this budget proposal or anywhere else, has not addressed the plight of the working poor, yet the Minister is seeking the approval of this honourable Senate for the allocation of \$28 billion for fiscal 2004/2005. The poor and the working poor can no longer be ignored. They are entitled to an equal share of the proceeds of our national resources. The solution to this critical problem is not a hamper, a CEPEP job, a 10-days or a soup kitchen. This emerging issue must be addressed with some urgency. There are solutions, however, it is the responsibility of the Minister to seek and implement a socially viable solution.

Let there be no doubt that the UNC has given consideration to the issues I have spoken about and is willing to come to the rescue of this incompetent, uncaring and corrupt Government. All they need to do is ask. We who believe in national unity will be willing to go to its aid, just ask. The solution must be based on the sound principles of fairness but, above all, the solution must recognize the dignity of the working poor. We can no longer ignore the need for social justice. We must pause and pursue a direction that points towards the attainment of a just, fair and equitable society.

Mr. Vice-President, \$28 billion is a large sum for a country of our size, yet with all our resources and the aspiration of the Government for us to become a developed nation by 2020, our country is not a truly happy place. We are beset by problems in all the services provided by the Government. We see huge sums of money being wasted, with no sense of accountability. We live in fear, in an atmosphere of unabated, escalating crime. We continue to encounter policies which divide our nation. We still have unequal distribution of the fruits of our resources. In short, we are a nation in crisis. The time has come for our nation to make the changes necessary to take us forward so, from these dark days, we will see the light again and we can move forward, as one nation under God, where equality and respect for one another define us as a model in the family of nations. [*Desk thumping*]

I warn this Government, failing to recognize these imperatives and address the legitimate needs of our people, could be the cinder that would ignite the unstoppable social revolution. I thank you very much.

The Minister of Community Development, Culture and Gender Affairs and Acting Prime Minister (Sen. The Hon. Joan Yuille-Williams): Mr. Vice-President, would you believe I did not intend to speak this evening? I thought I

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was not feeling very well, but when I heard Sen. Prof. Ramchand, the first person to speak on culture, I felt that I needed to say something. I got a little life. After hearing Sen. Sadiq Baksh speak on social services, I said let me put my act together and make a contribution to this debate.

Let me, at this stage, congratulate the Minister of Finance and the Minister in the Ministry of Finance for the presentation of the budget. I would also want to extend my sincerest congratulations to the staff of the Ministry for documents, which were very well presented. They were most useful documents. [*Desk thumping*] I hope the Minister would extend our congratulations to his staff. It made our lives much easier. I think as we go through the period, looking at the budget and the budget documents, we would be much more comfortable because of the work they had done.

I cannot help but refer to the response to the budget very briefly. After the budget was presented, I awaited with bated breath, the response from the Leader of the Opposition. I was not in the Chamber. It was televised, so I could have sat in my office in comfort and look at it. I do not know if I should say thanks to Sen. Prof. Deosaran. It is a \$27 billion budget, with over 1.3 million persons listening and the others on the Internet and two women got honourable mention in the budget. I felt those two women had done something right, to attract the attention of the Leader of the Opposition, when there are things such as poverty, crime and many other things. One was referred to as a “Trojan horse with a sari”; clearly a strong woman. The other was referred to as a “broker”; that had to be strength. There was something about those two women to attract the attention of the Leader of the Opposition on a day like that. I smiled. I wanted to call my colleague and say here we are, centre stage. I wanted to thank him for recognizing our strength. I also wanted to tell him that is what PNM women are; very strong women. [*Desk thumping*] We command centre stage. We are given a job to do and we do it well.

My colleague, Sen. Baksh has left. The Minister in the Ministry of Finance has 9,000 workers and is taking care of 36,000 families. The Minister of Education has a \$15 billion plan. She is taking charge. The Minister of Public Utilities and the Environment is in charge of a very essential part of this country. The Minister of Planning and Development is another strong woman. We also have the Minister in the Office of the Prime Minister (Social Services Delivery). There is where we are. [*Desk thumping*]

When you come to the Parliament, you tell people what you have done or what you intend to do and listen to what other people do, rather than following

LeRoy Clarke, when he was doing his creative work, looking for airy-fairy somewhere along the forest. This is a business place. This is a place where we work. We do a lot of work. Although LeRoy is my friend, and I like what he does, I am quite sure he never intended to take those legendary figures in the way in which some people tried to portray them.

6.45 p.m.

To add insult to injury, you then get support from persons who feel that this is something to make a theme, so they support it. We talk about facts and we talk about figures, and we leave the fiction for other times. [*Desk thumping*] So, I am going to talk about facts this evening. Before I do that, there is one other point that I must address.

This year has been probably my year, because sometimes the journalists will find something nice to write about me. You do not pelt a tree when it does not have nice fruits. The journalists were writing their thing. I do not want to talk too much about these matters, since one of the matters is a subject of the law. I will leave that matter out. This matter came up several times.

There was a big article in a Sunday newspaper saying: “Minister running up Hilton bills”. A Senator here found that was so exciting, so he took the Minister to the Integrity Commission. The Minister is again in that position so she will be staying at the Hilton Hotel tonight. [*Desk thumping*] The Integrity Commission sent for the bills and then they sent back the most charming letter exonerating the Minister. There was nothing wrong with that. That same person has no faith now in the Integrity Commission.

Sen. R. Montano: Why? I am so surprised.

Sen. The Hon. J. Yuille-Williams: So, I will move on. Therefore, they will continue to do that, and we will continue to do what we know we have to do in the way we should do it. When you do things and you do them right, then you have no fear, you just have to keep going on. We survive on helping people and on goodwill. So, people tell you whether they feel that you are performing well or whether you are not performing well. You have to listen to what persons have to say and then move on. When we sit in this Parliament that is what we do.

We were very fortunate to get very uplifting comments from some persons here. I will refer to one or two of those comments. Other comments were like a theatre show. I have been in the Parliament for a long time and, clearly, I have listened to some of the same contributions over the years, and I will listen to them again, because they are like replays.

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There is something that I need to say to everyone, and this came out in an article. People still do not understand the work that I have to do. There are 1.3 million-plus people in Trinidad and Tobago, and I am the Minister of Community Development, Culture and Gender Affairs. All the people are important to me, therefore, I have to find ways and means of dealing with everyone in the community. People are talking about national unity with one side of the face and on the other side of the face they are talking about discrimination and alienation. They are also saying do not talk to these persons; do not work with these persons; and to work with only certain persons. Think about what you are saying. We are not going to pay lip service to citizens who want to get things done in their communities. There are other persons who are purporting national unity. We look at all the people; we have to work with all the people.

With respect to my job, I have to work with the ex-prisoner, just as I have to work with the ex-priest. They are all important to me. I work with a number of persons in a Ministry and they work 24/7 per week. They go to all parts of Trinidad. I will tell you some of the new exciting things that we are doing to reach out to the people. If they go, then I go as well. I cannot go to all the places where they go, but sometimes they will tell me that I have to go. So, whether I go from Laventille to Lengua or from Barataria to Barrackpore, I have to go. I want to make it quite clear that those who find that I should only meet with a certain type of persons, because certain names are ascribed to these persons, will not deter me. Those are the same persons who will come to the Parliament and say: what are we doing for the people and people need help. My ministry is to provide that help for everyone, and I will do it without fear. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Vice-President, let me tell you something. I do not turn my back on the people. I cannot do that. Sometimes I wonder why some people who should stay and help, turn around and say no. Sometimes in our lives, we see the need to go out there with the people and, at other times, we just cut it off and leave the people behind.

I listened to Sen. Baksh just now when he talked about the social programmes. He talked about discrimination; he talked about alienation; and he talked about a family somewhere in Barrackpore—a blind person taking care of other persons. I put all of that together, and what I made of it was that some persons are not aware of all the programmes that are there.

I remember Sen. Abdul-Hamid said in the Senate that we had produced a manual with our social programmes, but that is not enough. The Ministry has

several radio programmes. There are radio programmes during the day and during the evening. I have all my officers on the radio, at different times, talking about these programmes. We pay a lot of money to get it out. We use Gayelle television from 10.00 a.m. to 12.00 noon. You will always see members of my staff on that programme. We are trying to reach the people, and we are doing it because we do not wish anyone to be left out.

We have another programme called: Street Theatre, where we have groups going out. The last day we were in Rampanalgas. We go to different places and talk with persons on the streets, because we have to meet those persons out there, who are not listening to the radio; who are not looking at the television; and who are not reading the newspaper. We also spend a lot of money on the newspaper advertisements. We have to find other methods of getting out there. That is why our officers are out there on the streets. There is a new Street Theatre series now and we are going all around the island with that programme. The purpose of the Street Theatre is to let people know what is happening in the Ministry and how they can access some of the programmes, and we are also teaching them things. I want to tell you where we got the idea for this Street Theatre and where it is going to lead us.

When we looked at our figures—I want to congratulate the Ministry of Finance for some of the programmes—

Sen. Seepersad-Bachan: Mr. Vice-President, I do not want to take up too much of the Minister's time.

Sen. The Hon. J. Yuille-Williams: You are quite free to do so.

Sen. Seepersad-Bachan: I am not into all this community affairs and so forth, but over the last year, I have been observing the number of persons who have been coming and asking for help. You have just mentioned that you are spending so much money on radio programmes and advertisements in newspapers. Would it not be better to spend some of that money in putting your people into community offices where they can actually reach out to people and get feedback and address whatever concerns and questions they may have? People are still saying that they cannot access these programmes.

Sen. The Hon. J. Yuille-Williams: I agree with you and we are doing that. We have people in the Ministry of Community Development, Culture and Gender Affairs offices; we have forms in these offices; and we have representatives for constituencies and so forth. That is why I mentioned Sen. Baksh's issue when he raised it. We have community development officers who are in these offices and

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there are forms in these offices. We have village council meetings, and there are still persons who do not know about these programmes, and they are the ones we have to meet. You could say what you want. The people on the block are not going to any one of these offices. Some of those persons do not go to these offices, but there are some persons that you have to reach out to by other means. This is not easy.

Mr. Vice-President, we have not only recently started community development, this has been here for years. What we have been doing is adding strategies to get the message out, and we are doing it without fear. If you have a strategy that you feel would assist us, certainly, we could talk about it. The point is that I have to get that message out and I am using all those methods that I have highlighted to get the message out.

Sen. Seepersad-Bachan: Madam Minister, I am just adding a suggestion. What I am saying is that for some reason, your community officers probably need to monitor more, because they are not reaching out to the people. Maybe they are being blocked by community officers. These are the complaints that we are getting. People are walking through the area and there is an increasing trend where people are saying that the community offices are not giving them service, and so much money is being spent. Why are the people not accessing these programmes?

Sen. The Hon. J. Yuille-Williams: The community officers cannot do it alone. Do you know how many officers we will need to go into all these areas? They alone cannot do it. We have non-governmental organizations and they are also helping us to do the work; and we are partnering with a number of other persons. We have a domestic violence hotline. We could not run that programme so we have partnered with Families in Action and we are paying them to run that programme for us. There are several TDCs around. We cannot do it alone. We pay those agencies to do it for us. We need everyone in here to get the message out. There is a large portion of the population out there that is in need of help.

We have also asked the churches to come forward to assist; and we have also asked the Lions Club and the Rotary Club to assist us. So, we need to reach the people. What my people are mainly doing is getting out there and meeting the people. This is Trinidad and Tobago. I am glad that the Senator has that concern. You will understand why I say that we work 24/7 per week. We cannot sleep. We meet groups late at nights, early in the day, and even on Saturdays and Sundays. We work all the time and some people are still not getting the message. We will

not give up. We have to keep trying. I am glad that you are concerned, and if you wish to help, let us please do so. The fact of the matter is that we have to get the message out there and we have to get it out to everyone.

One of the things that people do not understand is that when we go to some of these communities, we have to communicate with certain persons to get in otherwise we cannot get into these communities. You have to partner with someone to get into the community otherwise you will stay outside. My business is to get into the communities, and then I have to do what I have to do, to move into some of those communities.

We are using the Street Theatre. You will know the two popular figures: Roy and Gloria. Roy is on my staff. I had to think of someone who would help with this Street Theatre. So Roy is on the staff. We did a programme called “Defining Male Excellence”. When we looked at the participation figures of these programmes in the Ministry, we noticed that in the Adult Education Programme there were 9,600 women and 1,000 men. Even in the Geriatric Adolescent Programme (GAP) there were 826 women at one time and only 30 men. We noticed that there was an imbalance. So, we decided to do some programmes for senior corporate men. We have trained about 70 men and they have now joined us voluntarily. They are now going out into communities and speaking with other men. They plan the drama for the Street Theatre and they go out on the streets—outside the inns; outside the bars—because they have to reach people and talk to them, and that is how they try to make the connection.

We had something called the Community Safety and Enhancement Group. This is something like the Neighbourhood Watch Group. We have the Community Safety and Enhancement Group in all areas. Gulf City has one programme and their focus is on safety. When we go to some of the depressed areas, we will do the enhancement side first, and then we will look at the other areas. By forming these groups and having these Street Theatres people have started asking for different things.

7.00 p.m.

Mr. Vice-President, in forming those safety and enhancement groups, we were able to bring streets together, for example, in Laventille, which had not been together for nine years; there were feuding people. Northwest Laventille was practising in a garage; they could not go into the community centre for many years. As a result of the Street Theatre and the very informal way of talking and seeing everything played out before them, they let Northwest Laventille up there.

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I want to tell you something about my Best Village Programme. Best Village is supposed to bring communities together, but it also lives the lives of the community. Those of you who saw Laventille perform at Queen's Hall—they lived the life of the people of Laventille. When next you hear Northwest performing, go and see them; they pictured themselves. At some point in time in the play it showed that everything had gone; people had died and whatnot, then somewhere in the play, a voice sang. There was someone called “the Hammer”—you must know Rudolph Charles. He came in the spirit from out there, not a “douen”, a real man. They designed the play in such a way to show that Rudolph Charles was able to pull the people together. Do you understand what I mean? When you look at a play like that, it tells you something. They saw him as someone who had led them. His prowess came through playing the steelpan. We used a lot of culture in those areas to help bring people together.

I have to use all the strategies available to me. I use the community police, but they are part of my Community Safety and Enhancement Group; they work really hard. We have got to keep it going and, have no fear, it will happen, as long as people support it. Sen. S. Baksh knows exactly what I am saying; he knows those people up there. He knows that you have to keep working with them, because sometimes they fall off and come back. As soon as you do something and they ask for it, you have to deliver and you have to keep moving. Now some of them who were supposed to be impeding, are trying to pull the groups together. You could not walk on one side of the road; you could not cross the road; all that happened; that is the job I undertook when I swore to that oath. I have to do it. That is the job our members do as well. I needed to share that with you.

We have several programmes. Some persons call the names of the programmes and laugh at them. You have to set programmes to serve different groups. We have several types of programmes, because people are quite different: age-wise, religion-wise, urban, rural; people have all kinds of different interests. I am sorry Sen. Augustus is not here. We try to fit people into the different programmes.

We do not want to go just to the end of the training; we are trying to move to the next step; so I have the export centres, the Retired Experts Programme (RAP) and so on. In the RAP programme we took the junior secondary school children in their free time and put them into a proper surrounding where they could be helped with home work, sports and so forth. With Laventille, in particular, as we formed these groups, they asked us if we could get people to help them with literacy. I just had to remove the barrier from the RAP, from just the adolescent time. I had

to carry it up a little and make it flexible to include some of these people. They are comfortable with some of the people in their own community as teachers, because they feel that they know those people. I am not bringing in anybody else.

If they have community centres, we use them. If they do not have community centres, we try to use temporary places, because people want to do these programmes. You will be surprised at the number of them who say, "We want that as part of it." We try to get the literacy people to come in and help us. The programme is very dynamic and flexible; you have to move according to the needs of people, where they are and provide them for what it is.

I am glad Sen. S. Baksh came in. When I heard you talk about the blind person, I said to myself that there was a placement service within the ministry, where we give caregivers; probably, you are unaware of it. We cannot get the message to everybody, but I thought that I would tell you who was the person responsible and get the name of your person after. The Government provides caregivers for persons. If there is an elderly or disabled person, the Government will pay the caregiver to stay with that person.

There are cases where persons have asked us if we have trained people to give them, because they could pay for their own family. If they cannot, the Government pays. Hearing about the case Sen. S. Baksh spoke of, I know we can get a caregiver, somebody from the area who has been trained, to go to that person; have them benefit from it. We have placement officers, but there are a number of people in this country. It is difficult to find out about everybody, therefore, it takes people like us to report persons like that so we could move toward them.

With the whole business of community development, we have lots of programmes. Every other Tuesday we sit with the Prime Minister, who is Chairman of the Coordinating Committee of the Social Sector. We sit and work out the programmes together, because if we do not, we might have some programmes doing the same things and wasting finances or personnel resources. We have to present a programme in PowerPoint, say what it is about, the audience we will be targeting, the beneficiaries and the cost, before it is approved. When a programme is accepted, it then goes to the Cabinet and we move on it. It is not that I just dream up a programme and put it in. It goes through a process, which I think is excellent.

Now we have this little manual, which I know will go far. Who is going to read it? Probably, the non-governmental organizations or people in the society who will tell other people, when they come to them, that we have these manuals and so on. Can anybody here tell us how best we can get the message out? Our

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business is getting the message out. The way funding is given to the ministry, we can fund programmes that are not even on our list, but which people find essential. We can create a programme and fund it through CARE. I hope that you will recognize that we need to get the message out. People say that we are getting it on the leaves, but not the roots. These programmes will, certainly, go a long way to help people.

I am proud of my nontraditional skills people; the women who have learnt these skills. As a result of that programme, a number of women are more marketable, but that does not mean they are going to take the jobs available to them, very easily. I am moving now from community development to another important aspect of the ministry, the Gender Affairs Division. *[Interruption]*

Sen. Seetahal: The last statement you made about the manual. If you remember, two years ago I had asked about a list of the programmes and I had been then assured that it would be put into book form. At least, we should get a copy of the manual or, at least, the public can be told where to access it, because nobody knows where; it is a secret.

The second point may not necessarily fall under your ministry, but you talked a lot about it, community empowerment. I feel that drug rehabilitation programmes are necessary to get communities, like the ones you spoke about, out of the drug scenario. I said it here already and I am saying it again. You talked about people “on the block” and that is something we have to attack. I do not see anything of substance in the budget to deal with that.

Sen. The Hon. J. Yuille-Williams: I am glad you raised that one, and I did take a note of it; similarly, as you raised the issue of an AIDS programme. Let me, probably, spend a minute on it, before I move forward.

The manuals have been done. We have had them come forward; they have been accepted by Cabinet, so they should be out for printing. The last time I heard that we were going to do 100,000 copies. I think we need to almost double up on that number. Let me assure you that we are going to move very fast on getting those manuals out. Although there are people who will go through the manual, we still need to tell people about the programmes.

Sen. Seepersad-Bachan: Where will they be?

Sen. The Hon. J. Yuille-Williams: They will be in all the committee offices. I am sure Sen. Abdul-Hamid will ensure that everybody gets a copy. In the Parliament, we will have copies; we are going to send them to NGOs, other groups, community development offices and wherever they can be, because there

is a lot of work we can do out in those offices. One of the things I will be doing this year with those offices will be to upgrade them a little, so people can find them, because some people do not know where they are. We are going to have to make them look like offices, so people can find them.

This year, we will have the community skills bank within those offices. We want to find out how many people are employed and what skills they have. We will be doing that data collection within all those community development offices, so you can easily go to the skills bank within your area and register “unemployed” or whatever skills you have. It is not an unemployment agency, but people will be able to get data from them. We disaggregated it so you see “male” or “female”.

In terms of AIDS, I know what Sen. Seetahal said was her concern. I am not going to hold too much in the fact that we are not going to use much more money than that, because all the ministries are supposed to be part of the whole AIDS assault. Within my ministry, we have what is called the “Rural Women’s Programme”. For example, we started in Moruga, where we spent a long time and trained 40 women to be tutors and counsellors. We sent someone to Canada, who came back and did the training. They live in Moruga and are now working in Moruga. At the Basse Terre Community Centre we have set up an education centre with manuals, a television and whatnot, so people can go there and get counselling and advice. We are moving that programme all around. We have also gone to Barrackpore. This is for the rural women and it is all from the Community Development Ministry to the entire programme. It might not have been said there, because it came under community development, but you may have heard it on the radio, because we have been all around with it. So even though I see \$35 million allocated, I am not worried. I know you would like to see a larger figure to have the confidence that something is being done. I should really raise it, but I know work is being done.

Sen. Seetahal spoke about the drug rehabilitation programme and the fact that it was only at Piparo that she has seen work being done. In addition to that, we would have had lectures from Community Development and drug rehabilitation, but it is not sufficient; therefore, it is one of the areas that we have to look at again and highlight, because a large number of persons who we meet out there are addicts. Therefore it is one of the areas that probably we need to look at.

One of the things that the Ministry of Community Development, Culture and Gender Affairs has done this year, and we are very happy about, is that at last we have finished the National Gender Policy. We have been talking about it for a long time. We have worked on it very extensively and soon we will all be able to

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have it. I thank the Centre for Gender Studies that worked along with us to get this document prepared. I will not go very much into what the document entails, but I know it tells you that, at the end of the day, we should be able to have certain changes and that there are certain bits of legislation which we need to bring to the Parliament, as a result of this gender policy. When this document was being done, the whole business of sexual harassment was noted. We have already moved away from that, but there are others. Some of the legislation need to be updated. I think occupational health and safety legislation is also in here, one part that had something to do with some kind of discrimination, in terms of workplaces. I think there are about 10 pieces of legislation that we need to work on to fulfil the requirements of this document and then we have to get some three other bits of new legislation to go with the policy.

This policy will soon be made available to all of us and then we will move on to the legislation. I thank all those who helped us to work on this. One of the nice things about this policy is that it is going to help us in the area of the collection of data. We do a lot of collection of data but, in many cases, it is not disaggregated: male, female, as the case may be, and that does not give us a true sense of what we are looking at. Everything you see in here is, for the first time, disaggregated. It gives us a better idea, even for the programmes we work with, as to the things we should do.

7.15 p.m.

Let me just move very quickly to Sen. Prof. Ramchand who talked about culture. We have a draft cultural policy, and probably he may not have felt any movement and asked about the consultation, because the consultation for the cultural policy was not as extensive as that of the gender policy where we spoke to everybody in Trinidad and Tobago.

When we got to the ministry, there was so much from so many attempts that the best thing to do was to look at all, pull them together, get a draft, and move with it rather than start anything which would have taken too long, because we wanted to have it finished.

So this is what we have as the draft cultural policy which we will now send to everyone so they will be a part of the discussion for culture. I want to get into some of the strategies we want to do for culture this year.

Firstly, we want to have this cultural policy finished by the end of this year; and, secondly, the development of the cultural industries. I think that is what Sen.

Prof. Ramchand was talking about, and he was particularly looking at the music industry.

If you talk about the music industry, one could say it is revolutionary in terms of the culture because normally it is developmental and we are not into that industry, but we had to look at it and I am quite glad to let you know that we have moved into the music industry; whether we had been forced into it or not but we are there now.

To let you know how fast we have to move, in the year 2006, soca will be a part of the Grammy Awards, and to get our people participating, we have to move fast and put a lot of funding behind it to get them there.

For example, to get selected, people must hear your music and to get your music out there, you have to have proper CDs and videos. We have the talent, but our artistes do not have the resources to do it. We are therefore now at the point of looking at the artistes and trying to attach other well-known labels to them to move them forward.

Sen. Baksh: Mr. Vice-President, I wonder if the Minister will pursue the minimum local air time in terms of the national broadcasting policy. I think it is a good step and an important one in the culture.

Sen. The Hon. J. Yuille-Williams: I do not know if I have to force that right now and I will tell you why. With the coming of Gayelle, which we supported, and the coming of the local radio stations: Iwer has one, Kenny Phillips has one, you will notice that a number of local people have now moved to local contents. Some of those radio stations may very well lose some of their patronage because of the competition.

Automatically, people just moved into those areas, and if you look at some of the East Indian radio stations, they have their people and are playing East Indian music, we are just looking at the trend and we may not even have to go further.

In fact, some of those producers are telling me to look at the trend, so we are looking at the trend to see if it is necessary, because we would not like to restrict people of their constitutional right and so forth. Remember at one time we were going in that direction, but as we have opened up and allowed community radios and television stations to come in, we have noticed that they are getting a lot of patronage, and those who want to hear their music turn to those stations. You will hear persons saying that you get a licence for a certain area, but it is so powerful that it is coming up in another area, and the reason that is being said is because

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people can pick them up in certain areas and they are losing their patronage. I listen to what you are saying, but let us look at the trend to see what is happening.

Let me just go back to what I was saying to Sen. Prof. Ramchand about this station. This year we are on two things: one, we are trying to get some of our popular artistes with labels abroad so that they can move very quickly, because soca belongs to Trinidad and Tobago and when you hear the Grammy, you hear the winner is from somewhere else. So we have a challenge. Nobody knew it was going to move so fast but we have a challenge.

Secondly, we are now awarding some scholarships. I have documents for sound engineering and production and for this year we are moving in a different direction in culture. We are doing scholarships in a number of areas that will interest them and allow our people to take their places.

We can do some at the Creative Arts Centre at the University of the West Indies and we are going to get scholarships there, and we are doing some with two of the more popular radio labs in Trinidad, and in one case we are bringing in a consultant to help us. We are doing that so we can move forward.

I know when you look at the budget you will say you did not see that amount of money, but have no fear, it will be done. We are also moving into the film and video production this year and there is someone from Barbados who we are going to be having in Trinidad. She has started what you call a film on the block, or film in the community in Barbados which we found to be extremely good.

Just as we go out to persons who are not employed, of the things that we are doing, that became the essence of our movie, and in order to structure and develop it, the skills we are training the people are there. There are some people who probably never thought they would see the beginning of a film industry in Trinidad and Tobago, they will now get the opportunity to do it. She said she had a wonderful time last afternoon watching a string of Bajan films. Yes, Bajan films starring Bajans, produced by Bajans, written and directed by Bajans.

In trying to find opportunities for the film and video, the Creative Arts Centre is helping us and we were able to use this and we are putting it together, it is a Caricom sort of thing. I am using both together, and we are going to get the beginnings of a film industry bringing people in who never dreamt of being in a film, but so much of the talent is there.

They can now showcase the communities so different people can see different communities and that is part of what we really want to do. Trinidad is such a

diverse community and people do not know each other and they do not understand each other and I am really interested to see how best we can get people to appreciate each other and their culture.

If you go to the videos or television everything is so near that you can learn about other people all over the world very easily. We need to do some of it in Trinidad and Tobago and I feel that part of our problem, even with bringing our different races together, is the fact that we do not know each other's culture. So our education programme this year is to expose the different cultures in such a way so they can understand.

On Sunday, I stopped off at a Ramleela celebration. I am supposed to know exactly what it means, what it depicts, I am supposed to know the lesson that it is portraying—

Sen. Anmolsingh-Mahabir: Madam Minister, did Ramleela get any funding for this year, or will they get any?

Sen. The Hon. J. Yuille-Williams: The answer is yes, yes, yes. I will come back to you and the funding part. Now, I am supposed to know that, I am in Trinidad, and people passing who are just looking on may ask: What are they burning there? Why is there that large flame? People are not appreciating it. They should look at it and understand the story.

One of the ways we felt we could do that was through the education programme which is quite different from what we had done this year. We are going to have them televised, we are working with some of the groups who did it so we can show it to the community and they can understand what it is. So when a celebration comes around, people would not desecrate it because they understand.

I think half of our problem is that we do not understand. I remember earlier this year we had a programme for Ramleela, with the organizers. We wanted to extend it to the story which everybody can understand. You can sit at home and see it, you can go to the place and understand it and because I like writing I am hoping that we can write stories of it.

We do not find things written in such a way that you can understand, so there is no sense in talking about education programmes without writing. So in the Culture Division, we are going to try to write these things down for all the different programmes.

Mr. Vice-President: The speaking time of the hon. Senator has expired.

Motion made, That the speaking time of the hon. Senator be extended by 15 minutes. [*Hon. D. Montano*]

Question put and agreed to.

Sen. The Hon. J. Yuille-Williams: Let me move quickly. When I was in Tarouba on Sunday and I asked them if they got their funding, some of them did not. This afternoon, I saw a listing of all the individual groups and I think before the week they will all receive their funding. Divali funding will be out before the week is finished, and that is a large amount. One of the things I am trying to do is to ensure that people get funding ahead of time.

One difficulty with the funding subvention is that because of the way groups are structured, the national organization can apply and give it to all the different groups, but sometimes it does not work out that way. But then I do not know who are the groups affiliated with the national organization so I have a problem. At the moment, I am funding them all, and while that is happening, I just have to fund the national organization with a certain sum. A number of groups write, my officers see them, and I have to fund them. So we are really trying to fund all the groups and I think we have been doing extremely well. This is part of the new thrust we intend to do for culture.

Let me just move very quickly to three other areas in culture. Of course, you know our Junior Best Village is going on and I want to use that as part of the education programme, and I am tapping into that more than into the Senior Best Village. In the Junior Best Village we have summer camps and each represents a different ethnic group, so the kids are living the lives of the persons.

On Friday, they will be at the savannah in an extravaganza, but they spend their 12 or 14 days at the camps. If it is a Spanish camp, they live the life of a Spanish; if it is an East Indian, they live the life of an East Indian and all the races that are in Trinidad. The Syrian/Lebanese were with us last year and thank goodness they are with us this year.

The children dress, eat, wear clothes, dance and sing. If we could get those kids doing it all the time, they would certainly learn to appreciate others. This is the second year of the experiment, we like what we see and we are going to continue with it, and we are putting it on the education programme.

Let me just make a few statements in terms of the large groups we have to deal with. Of course, there is carnival, and that is moving on, and I will not take

up time with it. Then we have pan, mas and calypso and I know a lot of people are going to ask questions about them.

One may have noticed that the NCC was in charge of carnival and now gives to each of the bodies subventions for the year, and that was done during the time of the administration before us, but the money was given to the groups, and they did not have the management capability to handle it. Even though the money was always short, it could not go the full distance because of the problem with management.

They were to get the money for five years and were to be self-sufficient by then, clearly, that is not so and they still have to continue to get it, and we have to do something about it.

For pan, this year they have come forward with a proposal that they have groups led by very famous people to help them. I am watching to see how well that will go.

7.30 p.m.

A lot of money is spent. We cannot get the sponsorship that we need to get, although they have put something inside there, but we are hoping that we would get the sponsors to come up with the funding for some of those, and take the tax incentive that is there. But for some reason it has not worked very well and we are still going to pursue it to see why, because if you have this tax incentive, then sponsoring should be something that you would want to do. So we want to pursue that and ensure that people know about it and that they can do it.

The making of pan is a big industry in this place, but for some reason we cannot get the pan tuners as often as we want. When I looked at it, the pan tuners have become a small set. So this year we have 100 people learning to make pans that cost us nearly \$2 million, but I think it is money well spent. At the end of it we would have a cottage industry. Where the block is, is the chroming of the pans and we are now working with Pan Trinbago to see if we can set up a chrome factory. We have got one from abroad. There is one here that they wanted to sell us, but they told us the technique is bad. So we are now working with one from abroad and shortly we should be able to set up a chrome factory. So even if in the early stages you are making up the pans in your cottage industries, you could have the place where you can have them chromed, which is very expensive.

We are also trying to work with them to set up a warehousing where we will import all the accessories; the wheels, the pipe and all of that. It is a lot of money.

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So they are now working very feverishly to set up that. That should help to cut down the cost considerably.

We have a lot of people at the National Steel Orchestra and we felt that we wanted to give them literacy programmes so we are going to attach trained pannists with associated degrees from NIHERST to bands so that they can learn the music, because it takes a long time when you have to do it by ear and we felt it was time for them to move forward. So they would have that to learn the music.

Finally, as you know, Pan Trinbago had started its headquarters. It is not finished, and I am sure this Parliament will not disagree that we need to put some money into it to complete it. This is the home of the pan, so we need to complete that. I think at the end of the day, with the chrome factory, having the pan there, starting up a small industry—a pan made in Trinidad and Tobago, the national musical instrument, is a branded thing. It will go much further than “Made in China”. So we do not have a fear of competition from China. What we need to get are pans made in Trinidad and Tobago as we move on.

With respect to calypso, we have worked with TUCO. We spent one year with TUCO doing institutional strengthening. I think that they have improved. They have moved to new headquarters now. They are forming companies. They are trying to get themselves involved in such a way that when the World Cup starts they are part of the action and they are in a business. So we are trying to get these into business areas so that they could set themselves up. From November 08, we are going into some courses: Enterprise, marketing, events management, singing, composing; really good courses done under the aegis of some people from the IOB for Pan Trinbago, TUCO and people from the Ministry. It is going to be a year-long programme with good certification. But at the end of it all, we should have a better cadre of trained personnel in Trinidad and Tobago. It takes a long time to do it; it takes a long time of talking and working with people, but it has happened.

Let me also just tell people that sometime last year when we helped a tent there was a big noise about it, but we have to help. If we do not help, we would lose it. We had pan; we had chutney. We must help to get them up, because if this year we do not help people to find spaces, the tents would be closed, because they are just not strong enough to find the spaces. If you want to keep people coming here and spending their money, the Government has a responsibility. When it will end, I do not know, but while this is happening and the need is there, as a government, we have to help. So you are going to hear us helping again to keep things going, to make things happen.

The one we have the most difficulty with is the soca and tomorrow evening we have the prize giving. I know you all are going to talk a whole lot about it, but there are some times the Government will have to meet with the persons from the soca fraternity to talk about relationships, how it could be helped. We have been helping to bail people out, but that is not always the best way. We cannot continue doing it and there must come a time when you must stop and say, "Let us work this out together and see how best it can happen."

Therefore, after their prize-giving tomorrow, before they say anything about next year, we have to sit with them and say, "We have come in as a government and helped you with prize money." Because artistes pay a lot of money and I need those artistes to stay in competition. That is their stage; that is where they practise; that is where they get their strength to go abroad; that is how they are going to do their thing to get into the Grammys. And if you put on a spectacular show here, they sell these things abroad. They need a competition and if private enterprise had it and it is not working, somewhere or the other, while we are working it out, we have to help them. Some people do not see it and say it is a private enterprise. But we are looking at the artiste behind and we must find ways.

Other people help their artistes to come out. Rupee is doing very well, backed by the Government of Barbados, in soca. Trinidad and Tobago must do its part. Little has done well, because somebody was here—and you see when you have those big spectacular shows, scouts come in and they see your artistes and take your artistes. Therefore we have to prepare that kind of ground for them.

So there is a lot of work to be done in culture. Before I forget, the Academy for the Performing Arts, I have the brief here, done by UdeCOTT. It is going to be on 10 acres at the Princes Building Grounds. The National Academy is here. I know we have been saying for years it would have been here. It is going to be one of the more modern types. It is going to cater for all the performances, training, classrooms, workshops; I have it all in front of me here, which people would see. I know Sen. Prof. Ramchand is happy, because I heard him talk about it. I almost forgot to tell you we have it.

We would be teaching people here. We do not have a place to do some of this professional work. In the schools we now have theatre arts, but they do not have the kind of facilities. So here is one place where you are going to be teaching pan-playing, welding, tuning, some writing, all kinds of things; music, all types; dance, set design, film and television. This is the National Academy for the Performing Arts. This is one. Then in San Fernando where they renovated the Naparima Bowl, they are going to have a Centre for the Performing Arts also. We

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need performing space. We are hoping to work with the Education Ministry because I felt that in some of the secondary schools, even at that level, if we could get the stages and so, acoustically done, we could also have some performing space there. We have very little indoor performing space. We go to the Stadium, but that cannot cope with this type of work like this could do.

This is for dance, drama, the black box theatres, and all that kind of thing. This is about 1,500. We lost 200 when they renovated Queen's Hall, so that is smaller already. We already have problems, so I am all for this; I am 100 per cent behind it and I am anxiously pushing it and it is here. It is very much in the line of the one in Hong Kong, which is one of the better ones. So this is going to be right here at the Princes Building. The museum is going to stay, but the rest of the things will go. That is a 10-acre plot of land across there.

Sen. Mark: May I just ask the Minister whether she is aware that a certain portion of the Princes Building park has been appropriated by some particular company. I saw a car park. You know, on a Sunday, ordinary people normally would go there to picnic and a couple weeks ago I passed there and I saw a car park. I think it is managed by Atlantic LNG. So I wanted to know if the State had sold land to these people. They were actually dislocating ordinary people who would like to go there on a Sunday and picnic. So I wanted to find out if the Minister is aware of this.

Sen. Bro. Khan: My mind ran on—you have covered quite a bit of ground—the question of the painters now, the artists and possibly, too, to amplify a little more on the mas.

Sen. The Hon. J. Yuille-Williams: As I sat here and said pan and calypso, I said to myself, "I wonder when will Sen. Bro. Khan get up to ask me about it." We are using 10 acres. The car park facility is .3 acres, but that is part of the 10 acres. So have no fear. That goes. It is written here, that there is a car park, a hockey pitch, a tennis pitch and a passive recreation, 5.5 acres. So 10 acres would go towards this and they are making space on the other side of the Queen's Park Savannah to accommodate probably the passive recreation and that kind of thing.

At the Centre for Creative Studies, two things we are having down there. We have scholarships for documentalists. I did not say that one. We also have for Carnival Arts, which is also part of this Centre. I know you were going to ask, but you are so good at it—so we still have space for the carnival art at the Creative Arts Centre as well as in this Performing Arts Centre. But we also have scholarships and every year we do give scholarships. This year we have a list of scholarships again going there.

I know in terms of the carnival, the Senator has been doing quite well with that and you would ask me, well, why did we not stretch anything more with it; what else could be done to improve it. I think we would have great chances to show the Carnival even next year, because we are going to be launching the World Cup Cricket in Trinidad and Tobago, so we still have time for you to do some of the showing there.

But what you are talking about is teaching the children how to do it. The artists, the painters, all of those are catered for. Again, we do not have enough spaces, as you quite well know. There is money in for the renovation of the museum and to do that, we have to come this way, to take an extension for the museum so that we could even have a gallery. That is a lot to be done in that area. There is so much that we have not been developing that we would like to develop and we would like to expose our young people to.

I know I raced it all through, but I am hoping that you would be able to get an appreciation of some of the things that we are doing—

Sen. Dr. Kernahan: Madam Minister, I know you are very passionate about community development, as we all are, but part of the whole question of the development of communities is establishing the goals, establishing deliverables and establishing the success or failure rate of the objectives at the end of any particular fiscal year within a framework of, maybe, a five-year development plan for a particular community or so. So I would like to know if, at this time, you could share with this Parliament, any one community—Gonzales, Belmont, any part of Laventille, Morvant, any particular community—where your officers have been able to establish socio-economic goals in that community; cultural goals in the community, and tell us what you have achieved, what remains to be achieved in that particular community; what has been your success, your failures and what you plan for the next fiscal year—any one small community.

Sen. The Hon. J. Yuille-Williams: I would have loved to do all that in the limited time. But there is set up a monitoring and evaluation unit which would monitor and evaluate all the programmes. Even within the smaller communities, the officers have that ability to do, at least, rudiments of monitoring and evaluating. It would be very difficult for me to stand here and give you all those little parts of all of that—

Sen. Dr. Kernahan: Madam Minister, maybe you cannot give it here, but is there anywhere that Members of this Parliament can get that information? Because a lot of money is being spent and continues to be spent in these areas and

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we get all these generalizations and plans and so on, but we do not have any specifics where the quality of life in one community is changing. In fact, Sen. Seepersad-Bachan expressed the frustration that everything seems to be falling apart in spite of the millions that are being spent. Where are the deliverables?

Sen. The Hon. J. Yuille-Williams: I do not have it here with me, but the one I would like to show you with everything you have said is the one of the Community Development Fund. I am sorry I do not have that with me. All aspects of that Fund had been done very scientifically. The impact done, whether you were at YTEPP, at FEEL, wherever the money was spent; whether you were doing institutional strengthening; what has been done; how it has been done; the review; how many people were affected; what are the benefits; where it went, and recommendations. That had been one I could actually show you and if you allow me, I could probably get it to you tomorrow. There was a full evaluation of the Community Development Fund. That is what we want to do for all those. We commissioned the evaluation and we would continue to do that.

Thank you very much, Mr. Vice-President. [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. Rose Janneire: [*Desk thumping*] Thank you, Mr. Vice-President. I rise with a deep sense of pride and I am, indeed, humbled to be numbered among this honourable and most distinguished gathering and to become a small part of the record and history of this House.

Like my colleagues on this side of this honourable Chamber, I support the initiatives of the 2004/2005 budget and I congratulate the Prime Minister and Minister of Finance, the hon. Patrick Manning, ably supported by the Minister in the Ministry of Finance, Sen. The Hon. Conrad Enill and their very capable team. I am grateful to my party, the People's National Movement, for the opportunity given me and I am awed by the great responsibility that attends membership of this place, no matter for how short a period.

With this in mind, I wish to crave the indulgence of this honourable House to have patience with my inexperience and to bear with my bias towards the social sector in appreciating some of the elements of the 2005 budget that have been so shaped so as to ensure the most effective social development, not only in the year ahead, but for several years to come.

7.45 p.m.

The approach by this PNM Government recognizes the changing times in which we live. Therefore, it is not, and cannot be, a quick-fix approach. It is an

approach, which while seeking to be uniquely national, keeps tab on the eight millennium development goals. My colleague in her contribution yesterday stated these goals. I think that they are important goals and worth repeating, goals which include eradication of extreme poverty and hunger; achievement of universal primary education; promotion of gender equality and empowerment of women; reduction of child mortality; improvement of maternal health; combating HIV/AIDS, Malaria and other diseases; ensuring environmental sustainability and development of global partnerships for development. The 2005 budget is replete with allocations to stimulate action in addressing these goals.

I wish to underscore for the record of this Senate what underpins these allocations. This is not the case of the mere provision of money. If this were the case that would be the quick-fix approach. The Government has made it clear that its initiatives are guided by the philosophy that economic development alone cannot bring about the much needed improvements, in the well-being of citizens of our nation.

Consequently, the Government has opted for a path that focuses on sustainable human development with an emphasis on people-centred approaches as the path to development. The approach places high value on principles of dignity, equity, equality, participation and empowerment, while seeking to maintain an acceptable balance in the money it must spend on related rehabilitative and development programmes, as opposed to remedial type initiatives with significant investment in the building of social capital.

The building of social capital is an item that tends to be ignored whenever there are important discourses on how we spend our national resources. Yet, it is that aspect of national life that guarantees the cohesion of society in undertaking those things, sometimes completely outside the ambit of government, to make life better for all citizens. In other words, a large body of social capital realizes and accepts that the Government cannot do everything. Some things are far better achieved through community and not direct government involvement.

When I peruse the provisions in this budget, although I am regaled by those monetary elements which will redound to more money in the pockets of old age pensioners, the disabled and retired public servants, I am greatly encouraged by a philosophy and policy that put and encourage people to be at the centre of their development. [*Desk thumping*] This is underscored by what is referred to as the guiding principles in pursuit of this PNM Government's social policy objectives. Participation, collaboration and partnership are these guiding principles and, in particular, Government will seek to partner with civil society organizations to

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develop the social sector and provide decentralized services to various target groups. It means simply, that, more and more, people will be given responsibilities to shape their development.

An appeal has to come from this Senate for civil society to take up that challenge, particularly, our friends who are captains of the private sector and whose successes are grounded in the patronage of the rest of society.

There are some outstanding examples of that partnership as service groups, organizations and private citizens undertake projects aimed at improving the lot of the disadvantaged of our country. That is not enough. Far too often there are sections of society that are completely forgotten in the mix. The approach has to be one that ensures an enabling environment is created for all citizens of Trinidad and Tobago irrespective of race, creed, age, religion or gender, to access opportunities to attain an acceptable quality of life.

Yesterday, I was moved by a real life story narrated to me by a colleague and which was only made public through the efforts of the First Caribbean International Bank which many of us may know was headed by a former member of this distinguished Senate. Through a project that aims at honouring unsung heroes of our region, the staff of this bank came up against an 81-year-old woman in St. Vincent who has been taking care of neglected children for the past 25 years. It began when she was asked to take care of a baby boy for about 18 months by a mother who wanted to travel overseas to seek employment. The mother never returned and the quality of care she provided for that child mushroomed into other requests which she gladly gave, to the extent that her house became known as the place to leave your child for a day and not to worry about returning to collect. Mothers who wanted to go overseas to make a better life for themselves and had nowhere to leave their children, made this lady's home a safe haven.

The upshot is that in that community several young men and women who passed through a foster home run by a dedicated woman and who had received higher education, such as degrees are holding down respectable careers, both in their homelands and abroad. I know of a similar case in my home town where street children have been taken into the humble abode of a caring Arimian and not left to the threats that lie out there and to which they can be most vulnerable. Last week in Barbados, a noted HIV/AIDS activist was making a plea that the grandmothers of our nation must not be forgotten.

When the whole story of HIV/AIDS is written the tremendous role of grandmothers in caring for those who were infected and affected, including the

orphans of those who have passed on will definitely be the highlight of the story. Grandmothers do not only bring caring, succour and comfort; they bring values which are fast disappearing from our lives, resulting in the type of confusion, chaos and mayhem that are part of the existence of today's generation.

I make mention of these to indicate that there are so many unknown and unsung efforts which can be associated with the implementation of the type of policy that this Government is seeking to institute and implement; a policy that seeks out national partnerships in pursuit of social development. As provided for in the budget, Government can only take the lead. I appeal to civil society to embrace the offer of partnership and to follow.

Thank you and may God continue to bless our nation.

Mr. Vice-President: I take the opportunity to congratulate you on your maiden contribution.

The Minister of Legal Affairs (Sen. The Hon. Danny Montano): Mr. Vice-President, I know that it is getting late and I think that we want to go home. I will try to be brief as I can. I want to make a brief intervention to at least tell this honourable Senate a little of what has been happening in the Ministry of Legal Affairs over the past year or so.

Before I do that, I want to say that this has been my ninth budget year. I have been here as long as Sen. Baksh. The level of the debate particularly coming from the Opposition Bench I am not sure what has happened to the spirit of debate. I remember when I was on that side in my second year, I went to the President who was a UNC appointee at that time and asked him if I could read my budget contribution. He flatly refused. He said no. From then to now I have had to speak ad hoc. We had a demonstration where we had seven UNC Senators, six of whom read their contribution and did not speak to the budget. One of the Senators who did not read, did not talk anything to do with the budget. It was only political rhetoric. The rest of them made political speeches that had a nexus to the budget, but the spirit of the debate was lost.

I heard Sen. Mark, Sen. Baksh and others talk about the failings of the budget; there was no plan and where is the execution going to be. The reality is that the budget is not only the statement that the Minister of Finance makes when he presents it. The budget comprises all the documents which are published which I used to read scrupulously when I was on that side, so that I could argue to specific

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points. I could understand exactly what the government was doing or not doing as the case might be. The element of debate is when ministers present their parts of the budget; the programmes that fall under their ministries. What you are supposed to get from the other side is the element of debate on the issues. We have not had that.

We have had a long series of political speeches and a fair amount of bacchanal which I think that we have dealt with effectively. Some of the silly things that were said—I heard Sen. Baksh say a while ago that they would have been in their fourth year or second term right now and the John Humphrey interchange would have been built by now. Thank God it is not built! Thank God we are here! I know of no other interchange on the face of this planet that has been built with a suspension bridge. I do not know where that exists anywhere in the world, but we were going to have the first one in Trinidad and Tobago.

Let me tell you about that John Humphrey interchange. When they built the airport shed that we have up there, the building was designed with ceramic tiles. There was a local supplier. The tiles came from a particular yard in Italy. The tiles were exact to the specification that was called for in the design. The price on the quotation was about \$14. [*Interruption*] They do not like the heat so they interrupt. Bad manners! They have no place in this Senate! They do not understand the Standing Orders. Bad manners! I could shout, too, and I could shout loud! I am standing with the microphone. I could shout the whole night!

8.00 p.m.

Mr. Vice-President, the ceramic tiles were budgeted at \$14 per tile. The architect involved, who was unqualified, decided to get a company from Bolivia or Peru or something of the sort, to supply granite tiles for something like \$56 per square foot. The difference on 300,000 square feet is about \$12.5 million, and the tiles that we have there now; there are no two tiles that are the same colour. In the whole 300,000 square feet there are no two tiles that are the same colour. I know of no other airport on the planet that has granite tiles. But we have to have granite tiles. These international specifications call for ceramic tiles—and you are telling me about this foolishness of an arch? Thank God we are here! [*Laughter*] Mr. Vice-President, thank God we have reached here! [*Interruption*] I could go on but I am tired; it is late so let us just talk about the Ministry of Legal Affairs.

The Ministry of Legal Affairs comprises of the Legal Aid Authority, the Law Revision Commission and the Central Registry, and the Intellectual Property Office in the Consumer Affairs Division. Let me just deal, first of all, with the

Central Registry. The registry is in itself broken into three parts: civil, land and company.

Mr. Vice-President, I want you to understand that the ministry as a whole is a service ministry: we do not make anything and we do not build anything. We provide a number of different services to the public at large. I quickly saw when I got there that my mission was to improve the quality and level of services of the entire ministry. We set out to create a change.

Mr. Vice-President, I have to tell you something. Government services worldwide are always challenged by being able to improve the services that they provide to the people. It was a challenge that the last administration faced; it is a challenge we face also. I have heard many statements about the so-called unwillingness of public servants to make changes or to be helpful to the public and so on. I have had the experience in this ministry where the executives in charge of the different sections of the ministry have only shown to me the greatest willingness to make the changes that I have been asking them to make.

It has been a pleasure to work with them. At different levels in the ministry there is some resistance to the changes because the changes are not understood and people always tend to be a bit resistant to change—to something that is new. But by and large, all the officers that I have had the pleasure to interact with have been nothing but completely supportive and, Mr. Vice-President, that spirit is really led by the Permanent Secretary and Deputy Permanent Secretary, to whom I owe a debt of gratitude.

When I got there in December of last year, there was a person from the Registry in Jamaica, a Dr. Holness who had done a brief study of the Civil Registry and had indicated to us, first of all, orally and then later on in writing, that we had a number of problems in the Ministry—let me put it to you that way.

Mr. Vice-President, we have heard some talk in this Chamber this week about voter padding and so on, but we will deal with that on another occasion because it relates to what we have found in the ministry. There are issues here that would be the subject of other discourse at another time.

Notwithstanding that, we found that there were a number of situations that we had to correct. We hired a firm of chartered accountants to try to close—what I would describe as an accountant—some of the internal control weaknesses in the Civil Registry. We are now beginning to close all of those loopholes.

When I first got there last year, we found that there were long lines at the cashiers. Anybody doing business had to wait a long time just to line up at the

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cashiers. The difficulty was that within the public service arrangement we did not have enough cashiers and, of course, you know what things are like, not everybody turns up to work when they are supposed to, then they would leave early and come in late and all sorts of things. The first thing that we did was to train a number of relief cashiers; cashiers who could go in and spend an hour or two as the case may be to make sure that the cages were always fully manned. That was the first thing that we did and it has worked very well.

The other thing that we are at the point of implementing now, it is taking a little longer than I thought it would because of the regulations with the Treasury Department and trying to get the forms printed at the Government Printery. The search clerks come every day to search the title books and every day they have to pay \$10 to search the books. Well, it became a very simple thing: Well, why do you not pay \$200 or \$300 once for the month? Within the Government regulations we did not have the form of a receipt that could work, so we had to design one. We had to get everybody involved and eventually we got it all done and the system should start to operate on Monday next week. Mr. Vice-President, that alone would make a big difference.

Mr. Vice-President, the other thing that we did was with respect to the Central Registry downstairs where many people go through every day—we must get about 200 to 300 persons through there every day, so the first thing I said was: paint it; clean it; put in proper lighting; put in water; clean up the toilets and make sure that people are comfortable, at least, when they come to see us. We have done that. We hired a firm of architects who designed a paint job, which I rather like but some say it is a little strange, but the basic thing is that we have made the physical ambience of the place more user-friendly and it is working very nicely.

One of the things we also did was that we now have specific work programmes for all the supervisors and managers on a weekly basis so that their targets and deadlines are measured every week, so that we do not fall backwards; we do not slip behind and things are running very quickly and efficiently.

One of the problems that we ran into, Mr. Vice-President, was with respect to the title deeds. Deeds are available to anybody, as it must be; people want to search a title or they want to do all sorts of things, so we cannot really restrict access to title deeds or the use of copies of title deeds. We know that title deeds were being used improperly in some bail situations. What we have done—and this is the best that we can do for the time being—is that you are now required to walk with your ID when you want a title deed and we will log it so that if we find out

that that title deed has been misused, we would know who has misused it; so it can be traced. That is the best we can do at this time in trying to prevent the misuse of certified deeds.

Sen. Dr. McKenzie: Mr. Vice-President, may I ask the Minister a question? Mr. Minister, are you aware that at one time there was a complaint that because when you applied for a deed you are given a certified copy, that a person would use this copy and remove the name; type in their name and make a copy of that copy and actually fleece the bona fide owner of his land? That used to happen in Tobago and when you went to the Inland Revenue Department to pay your taxes and so on, you would discover, for the first time, that you no longer owned this land. I had suggested here before that before people could go and change the ownership in the Inland Revenue Department they must recheck with your department to ensure that the original says what the copy would have said.

Sen. The Hon. D. Montano: I am grateful for that, Sen. Dr. McKenzie, I was unaware of that situation but at the very least once we find out that there is an error we will know who the perpetrator is and we could fix it at that point—although that is after the horse has bolted, which is not always a happy situation.

Mr. Vice-President, we have also seriously restructured the work flow in the ministry so that things happen much faster. The delivery of certified copies of deeds, when I got there in December it took six weeks; it now takes one week and by the end of this year it would be on a same-day service. The day you request it, is the day that you will get it. [*Desk thumping*]

We did the same thing, Mr. Vice-President, with the computerized birth certificate. In June of 2003, it took ten working days to get a computerized birth certificate; by January of this year, it was down to five days. In April of this year, in order to effect the changes in the entire ministry, I hired what I described as a business manager. This is a young lady who has a degree in law and an MBA so she understands the legal issues as well as the business issues. She has been streamlining all of the operations, slowly but surely, in the entire ministry.

The business manager came in about March of this year and by April she had managed to get a turnaround rate in the computerized birth certificate operation. Mr. Vice-President, 80 per cent of the birth certificates were being issued in one day and by June it was 100 per cent. We have now turned it around to same day service all the time. But we have challenges with that and we will talk about that on another occasion. The entire system is being moved to an electronic form. At this point the only beneficiaries of this electronic birth certificate are the

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beneficiaries who were born between 1984 and 2003. The database is, in fact, finished all the way back to 1934 but it needs to be cleaned up. The database was done by an outside firm—that work was outsourced but there are many errors in it and it is now being finalized. I am assured that work will be completed by the second half of next year.

Mr. Vice-President, we were also trying to speed up the system for faster registration of land documents. Again, at the counters, we now have a fast service line for clerks with five documents or less and a separate line for clerks who have 30 documents or more, so that things would just move faster. Someone who has two documents does not have to line up behind a person who has 30 or 40 documents. So that things are moving very much faster than they used to be.

8.15 p.m.

I am advised, and I am assured—not just advised—but I looked into this, that the computerization of all land records should be completed by August 2005 and shortly after, once we have verified all the data—I say shortly, it may take six months, maybe even longer, but shortly after that the lengthy process of having to go and search all those big books, you would not have to do that anymore. In fact, it will be a very short step where a lawyer can stay in his office, go online, pay a fee and search the records in an electronic format. Within the next three years we will be at that point. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Vice-President, in the Companies Registry there were some challenges there as well. The United National Congress had started the programme but really had not done very much in terms of trying to put the companies information on the computers. It was a sort of halfway attempt and they did not get very far with it at all. In fact, they had started the programme in 1999 after the enactment of the Companies Act, 1995 if you would recall, and only basic information on some companies was done. We have installed new hardware.

In order to deal with the backlog of information, two months ago we hired 10 data entry clerks, 6 clerical assistants and 4 vault assistants. The data that they have to capture is like this: There are 44,713 businesses, they are not companies. These are unincorporated businesses of which only 10,000 are on the system, so data has to be entered for 35,000 businesses. There are 22,895 companies of which 13,000 had been entered on the system, so there are 9,700 companies to put on the system. The companies have much more data to capture. I am assured, again, that the work which was very scientifically worked out, that exercise will be finished by August of next year so that people who go to search the Companies

Registry can get through in a matter of minutes, everything will be online at that point.

Mr. Vice-President, I am very, very proud to tell you that the Registrar Generals Department had been shortlisted for the Prime Minister's Award for innovation and, in fact, we are one of three finalists. I congratulate the Ministry and the Departments on their work.

Law Revision: I got this data especially for Sen. Seetahal. Law Revision is where we revise all of the Acts. The last time that the Acts were revised was 1980 and when we were appointed, Senators, you would recall, that we all got those large black books that supposedly contain all of the laws of Trinidad and Tobago. The last time that exercise was done was in 1980 and we are now charged with the exercise of doing it all over again. The total number of laws that are to be revised is 1,025 but there are some Acts that we do not have to revise in a sense. The revision is when there are amendments; the original Act itself is not modified. In order for you to be able to deal with it effectively we need to put the amendments in the original ones so that you have an amended version. That is what this exercise is all about. But there are 420 Acts that we do not need to revise. They are amendment Acts themselves; the Incorporation Acts, Appropriation Acts, and Validation Acts. So the number of Acts that we really need to revise is 604.

As of the end of September, 305 were completed. There are 299, plus whatever else we do between now and the end of the year to revise but, of course, we may not have to revise those because these are already done as it were. At the rate that we are going, the revision exercise should be completed by December 2005, and at that point the exercise is now to actually start the effort of the publication. You do the proofreading, and all the other things and we should actually start to publish in the second half of 2006. It would be in a number of different formats including CD-Rom.

Sen. Ali: Mr. Vice-President, during my contribution I spoke on the question of consolidation of the Petroleum Taxes Act, which has not been consolidated since 1985, and I drew the Minister's attention to that. Could you give me some information as to when that is going to be updated?

Sen. The Hon. D. Montano: That is all part of the whole process and it will be done. It is being done altogether. What happened is at different points people call and say, would you update the Companies Acts or the Value Added Taxes Act or whatever it might be and we do that. If you made a specific request for that

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we can change the order in which we do things and update it for you fairly quickly. It would take two weeks.

Sen. Ali: Is it that you are referring to me? In that case, I will make a request now that the Petroleum Taxes Act be revised urgently because it is where we are getting all our revenue from.

Sen. The Hon. D. Montano: It would be my pleasure to oblige. I would only ask you to remind me by way of a written note and I will be passing it on to Mr. Bhagoutie, who I know will do it for you. It should not take more than two to three weeks.

Sen. Seepersad-Bachan: Mr. Minister, can I also ask—I know you talked about the CD-Rom and having to wait until next year. It is one of the things that I have been taking up with the Clerk of the House for some time about us getting a fresh set of books so that we can work with. Is it possible—I know you have December next year as a deadline—as you are going along—You said there are 420 Acts that do not need revision—that you can get these Acts up on a website so that they can be made accessible to the people of Trinidad and Tobago and as you update, you can put them on your website?

Sen. The Hon. D. Montano: It is certainly something to think about. One of the things that we are trying to do is that we have, in fact, looked at software and there was a demonstration. We have included the Clerks from the Parliament in this, in that as fast as it gets done here, it will go on a website and you can access it immediately. We have to acquire that software. The software that we have presently would not allow you to do that. We would have to then copy it over into a website and we are struggling with resources, not money resources, but human resources. We are just trying to do the things we know we can do. If you make a request, then we can fulfil it for you. Your suggestion is a good one and we are going there, but we are not at that point yet. There are priorities. What you are suggesting is part of the plan. It is just not as early as you want it but it is in progress.

Mr. Vice-President, let me talk a bit about the Consumer Affairs Division just to tell you what is going on there. Contrary to what some people would like to think I am responsible for, let me just tell you the legal Acts that I am responsible for as the Minister of Consumer Affairs.

First, there is the Consumer Protection and Safety Act, 1985, the Trade Descriptions Act, 1984, the Sale of Goods Act, 1895, the Hire Purchase Act, 1957 and the Unfair Contract Terms Act, 1895.

When I came into the Ministry in December 2003 it was clear that the consumer legislation that we had on the books was inadequate to meet the needs of a modern society; clearly, hopelessly, inadequate. And we began to search for models. There are a number of different models outside there and we have found something. There is a document that within the next few weeks, will be turned into a Green Paper so that Senators will be able to comment on it. Allow me to tell you the issues that we want to address in it.

One of the problems is that there is a consumer marketplace that is very small. The environment is very small. There is a cumbersome legal system and, therefore, too often the consumer gets short-changed. So the question is: How do we protect and empower the consumer? There are new forms of business; e-commerce, and there are issues that we must face in terms of e-commerce. We have to establish minimum standards for the use of electronic signatures. There must be prescribed disclosures for electronic contracts and such like. We must have protection against inadvertent purchases on the Internet. That is when you buy something and you inadvertently click the wrong button and you get it, there must be cancellation in the event of seller non-disclosure and cancellation rights for late delivery of goods that are ordered from abroad and so forth.

There are many issues that we need to address and we do not have the legislation for it. We need also legislation that will address the issues such as the cost of credit. When you see advertisements that say no interest, and so forth, is that really true? And there is need for legislation that will address things like that.

The legislation hopefully will be drafted in plain language so that it is simpler. There is need for legislation that can deal with scam artists which is a rather relatively new phenomenon in this country, but we need to look at that. In terms of the legislation that exists for major appliances and electronic equipment, the Sale of Goods Act, 1895 is obviously hopelessly out of date and the kind of civil remedies that exist for the consumer to be able to access legal recourse when he has received substandard goods is lengthy, costly and difficult. As it now stands, there is nobody that really has the power to deal with individual situations as they arise.

Mr. Vice-President, there are situations where motor car companies here that sell both new and used, are virtually manufacturers' representatives because they are exclusive to the manufacturer. You find one dealer selling Ford, one dealer selling Nissan, one dealer selling Volkswagen and so forth, yet the warranties that they are issuing are not the warranties the manufacturers are issuing wherever the cars are manufactured and something is wrong with that.

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There is need to change the paradigm to make sure that the consumer is properly dealt with.

The travel industry. What would happen when someone buys a ticket on one of the aeroplanes going to Tobago, and they are told the aeroplane is broken down and they cannot get on a seat, and they cannot get off here and they are stuck for two or three days? What happens? Not good enough.

I do not care whether it is a state-owned business or a private-owned company; you have to do better than that. Internationally, there are penalties for that sort of situation and these companies must know that there will be penalties in situations like that. That is what we are looking to do.

Mr. Vice-President, the other thing I would just like to very quickly talk about is, clearly, there is need to establish different mechanisms for the consumer to be able to take his problems to.

There is need, first of all, for a small claims court, and some other kind of market-driven tribunal that can have the force of law by agreement between the parties so that a consumer can go immediately and say look, so and so sold me a toaster, and it does not work properly. I took it back and I took it back, and I took it back and somebody must be able to say listen, either give him his money back or his toaster back or something of the sort.

8.30 p.m.

At this point, to change that, he has to go to the High Court, and that is absurd. It is too expensive. We want to make the process at that level virtually free, if not free. That is it in a nutshell. When you see the Green Paper, you will be able to comment more on it.

I want to go as quickly as I can now, just to wind up. I want to talk about the Intellectual Property Office, because this was something I did not understand at all when I came into the Ministry. I really did not understand the business of intellectual property. My first impression of it was that the Intellectual Property Office had been established by the developed countries to make sure that anything we used that came from them, we had to pay royalties and licence fees for. That is very largely the origin of the office. In fact, it is expected.

There are those who estimate that within the next 20 years the outflow from the developing countries to the developed world in terms of IP royalties and licences would exceed the flows on visible trade. It is that big. Anyway, I said that we do have certain international obligations that we must adhere to. This is not something we can escape or unilaterally say we are not doing.

There are some things that we can do and I have done. One of things I did, in Geneva recently, I partnered with Brazil and Argentina at a conference there, where we were saying that the development flows must change. What, in effect, we are going to be asking is that countries like ours should not have to pay the same levels of royalties and licence fees as the developed world. We are a developing nation and, therefore, we should get some other form of treatment that is not so costly.

On the other side, Mr. Vice-President, I began to understand slowly how we could use this for our benefit. The first thing that happened—I think it was in March of this year—was that there was a notice in the newspaper that indicated that some fellow had registered, in Trinidad and Tobago, a patent on the pan. I do not know about you, Mr. Vice-President, but as a national, I was offended that someone outside Trinidad and Tobago could take something that belongs to us, something that belongs to Trinidad and Tobago, and say it is his. I was offended and I am sure everybody else was equally offended.

I went to the IP Office and asked what we could do and I was told that the steel pan has been in the public domain for too long and, therefore, could not now be patented. I said that the first thing that we should do if we say, as I said in Geneva—I stood in front of the whole world and said that the steel pan belongs to Trinidad and Tobago. There was a hush in the hall. I repeated it. I said, “It belongs to Trinidad and Tobago.” The first thing that we must do if we own it is to protect it and be willing to defend it. [*Desk thumping*] We must go abroad and anybody who tries to register a patent on it, we have to challenge. I am asking the Cabinet now to do exactly that. That is where we must go. Beyond that, there are other things we can do. I do not want to get into it, but it is a complex legal issue.

There are some treaties and there is a vacuum of treaties. We are going to try to get everything done to protect the steel pan both within and outside of Trinidad and Tobago. We have to find a way so that we can establish that anybody anywhere who makes a steel pan—and you can make it anywhere that you want—must at least put a label on it saying that it originated in Trinidad and Tobago. That is where we are headed: Any steel pan made in Trinidad and Tobago must bear a seal saying that it is an authentic steel pan from Trinidad and Tobago, thereby saying that no other steel pan is an authentic steel pan, only the one from Trinidad and Tobago. Those are legal challenges.

Recognizing what we lost with the steel pan, there are other things we can lose too. We have artists, poets and writers. We have to protect these living treasures. If the steel pan is a national treasure, we also have living treasures—we

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have one in our midst here, if I may be so bold. We have to make sure that we have a legal structure in place to protect what belongs only to us—whether they are here with us or they are not with us.

That has been a real education for me—a real education. I think the officers at the IP office are going to change the face of how things happen in Trinidad and Tobago. Mr. Vice-President, I hope I have not delayed you too long. I thank you very much for your time.

Sen. Dr. McKenzie: Mr. Vice-President, I just want to remind the Minister that he said that we have one living treasure. He forgot that the Vice-President is also a calypsonian.

Sen. The Hon. D. Montano: Mr. Vice-President, we have many and we will do what we can.

The Minister in the Ministry of Finance (Sen. The Hon. Conrad Enill): Thank you very much, Mr. Vice-President. From my tally, we have had about 32 speakers. I think that is a significant number of intellectual power.

I wish to do a couple things very quickly. First, I wish to thank all our Senators, whose contributions continue to provide us with their legitimate concerns and expectations as we move Trinidad and Tobago towards its full potential. I also wish to thank my colleagues, who have demonstrated once again their dedication and commitment to the service of Trinidad and Tobago in our pursuit of excellence and our desire for a better way of life—something which we call, fondly, Vision 2020.

As I reflect on our deliberations, Mr. Vice-President, there are two emotions that I can express. On the one hand, I am happy that we can have a discussion about the important issues that affect us all. On the other hand, I am saddened. You know, it is very difficult for me to take Senators seriously when the words they use to describe what we spend 24 hours a day, seven days a week doing is done in a language configuration that, quite frankly, is designed to promote the negative that is in us. Sometimes it is very difficult to try to maintain a sense of balance in what passes for contributions.

One point I want to make before I say a couple other things is this: We make choices about how we do what we do and we on this side have made a choice to do what we must in a particular kind of way. We understand, Mr. Vice-President, that that is a deliberate choice that we make and we can always review it and deal as we must.

Some of the things that came out in your contributions suggest to me that I must place on record the process by which we arrive at this particular document. There almost seems to be a view that one would get up in the morning and by the evening present to the community something and that reflects a budget. Let me take you through, because I must, what is involved in this particular process. First of all, each ministry is competing for the resources that are scarce.

In order for us to achieve the best fit of resources and plans, the Government takes a position on the priorities it would follow. This Government has decided that until further notice the priorities that it has identified are: education, health, housing, national security and social services. Therefore, as that priority is maintained, we must make choices about allocation. The thing you must know is that we are constrained by the level of revenue that is available and so, in trying to understand how to make those choices, we require that ministries submit to us a couple of things.

The first thing that we ask them to do is to develop for us some understanding, in writing, of their principal responsibilities; the review of their last fiscal year—what were their major achievements and their major constraints; their outlook—what are their planned improvements to their structures and processes, their systems and what equipment they require to improve efficiencies, and what is their strategic direction. What are the services and products they provide? They are required to identify the services and products delivered and the customers to whom they are delivered. What are their performance indicators? We need them to identify the performance indicators by which the ministries' or departments' achievement would be measured. This is a requirement for getting public funds.

We also do that within the context of a couple of documents:

(1) *The Social and Economic Policy Framework*

This is the Government's medium-term plan. There is a requirement for a strategic plan for each ministry, department or agency in the sense that has been described by some commentators. We go one step further and say that if you are a government ministry, you have a customer service delivery plan. How can you affect positively the delivery of services by your ministry?

8.45 p.m.

In preparing for the budget, accounting officers are asked to do a couple of things. One such thing is to carefully scrutinize all items of expenditure to ensure that:

- (i) services which are no longer essential are eliminated;
- (ii) the necessary services are provided at the lowest cost possible; and
- (iii) public funds are spent to the best advantage.

Insofar as their particular strategic plan and objectives are concerned, we have some very specific objectives. We said, in setting up your strategic plans, they must be guided by the policy agenda, your internal plans, your programmes and projects, and there must be the following as an important component of this plan.

The first component has to do with continuous improvement and reengineering. That is to say, the examination of your core function and to determine whether your organization, agency, department or ministry should continue to carry out that function; whether the function should be privatized or outsourced; and a review of the agency's delivery process, to ensure efficiency and effectiveness. The framework is there.

We also focused on the development of the human resources plan, where ministries and agencies are asked to clearly identify the training needs, bearing in mind their strategic objectives. Copies of the training plans are required to support all training requests. These training programmes have to be approved by the Cabinet.

We went one step further. Ministries and agencies are asked to be mindful of the impact of the following, on their information management systems: the human resource information system, the communications backbone, the Freedom of Information Act, the requirements for annual reporting to Parliament and the directory of government services. The reason I wanted to put these processes on the record is that there is a process, a system, accountability and there is a way in which government operates. When you do all of this, and it comes to finance, usually what happens in any given year, is that the plan that you have costed, in relation to the revenue that is available, is different.

Last year, in terms of PSIP requests, if you calculated what was requested, that came up to \$9 billion. On the basis of the revenues, we have allocated \$2 billion. It means, therefore, within ministries, one has to prioritize and, within the Government, there has to be a prioritization on what happens in this particular year. The Government takes the view that it is around for five years and within that five years there are certain things that should happen. In any one year or the other, depending on where the project is, at its various stages, funds are in fact allocated.

Let me, therefore, deal with the other question that came out quite clear in the debate. A number of commentators have said that we have a \$28 billion budget, you have spent so much over the last couple of years, where has the money gone? That is a reasonable question, but the money goes where it goes every year. Every year we tell you exactly where it goes. It goes to pay 60,000—70,000 employees who deliver public service to the rest of the country. This year we are spending—it is on page 37 of the budget speech—and personal expenditure will cost the Government approximately \$5.3 billion. It is made up of salaries, cost of living allowances, wages and allowances, government contributions, overtime, et cetera. It is also made up of goods and services and minor equipment. That is made up of travelling overseas, electricity, telephone, WASA, short term employment, et cetera. It is made up of current transfers and subsidies, \$7.6 billion. The issue that I have is this, the information is available, it is written and yet the question continues to be asked: “Where the thing has gone?” I am not sure I want to answer that particular question. If you provide the information in the form that is required—that information, although it has been given time and time again, is disregarded and the impression that is being given is that this money has absolutely disappeared and there is absolutely no benefit from it. I asked the question: What are we saying?

I have heard that there is a disconnect between the population and the Government. I wondered about that for a very long time. I think you are right. The reason you are right is that the system which we operate by—the only system in the world, which I am aware of, it really does not matter which government is in power—frustrates us and we have not had a discussion on it. In that regard, I am asking the joint select committees that have responsibilities for matters, as they relate to the Public Service Commission, to start asking a number of questions; for example: How long does it take to fill a vacancy in a ministry? You might find that the average time is either four years or six years. You will ask also: How does one get an individual who, on the basis of their training, should be in a position, but because of judicial review issues, the commission takes the position it would give the particular position to the individual who has been around the longest time, because his file says nothing different? I would like this Parliament to assist me in being able to understand how you are holding me accountable for something which you should be dealing with. What you should be dealing with is this: Why can I not get the 200 persons that I have asked for in the Customs and Excise Division, to make it efficient? Why? Why is the Minister of National Security not getting the 150 prison officers that he has asked for, in order to do the job? Why? I can go through organization by organization. You only have to

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look at the expenditure. Look at the number of vacant positions and track them year after year. We provide the resources but we are not in control of the mechanisms that are in place by law, to fill those positions.

We talk about transparency and accountability and they say: “Ha ha, big deal!” Let me explain to you what we mean by that. There are rules in this place, which we have put in place. We have said that for something to happen, these are the rules. When we follow the rules and we give them to you, based on the rules, your issue is; they are only talking. I am suggesting to you that this Government, when it talks about transparency and accountability, is operating within the law and the systems that we have set up. [*Desk thumping*] If the system is not working—I am suggesting that it may not be working—we need to sit and decide how to fix it. It really does not matter whether we are here or you are there. The fact of the matter is the system is holding us to ransom. I think the time has come for us to agree on something. The system must change. [*Interruption*] We are on record as saying that we have no issue with constitution reform. What again is happening is that we have a different view as to how it should happen. The point in all of this is that we cannot continue to not understand the system and then create an impression and a set of issues and circumstances about something that is not true. I simply want to say that.

Trinidad and Tobago, quite frankly, is a very good place. There are significant strengths, significant opportunities, some weaknesses and some risks. It really does not matter, because all of us, both sides, agree on one thing. We agree that Trinidad and Tobago should be a better place. I think the difference, as I listened, is where we are coming from. There is a very theoretical and correct discussion that comes across sometimes. I enjoy the discussion because, quite frankly, I lived in the corporate world before I joined this arena. Therefore, I understand the language and planning that is used and the issues that are discussed. But I live in the real world. I have to deal with issues that are constrained by laws, systems and traditions. We have to try and deal with that the best way we know how while, at the same time, dealing with the issues of public accountability and all the other things that we are requested to do.

Therefore, while I understand that is an ideal to which we can aspire, I am also very comfortable with the fact that within our system, we are doing the best that anybody can do, while maintaining and achieving the balance between public accountability under the law and delivery of services in a particular way. If you do not understand it, it does not necessarily mean that we are not doing it right. If you would ask us nicely, we would provide you with the information. If you do

not ask us nicely, we will still provide you with the information, because that is how we are.

One of the things that we found, in coming into office, was that the problems that the last administration would have had with human resource issues started to affect us. When we tracked, for example, the higher echelons in the service, one of the things we found was that the way people entered the service was in batches. There was a batch of 20, another batch of 30 and another batch of 40. What we are finding today is that the batches are retiring. I went to work on a Monday morning—coming out of the corporate world I understand how it works—so we had heads of divisions. My 14 heads came and I said: “Gentlemen, this is how we are going to do this thing here. This is the objective. This is what I want. That is the time I want it. Go do it.” One month later, I come back and I am looking at a bunch of strangers and I said: “What is going on here?” They said: “Well Minister, that guy went on pre-retirement leave. This other guy got transferred to somewhere else. That other guy is now acting for someone else. This other guy took another job in another agency, which was paying more money.”

9.00 p.m.

Mr. Vice-President, I came up with a strategy. I am no longer calling one guy but I am calling two guys. My meetings have now moved from 14 persons to 28 persons, and we go through the same process. The next morning when I return, guess what? I am dealing with a different group of people again. Anyone who has worked in the public service, or has been part of this process, understands those challenges.

We have a situation with respect to the Automated Systems for Customs Data (ASYCUDA). This programme is going to take three years. The cost of the programme is \$14 million. I have the money two years now and I have put a team in place. Now, I am sitting for the very first time with the team. I then say, “Okay, let us work out the plan. But before I do that: Can I understand when you guys are retiring because this is a three-year programme?” When I asked the first guy the question he said that he would be retiring in December; the second guy said that he would be retiring in January; the third guy said that he would be retiring in four weeks’ time, and the fifth guy said that he was acting and, by tomorrow, he will not be there.

Quite frankly, these are the real issues; these are the real challenges. I am saying it again that this Parliament can make a difference. The Members on the joint select committee can, in fact, really start to add value to our process by

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challenging the delivery of those organizations to the supply side of the Government.

Mr. Vice-President, one thing that came out from his entire budget debate was that unless the Parliament intervenes in this matter, in the interest of Trinidad and Tobago, it is very possible that next year, we will come back here and Sen. Baksh will be able to tell me exactly what he has told me, because he understands the system. It is not that what he is saying is wrong. He understands the system and because he understands the system, he can predict the results with some degree of certainty.

However, every time I do this discussion I get two responses. The first response I get is: "So all yuh go throw up all yuh hands in the air and doh do nothing", and the second response I get is: "Well, you are blaming the public service". It is neither of those things.

A very important issue was raised this evening and that had to do with value for money. We are spending \$5 billion on human resources, and we are not getting that value. The reason that we are not getting that value for money is not because of the people, but because of the system. We have very dedicated officers.

When the Minister of Community Development, Culture and Gender Affairs tells you that they are working 24/7, I am sure that if I look at that matter there will be a few officers who are basically stretching themselves to get the work done, because they feel a particular way about the work. With all my training and everything else, I feel that we cannot continue to run a Government on the basis of individuals, and how they feel about the country. There must be a system: a system in which there is accountability; a system in which there is reward for performance; and a system in which you get rid of persons who are not doing what they are supposed to do.

The greatest challenge that we have in moving forward is how to change the relationships that we have currently, in order to get more for the same amount of money that we have. That is what everybody is doing. Everybody is trying to get more for the same amount of money.

One of the things that we do is that we spend millions of dollars training people in the hope that we will get a better service. As soon as these officers are trained, the guys in the private sector come across and say, guess what? "I like you, please come." The officers will then go across to the private sector. This is important to me. I really feel that the country is at a stage where we need to deal

with this particular issue, and we need to have a discussion on the matter. If at the end of the discussion, we agree that this is how we must continue, then we must understand what is going on. I think that a discussion must take place as a consequence of this issue.

Sen. R. Montano: Mr. Vice-President, I am speaking for myself, and I am delighted to hear what the Minister was saying, especially as this matter relates to service commissions. I happen to sit on that joint select committee. My experience on that joint select committee is that when I have gone into the faces of the service commissions, instead of getting support from the Government Ministers I, have, in fact, found myself coming under attack from the Government Ministers who would turn around and support the service commissions.

Is the Minister of Finance saying—which words I welcome—that from now on we can expect support from the various Ministers? For example, I am a Member of Prof. Deosaran’s committee. Can we expect that the Government Ministers will support us and will turn around and start demanding performance from these service commissions? This is what we want. I heartedly endorse everything that is falling from the Minister’s lips tonight. It is critical that if what he is saying is correct—sorry, I should not put it that way. I am not trying to doubt his sincerity and so forth, but what I am hoping for is that his colleagues will support what he is saying. Can we expect that?

Sen. The Hon. C. Enill: I think the short answer is, yes. However, when I started I said that sometimes I go through two emotions: One emotion is to stand with you and the other emotion is to “lick yuh down”. That has to do with the words that you use and the way in which you communicate. I am suggesting that a particular communication will get a particular response. If the communication is one in which we are working together to solve a problem, yes, we will support it. On the other hand, if it is intended to do damage and to score political points and so forth, then you will not get our support. I just wanted to make that point.

Sen. R. Montano: Just for the record and Sen. Prof. Deosaran will back me up on this. I, personally, have never been political with respect to the joint select committees, but Government Ministers have been. [*Laughter*]

Sen. The Hon. C. Enill: Mr. Vice-President, I just want to say that I think we should understand the matter. I have raised the matter and I honestly hope that we could go forward with this matter.

Mr. Vice-President, quite a number of matters were raised in the debate. I think that most of my colleagues dealt remarkably with them. However, there are a few matters that I would like to touch on briefly before we move on.

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I said that at this point in time, Trinidad and Tobago was in a state where there are significant strengths, significant opportunities, some weaknesses, some risks and we had a particular objective. I said that both sides supported that and, quite frankly, the differences that we had were with respect to delivery. In no particular order, I just want to basically deal with a few issues.

Sen. Anmolsingh-Mahabir talked about debt issues and she was quite right. We had a discussion a long time ago in trying to arrive at the revenue stabilization issues, as to whether we should be spending money in retiring debt, or whether we should be saving the money. One of the realities is that some of the debts do not have the ability for us to repay them. The way the debts were contracted does not allow us to do that. Therefore, the debts that we were able to renegotiate, we did just that. In fact, if my information is correct, I think that we have saved some \$100 million on the direct cost.

Mr. Vice-President, let us just understand debt a little. Debt for recurrent expenditure is a no, no, but debt for capital projects is usually the way that you will have to go, especially with a lot of these large projects, your resources are just not going to allow you to do that.

The other matter with respect to debt is that the way we do it in public finances is that 100 per cent of the debt is written off in the year in which it was paid for. That is a cash system. Therefore, in evaluating the debt, there are some other matters that you would have to look at.

Insofar as debt issues are concerned, we have taken some positions with respect to that matter. We have reduced letters of comfort; we have tried to make sure that all the issues in the past that would have required some debt support were facilitated in the budget. In terms of debt, we are simply looking at either capital or one-off projects. There is a plan to bring down the debt. I believe the debt is 55 per cent of the gross domestic product (GDP). We are looking at debt sustainability as an issue, and that is to say that over the long haul, to sustain debt. That is part of the programme.

There was also a question with respect to tax relief to the poor. When we looked at the budget for this year—this is our third year and we had done some other things in the past. For example, when we came in, we basically reduced the tax rate for all citizens; we increased wages significantly and paid off the debt to public servants. There are about 60,000 to 70,000 employees which form the major part of our middle income individuals. So we did two things: we gave more income to that group; we created more disposable income by reducing taxes on

savings; providing benefits for credit union shares and so forth. When you look at this matter, on balance, our thinking at this point in time was simply to deal with those individuals who would have been affected by the increase in food prices at the lower end. That is what we sought to do with the tax relief in this particular budget. We did not attempt to do it beyond \$35,000 which is about \$3,000 per month, because we did not consider the fact that we could have afforded it at this point in time based on the cost and, therefore, we stopped at that point.

The question with respect to the resources for the joint select committees, I do not understand why you did not get the resources. As far as I am aware, as a matter of course, anything the Parliament asks for, we will fund it. We do so because we do not want to be accused of interfering with the works of the Parliament. I really wish that someone will check out that matter. Whatever requests are made we, in fact, give it to the Parliament.

Mr. Vice-President, there is one matter that Sen. Seepersad-Bachan raised. I thought it was interesting so I actually went and checked on it.

Sen. Dr. Gopeesingh: Mr. Vice-President, may I ask the hon. Minister about the debt to GDP ratio? If the GDP is recalculated and it is higher now and the debt goes up, then that level remains basically the same percentage. Is it not a better idea to get a better picture of the debt to foreign earnings, since that would give us a truer picture of the real debt situation and the ability to service the debt?

9.15 p.m.

Sen. The Hon. C. Enill: The debt issues are guided by the Article IV consultation. Each year the International Monetary Fund (IMF) comes here; spends a long time with us and then produces an Article IV report that is, basically, available to everybody. It uses a particular method of debt to gross domestic product (GDP) and it looks at sustainability issues. We have stayed with that programme.

In looking at our own debt profile and debt programming, we take other things into account. Remember that a major component of this debt is local debt and the piece that is foreign is coming down all the time; quite frankly, it is too low right now; it is 13 or 14 per cent or something like that. If we are going out to do foreign debt, it will be simply to make sure that Trinidad and Tobago has a presence in the investment community, so that the strengths and investment grade can, in fact, help our manufacturers and other businesses. But there is a discussion going on now, even at the level of the IMF, as to how we should deal with debt. Is debt to GDP a good measurement or is debt sustainability? If it is debt

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sustainability, how do you measure that? How do you deal with that? How do you report that? How do you programme that? That discussion has not yet been concluded, but it is, certainly, something we are focusing on.

Sen. Seepersad-Bachan asked some questions to the effect: How could bpTT tell the Government the price for oil and gas? When did the Pricing Committee cease to exist and on whose instruction? And could it be a case that after three years in office, not one of the four Ministers in the Ministry of Finance recognized that was part of their portfolio? I checked, and my technocrats told me the following: The last time the committee met to discuss substantive pricing issues, was January 17, 1997, under the chairmanship of Mr. John Andrews. At that meeting the issue of transfer pricing was discussed.

The fact of the matter is that because we were having a problem and we were trying to find solutions, we went back to determine how this thing was done in previous years. The challenge and the issues we faced were as follows: A company would come to the Government and say, "On the basis of my revenue, I am using this particular price." We found ourselves in a situation one day, where we said, "No, no, no; we are not happy with that price; we want you to do a run for us, on the basis of a particular price." They said, "No, we are not doing that." [*Crosstalk*] I am simply telling you what is.

Sen. Seepersad-Bachan: I think that is something that you need to check into, because Mr. John Andrews would have been Chairman of that committee, until he left to go to Atlantic LNG, in his portfolio of the Technical Advisory Group. Members of that group would have been on that committee. They constantly governed pricing, because they would advise the Minister as well, on pricing; so somebody is not giving you all the facts. I would hate to think that John Andrews, for who he is, would not have continued his job as the Chairman of the Pricing Committee.

Sen. The Hon. C. Enill: I am simply providing information. From time to time you have said that we manufacture. The fact of the matter is that I asked my officers to research it and, for the last three days, they have done that and have given me the information. I am simply putting it on the record. If we have to check it, we will do so. I specifically asked, because I found that the situation you expressed and the manner in which you expressed it, I was unhappy with it, and this is what I have found.

In terms of Dollar-for-Dollar, you asked for a report to Parliament; that is something I have to look at, because I know we did it in the budget and there is some number there, but I honestly do not know what that is.

Sen. Seepersad-Bachan: There has been a constant drawdown.

Sen. The Hon. C. Enill: We will make sure that we honour all the commitments we had for Dollar-to-Dollar, but over time we will move to a different system, one in which you do not have to have the first dollar, we will simply fund it, on some basis. [*Interruption*]

Sen. Seepersad-Bachan: But that is not the point. [*Crosstalk*]

Sen. The Hon. C. Enill: I understood it that way. [*Interruption*] If I did, I apologize.

In terms of the \$300 million Caricom relief that one Senator asked about, you will recall that in the aftermath of Hurricane Ivan, the Prime Minister, in the other place, basically identified a mechanism by which we will support countries that purchase petroleum products from us, by giving a discount on the price, once the price of oil went beyond a particular level. The way we had chosen to do that was simply to put it in a fund to the maximum of \$300 million for three months and set up rules by which the drawdowns can only be done for poverty alleviation issues. That is what the \$300 million referred to inside the budget. It is relief for countries that purchase petroleum products from us, once the price gets to a particular level. We cannot rebate directly, so we simply transfer it into that. The fund is going to be managed by the Caribbean Development Bank (CDB) on the basis of a trust fund and the heads will determine how that will be dispensed.

In terms of the other issues raised, I have asked the Ministry of Energy and Energy Industries to deal with them, either through a statement or we will debate the issue again, so we will deal with that shortly.

Sen. R. Montano asked: Are you better off now than you were one year ago? I think that we have demonstrated with absolutely no doubt, that we are better off. [*Desk thumping*] The answer is, yes. [*Crosstalk*]

Sen. Prof. Deosaran spoke about “compassionate pragmatism services to citizens”. I understand why some of the issues coming out seem the way they do. One of the things I have learned, over the last year or two, is this: Every country in the world is trying to deal with one issue alone: How do you reduce the levels of poverty in your particular country? Sen. Abdul-Hamid spoke about it. If you go to the international community you will find that there is a preoccupation with them putting aside funding to deal with social issues, because there is a recognition that no country can move forward unless it can take care of its people.

In the analysis of the programmes that we do, what is missed or what we have not communicated properly, is that when we came into Government we found a

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difficult situation, that is, there was a group of individuals who, really, were not part of the system. As a consequence of that, many of them were forced into a particular lifestyle that was not consistent with peace and harmony in the country. Therefore, in dealing with the issue of crime in the country, one of the things we did was to attack the problem on the other side. That is to say: Can you provide individuals with an alternative?

The challenge is that many of the individuals involved in that activity need time to move from a situation of instantaneous gratification, to one in which you have to actually work; you have to get up and do something. Our programmes are designed to give individuals something, over time, that will allow them to participate in the economy that is, basically, expanding, because there are opportunities. The problem is that we have a bunch of unskilled people and a bunch of unserved needs. The Ministry of Science, Technology and Tertiary Education, in some of its specific outreach programmes, is going into communities, finding these individuals, providing them with training and some level of support and then placing them into programmes where they will continue to have a sustainable existence.

For example, in the housing programme, we are, in fact, taking individuals with no skills through a programme, giving them something to do in that sector, monitoring how they do it and then, basically allocating for them, some piece of that activity. One of the promises we made was to make 10 per cent of the projects available to small contractors and we are going to attempt to formalize that, because it was not as easy as we had originally anticipated; but we think that it is a way which we, absolutely, must go. [*Interruption*]

Sen. Prof. Deosaran: I am very grateful for the explanation; in fact, I agree with you. It is unfortunate that my contribution, perhaps, through parliamentary necessity, had to come out the way it did. Since I agree with you, I would like to see in the next budget a disaggregation of the different groups that you are servicing—the numbers called by the hon. Minister—especially in the context of how many, in a certain target group, have been reduced over time, so as to remove the myths and misunderstanding that surround your social services sector. That is the point I was making. How many have been empowered and, if not, why not?

I want to emphasize that I have not spoken out against helping the people who are in genuine distress; that has been properly said in my contribution. I am more on the other end, with the people who should be transformed through skill training. They have to show some evidence, in time, based on taxpayers' money,

as to how they have begun to help themselves; which is also what the taxpayers, your ministry and the Government should properly expect.

Sen. The Hon. C. Enill: It is certainly a comment that we will take. I know you have done it, but I will just repeat it: If you look at the *Social Sector Investment Programme* document that is part of the package, there are some very specific programmes and targets. It also contains what was intended, what was achieved, the variances and the reasons for them. Beyond that we, certainly, will be pleased to hear what else you want but, from where we stand, we thought that the document provided sufficient information so that you could draw the conclusions as to its value. If it has not, then we will certainly look at that.

Sen. Dr. Kernahan asked the question: How does a government deal with the self-esteem of its people? Some may say that if you give them an opportunity and point them in a direction and they believe that they are part of your society, then they will start to look at you differently and you will have a different view. In that regard, I think some of the programmes that we have are, in fact, doing that.

Sen. Dr. McKenzie talked about whether or not there could be a way in which the maintenance of schools can, in fact, be given to small contractors and the whole question of the community and so on. That is an idea we are looking at right now, because we believe the Maintenance Training and Security (MTS) organization, should operate in that way. We believe that at the end of it all there must be more owners of businesses who can determine the levels of wealth they will require in the society and have absolutely no issue.

I think the other issue the Senator raised was the question of the communication challenge; that is always an issue. Sometimes I think we are not doing enough; sometimes I think we are doing badly, but it is a challenge, because sometimes the group you are looking at, you need to deal with them differently.

9.30 p.m.

Sen. Baksh talked about foreign carriers. I do not know where he got that from. Quite frankly, we had a situation where we allowed BWIA to wet lease two aircraft in order to deal with a particular issue.

Mr. Vice-President: Hon. Senators, the speaking time of the hon. Senator has expired.

Motion made, That the hon. Senator's speaking time be extended by 15 minutes. [*Hon. J. Yuille-Williams*]

Question put and agreed to.

Sen. The Hon. C. Enill: Thank you very much, Mr. Vice-President. I understand the lateness of the hour and I will try to move on.

Sen. Baksh talked about the working poor. This is something we have been noticing for a while now. It certainly is a phenomenon that is similar to jobless growth and I thank him for bringing it in this way because it was one of the challenges we faced this year as we were looking at issues that affected people in the society.

In that regard, I must tell you that any suggestions or prescriptions that you have I will be willing to sit with you to understand them because I really believe it is an issue. I know of it but, whatever prescriptions you look at there are consequences and some of them are very negative, so it is an issue. He also raised the question of lack of delivery and we talked about that.

I like Dr. Gopeesingh's style of analysis. I like how he has used some information to present us in a bad way. I am hoping that the Minister of Health will deal with that and I will certainly convey your best wishes to him so he can in fact deal with that.

I think that the Minister of Community Development and Gender Affairs has put to rest some of the concerns of Sen. Prof. Ramchand. If we do not meet the requirement, please do not wait for a budget debate to talk to us. We can respond.

I want to close with one other statement and it has to do with this corruption perception issue.

Sen. Ali: Mr. Vice-President, on a point of clarification, I do not know if I heard the Minister correctly, that the Minister of Energy and Energy Industries was going to make a statement because I had about seven project-related questions from the budget and I did not get any answers on them.

I want to know if the Minister of Energy and Energy Industries is going to address the issues in a statement. If so, I can refresh his mind by writing him a letter with the questions.

Sen. The Hon. C. Enill: Senator, because the nature of your contribution was directed specifically to comments that the Minister made in the other place, I thought it appropriate that he should respond to clarify those issues. We tried to get him this afternoon but did not succeed. So I suggest that we do it in the form of a statement, because I am sure that other Members also have concerns about the issues that you have raised.

I think that this group believes, in a sense, that you are sort of the energy czar in matters like this, and there are some other comments which Sen. Seepersad-Bachan made as well which I think will be appropriate for him to address in a statement and he has been so advised.

Mr. Vice-President, on the issue of corruption perception, I went to the World Bank to understand what they had in fact been saying about this issue and I will share with you what they have said. It appears that there is a view that corruption is linked to oil-rich countries and that once oil prices are high; there is a view that corruption is high. There are a number of countries that stand out here and it was recommended that oil companies need to provide more information about payments made so that the population will have a different view.

My colleague, Minister Sahadeo, had started to look at this Extractive Industry Initiative and it is our intention to deal with it, but the problem as you know is the one we have just talked about as it relates to resources. And it is not an excuse, it is simply that you cannot get a lot of these things done if you do not have the resources in place and we need to move to get them in place.

I must tell you that I am 100 per cent with the Attorney General that by the time this Government leaves office, this particular perception about this issue would have been addressed because we will take the steps that are necessary to present the information to ensure that it can withstand scrutiny. [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. Mark: Mr. Vice-President, I want to raise the question about the Minister of Finance's statement about a competitive exchange rate in terms of the manufacturing sector, and I want to get some clarification from the Minister of Finance as to what he had in mind when he made that statement in his budget presentation.

Sen. The Hon. C. Enill: A competitive exchange rate simply means that the policy that we have been following is what the Central Bank will maintain; an exchange rate that is based on the resources that are available so that our manufacturers do not find themselves in an environment in which they are uncompetitive. That is what it means.

There were concerns being expressed by someone about devaluation despite the fact that we had over six months of massive reserves. So we thought we should maintain a statement that says that the exchange rate will continue to be competitive. It does not mean anything else. So do not read anything else into it. It is simply a statement of policy and, yes, I heard you, the Governor of the Central Bank should have made the statement, but when you get to Article IV, you will see that the IMF is making the same statement as it relates to Trinidad and Tobago.

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So with this budget we take the country forward into a future of continued prosperity and stability, greater equity, and enhanced opportunity. Yes, there are other challenges and we intend to continue to work to achieve a society that we can all be proud to have made a contribution towards, and we invite all to join in creating a better future for all our people.

Mr. Vice-President, I beg to move.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill accordingly read a second time.

Sen. The Hon. C. Enill: Mr. Vice-President, in accordance with Standing Order 63, I beg to move that the Bill not be committed to a committee of the whole Senate.

Question put and agreed to.

Question put and agreed to, That the Bill be now read a third time and passed.

Bill accordingly read the third time and passed.

BIRTHDAY GREETINGS

Sen. Robin Montano: Mr. Vice-President, before the adjournment of the Senate, may I, with your leave, announce that today is the birthday of Sen. Dr. Jennifer Kernahan and may I ask the Senate to join me in congratulating her on her birthday. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Vice-President: I too would like to express my congratulations to you Senator.

Sen. The Hon. Joan Yuille-Williams: I join those on this side of the Senate to congratulate you on your birthday. Sen. King will sing after.

ADJOURNMENT

The Minister of Community Development, Culture and Gender Affairs and Acting Prime Minister (Sen. The Hon. Joan Yuille-Williams): Mr. Vice-President, I beg to move that this Senate do now adjourn to Tuesday, November 02, at 1.30 p.m.

I wish to inform the Senate that we will take the Bills as they appear on the Order Paper, and the Motions listed under the heading "Committee Business".

Question put and agreed to.

Senate adjourned accordingly.

Adjourned at 9.45 p.m.