SENATE

Tuesday, June 26, 2007

The Senate met at 1.30 p.m.

PRAYERS

[MADAM PRESIDENT *in the Chair*]

LEAVE OF ABSENCE

Madam President: Hon. Senators, I have granted leave of absence from today's sitting to Sen. Prof. Ramesh Deosaran and Sen. Angela Cropper who are out of the country.

I have also granted leave of absence to Sen. Raziah Ahmed who is ill.

SENATORS' APPOINTMENT

Madam President: Hon. Senators, I have received the following correspondence from His Excellency the President, Professor George Maxwell Richards, T.C., C.M.T., Ph.D:

"THE CONSTITUTION OF THE REPUBLIC OF TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO

By His Excellency Professor GEORGE MAXWELL RICHARDS, T.C. C.M.T. Ph.D. President and Commander-in-Chief of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago.

/s/ G. Richards
President.

TO: MRS. CINDY GIBBS-NICHOLAS

WHEREAS Senator Raziah Ahmed is incapable of performing her duties as a Senator by reason of illness:

NOW, THEREFORE, I, GEORGE MAXWELL RICHARDS, President as aforesaid, acting in accordance with the advice of the Leader of the Opposition, in exercise of the power vested in me by section 44 of the Constitution of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago, do hereby appoint you, CINDY GIBBS-NICHOLAS, to be temporarily a member of the Senate, with effect from 26th June, 2007 and continuing during the period of illness of the said Senator Raziah Ahmed.

Given under my Hand and the Seal of the President of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago at the Office of the President, St. Ann's, this 25th day of June, 2007."

"THE CONSTITUTION OF THE REPUBLIC OF TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO

By His Excellency Professor GEORGE MAXWELL RICHARDS, T.C., C.M.T., Ph.D., President and Commander-in-Chief of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago.

/s/ G. Richards
President.

TO: MS. ALTHEA ROCKE

WHEREAS Senator Professor Ramesh Deosaran is incapable of performing his duties as a Senator by reason of his absence from Trinidad and Tobago:

NOW, THEREFORE, I, GEORGE MAXWELL RICHARDS, President as aforesaid, in exercise of the power vested in me by section 40(2)(c) and section 44 of the Constitution of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago, do hereby appoint you, ALTHEA ROCKE, to be temporarily a member of the Senate, with immediate effect and continuing during the absence from Trinidad and Tobago of the said Senator Professor Ramesh Deosaran.

Given under my Hand and the Seal of the President of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago at the Office of the President, St. Ann's, this 25th day of June, 2007."

"THE CONSTITUTION OF THE REPUBLIC OF TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO

By His Excellency Professor GEORGE MAXWELL RICHARDS, T.C., C.M.T., Ph.D., President and Commander-in-Chief of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago.

/s/ G. Richards
President.

TO: PROFESSOR DAVID PICOU

WHEREAS Senator Angela Cropper is incapable of performing her duties as a Senator by reason of her absence from Trinidad and Tobago:

NOW, THEREFORE, I, GEORGE MAXWELL RICHARDS, President as aforesaid, in exercise of the power vested in me by section 40(2)(c) and section 44 of the Constitution of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago, do hereby appoint you, DAVID PICOU, to be temporarily a member of the Senate, with effect from 26th June, 2007 and continuing during the absence from Trinidad and Tobago of the said Senator Angela Cropper.

Given under my Hand and the Seal of the President of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago at the Office of the President, St. Ann's, this 22nd day of June, 2007."

OATH OF ALLEGIANCE

The following Senators took and subscribed the Oath of Allegiance as required by law:

Cindy Gibbs-Nicholas, Althea Rocke and Prof. David Picou.

PAPERS LAID

1. Report of the Auditor General of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago on the financial statements of the Trinidad and Tobago Racing Authority for the year ended July 31, 2000. [*The Minister in the Ministry of Finance* (*Sen. The Hon. Conrad Enill*)]

2. Report of the Auditor General of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago on the financial statements of the Trinidad and Tobago Racing Authority for the year ended July 31, 2001. [*Sen. The Hon. C. Enill*]

3. Report of the Auditor General of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago on the financial statements of the Trinidad and Tobago Racing Authority for the year ended July 31, 2002. [*Sen. The Hon. C. Enill*]

4. Annual Administrative Report of the San Juan/Laventille Regional Corporation for the period 2005 to 2006. [*The Minister of Local Government* (*Sen. The Hon. Rennie Dumas*)]

MUNICIPAL CORPORATIONS

Joint Select Committee Report (Presentation)

Sen. Rawle Titus: Madam President, I have the honour to lay on the Table the Third Report of the Joint Select Committee of Parliament appointed to enquire into and report to Parliament on Municipal Corporations and Service Commissions with the exception of the Judicial and Legal Service Commission and the Police Service Commission.

ORAL ANSWER TO QUESTION

The following question stood on the Order Paper in the name of Sen. Raziah Ahmed:

National Primary Schools Assessment Examination

72. Could the hon. Minister of Education indicate:

(a) What number of students in primary schools have repeated standards 1 and 3 based on the National Primary Schools Assessment Examination, in the academic year September, 2005 to July, 2006?

(b) What number of students will repeat the SEA in 2008 as a result of the non-availability of school places?

(c) How many students who sat the 2007 SEA Examination had the experience of repeating any prior academic years?

Sen. Wade Mark: Madam President, we will stand down this question. I would like to draw your attention to the Appendix. There are five outstanding questions for about four months. I would like you to appeal to the Leader of Government Business to take action.

The Minister of Education (Sen. The Hon. Hazel Manning): Madam President, I am ready to answer the question.

Madam President: Because Sen. Ahmed is not here they would stand it down until next week or whenever she is out again.

We have some outstanding written questions and I appeal to the Government.

Question, by leave, deferred.

IMMIGRATION (ADVANCE PASSENGER INFORMATION) (AMDT.) BILL

Bill to make provision for the transmission of advance passenger information respecting persons travelling to Trinidad and Tobago and for matters related thereto [*The Minister of National Security*]; read the first time.

ARRANGEMENT OF BUSINESS

The Minister of Public Administration and Information and Minister of Energy and Energy Industries (Sen. The Hon. Dr. Lenny Saith): Madam President, today is Private Members' Day. However, on the request of Sen. Prof. Deosaran and after discussions with the Opposition and Independent Benches it was agreed that Government Business would be dealt with today instead of Private Business.

I therefore seek leave of the Senate to deal with "Bills Second Reading" at this stage of the proceedings.

Question put and agreed to.

Sen. Mark: I wanted to intervene before you spoke because the question must be put. I have no problem with what Sen. The Hon. Dr. Saith has said. I would like you to emphasize that we have several matters on the Motion for the Adjournment which you have approved. For the last six weeks they have not been accommodated. I ask you and the Leader of Government Business seeing that we are so gracious in granting them Private Members' Day today—next week I imagine that we would have Private Members' Day. [*Interruption*] He did not say that. I am telling him that we are giving up today to get it back next week. In addition, I will like you to call on the Leader of Government Business to observe the spirit and at times the letter of the Standing Orders. I am not begging for any favour.

Madam President: I think that the reason we have not been able to entertain any of the matters on the Adjournment for the last few weeks is simply because we have gone quite late the last two weeks. It is impossible to have Ministers or call them out at that time. I do not know if you want to add to that.

Sen. The Hon. Dr. L. Saith: Yes, Madam President. The contribution needs an answer. First of all, we agreed and he knows that we agreed to have Private Members' Day this week. There was no need to gallery.

Secondly, on the last occasion I indicated that if the Sitting goes to 10 o'clock, 11 o'clock or midnight, since the Standing Orders say that if by 6.30 p.m. you have not completed, you have the option to do Motion on the Adjournment, many

of these require Ministers from the other place to be present. I think that the hon. Senator will agree that without knowing when we will end a debate you cannot have Ministers waiting for that. As long as we get to the point where debates would go very late in the evening, we would not do Motions on the Adjournment.

Sen. Mark: I take the strongest objection to that kind of statement. Madam President, you are in charge of the Standing Orders here.

Madam President: Senator, let us not carry the matter any further. I am aware of your complaint and the situation. Let us see how it works out. Sen. Dr. Saith is correct. As far as I am aware, if the Sitting goes on longer after 6.30 p.m. it makes it very difficult to have Motions on the Adjournment. Sen. Mark, I will look at it and see what could be done.

FINANCE BILL

Order for second reading read.

The Minister in the Ministry of Finance (Sen. The Hon. Conrad Enill): Madam President, I beg to move,

> That a Bill to provide for the imposition or variation of certain duties and taxes and to introduce other provisions of a fiscal nature and for related matters, be now read a second time.

Sen. Mark: Madam President, on a point of order.

Madam President: What is your point of order?

Sen. Mark: This Finance Bill offends several provisions of the Standing Orders. I refer you to several Standing Orders. [*Interruption*] No! This must be raised before the debate.

Madam President, can you look at Standing Orders Nos. 62, 63 and 37? In this Finance Bill on page 21, I saw it being certified as a money Bill. As you know a money Bill cannot be amended in the Senate. I refer you to section 63(2)(a)(iii) of the Constitution as to what a money Bill is about. If you need to suspend to get advice, that is fine. This is not a money Bill. That is the first thing.

Sen. Montano: Sit down.

Sen. Mark: You cannot tell me to sit. Out of place! This is not a money Bill. May I also guide you that on the Order Paper before us there is a Bill— [*Interruption*] Madam President, this gentleman who is a terrorist, would you ask him—

Madam President: Senator, you got to withdraw that statement.

Sen. Mark: Tell him to stop terrorizing me.

Madam President: That is a different matter. I will talk to him about that. You withdraw that statement.

Sen. Mark: I withdraw the terrorist, but I ask you to—"doh" terrorize me.

Madam President: Okay. I will. Now, take your seat while I am on my feet. Sen. Mark, take your seat. (*Crosstalk*) He has withdrawn.

Sen. Abdul-Hamid: He should apologize.

Sen. Mark: No!

Madam President: Minister, can I have a little quiet please, while I try to sort out this matter? Sen. Mark, if you will give me a chance. Miss Sandy, what do you say? It has nothing to do with that.

Sen. Mark: Madam President, please. You may not have read it. I have read it. There is a Bill on the Order Paper under "Government Business Bills Second Reading". If you go to (vi) you would see, "An Act to validate the collection of certain fees received under the Companies Act, Chapter 81:01".

If you go to the Bill before the Senate under clause 24, you would see that the very provisions in this Bill are contained in the Companies Act. That is offensive to sections 62 and 63. If you are not clear I am asking that you suspend and clarify.

Madam President: I have spoken to the Clerk who is my advisor in the Senate and she has advised that there is nothing wrong with this Bill being debated. I suggest that we debate it and you make your objections during that time.

Sen. Mark: It requires some patience because we are going about this thing the wrong way. If you go to the Constitution of the Republic, section 63(2) says

"Except on the recommendation or the consent of the Cabinet neither House shall—

(a) proceed upon any Bill, including any amendment to a Bill, which, in the opinion of the person presiding, makes provision for any of the following purposes:

(ii) for imposing or increasing any charge on the revenues or other funds of Trinidad and Tobago or for altering any such charge otherwise than by reducing it;"

I am putting to this honourable Senate that there is a provision in this Bill before us—I refer you to page 7 of the Finance Bill where Government says that a grant under this Act is subject to review and may be increased, decreased or discontinued.

We do not have the power as the Senate to discontinue any money that is given to people in this country. The Act and the Constitution are very clear. This Bill is offending section 63 of the Constitution and the provisions in sections 37, 62 and 63.

Sen. Jeremie SC: Madam President, the issue is a very straightforward one. The Bill is certified by the Speaker of the House. It says:

"I confirm the above and certify that this is a money Bill."

I submit that we cannot go behind the certificate of the Speaker.

Madam President: Senator, I have heard you. Give me a minute. I have heard the Attorney General; talked to the Clerk and looked at it. Sen. Mark, whatever is before us has been approved by the Cabinet. It has gone to the Lower House and has been certified by the Speaker. I do not see any reason why we cannot debate this Bill.

Sen. Mark: I want the President to rule on this.

Madam President: I just ruled. We are going to debate it.

Sen. Montano: You do not have to rule on anything except this issue.

Sen. Mark: Do not let "Danny Montano" misguide you. I will like the President to suspend.

Madam President: I will not suspend. I want absolute quiet while I decide on the Bill.

Members, after discussion we would continue.

Sen. The Hon. C. Enill: Madam President, the Finance Bill 2007 proposes to give effect to a list of initiatives, intended to improve the living conditions for the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago. Today, we have finalized the legislation which allows us to implement these promises as we move towards the attainment of the

objectives of Vision 2020. By these measures today, we propose to provide goods and services for the population of Trinidad and Tobago consistent with meeting our commitments to the development of our people, while ensuring that the country is moving in the right direction.

For quite some time now, this Government has been doing the planning intended to result in moving in the right direction. The process that we followed provided us with the information from which we were able to create a new society. We are building at a time when as a country, we are experiencing a very favourable and buoyant economic environment which has been reflected by positive internal and external macroeconomic indicators.

We need to remind ourselves that high oil prices are only part of the story of our economy's current success and by itself, high oil prices will not generate economic sustainability. We should remember that there are several countries that have benefited from oil or other commodity booms and remain immersed in economic difficulties and with uncertain economic prospects. Real GDP growth has averaged around 10 per cent over the past five years. In the process, per capita GDP has more than doubled since last year. The unemployment rate has declined to 5 per cent, the lowest level ever recorded.

According to information available to me, a total of 4,960 new businesses employing 26,997 persons were started during the 2002—2006 period. The existing 12,496 employers expanded their operations by employing an additional 121,436 employees during the period. Even based on 2002 data, poverty has been cut by one-half to 17 per cent. The rapid growth of the economy and the creation of several new jobs since that time would have reduced this figure even further.

2.00 p.m.

The energy sector has been the main driver for economic growth. However, the non-energy sector has grown at a robust 7 per cent per year since 2002. We have a very healthy non-energy export sector which is the envy of the Caribbean and further diversification into services, for example, banking and tourism, is proceeding apace. Our energy sector has been diversified to reduce its vulnerability; now we are a major world exporter of natural gas and petrochemicals. This is why we say we have a healthy economy that is built on strong foundations, and well positioned for sustained growth and development. But this is not only my judgment, or the judgment of biased insiders, the sentiments are reflected in the assessment of respected international experts.

Madam President, Standard and Poor's, one of the highly respected international credit rating agencies upgraded this country's bond ratings from BBB in 2003 to A-minus in August 2006.

Among the reasons that Standard and Poor's have cited for their decision to upgrade our credit ratings are:

- Prudent monetary policy;
- The buoyant energy sector;
- The sustained positive performance of the economy; and
- The continued surpluses on the fiscal and external accounts.

In its recently published *Regional Economic Outlook*, the International Monetary Fund has also recognized Trinidad and Tobago as one of the fastest growing and more dynamic economies in Latin America and the Caribbean region.

Madam President, this is the thirteenth consecutive year of economic expansion and the second year of double digit growth in the past five years. The energy sector continues to be the main driving force in this impressive growth trend.

While it is a fact that the inflation rate, which tended towards double digits at the end of 2006 was the primary macroeconomic challenge facing policy makers, the central government responded by focusing on supply side constraints and public education. It must also be noted that expanding the economy was a necessary step towards achieving the goal of diversifying the economy and to providing a platform for our next level of investment.

An increase in the inflation rate is inevitable because of the fall in the unemployment rate. If, almost everyone is working, then there is more money being spent. Consequently, demand increases and this in turn increases prices. Additionally, supply side issues also have contributed to the increase in the inflation rate. Government responded quickly and effectively using a mix of fiscal and monetary policies.

Madam President, the efforts of the Government were successful as the headline inflation rate trended downwards from 10 per cent to 9.6 per cent, 9.1 per cent, 8.6 per cent, 8.4 per cent, slowing to 8.0 per cent in March 2007, trending slightly upwards and now stands at 7.9 per cent which is the sixth consecutive month of decline since the rate peaked at 10 per cent in October 2006.

With this challenge being addressed, the Government continued its programme of pursuing policies designed towards improving the quality of life of the people of Trinidad and Tobago. To this end, the Government was able to achieve the goal of offering free tertiary education for all citizens, as well as reductions in the personal income and corporate taxes from 30 per cent to 25 per cent.

All citizens who cannot afford to pay for medication for chronic diseases now have access to the Chronic Disease Assistance Programme. This programme was first introduced in 2003 and provides universal coverage of drugs for 11 diseases. Additionally, all citizens now have access to quality and affordable housing. This policy reflects the Government's desire to carefully set the stage for providing a better quality of life for everyone.

The Government's priority is not only focused on the current state of the economy, but also on the future of the economy. The Heritage and Stabilization Fund is one way the Government is addressing this issue. The legislation that will regulate the management of this Fund was recently passed in the Parliament. The Government in collaboration with the Central Bank of Trinidad and Tobago has also launched its Financial Literacy Programme which will give all citizens the knowledge to deal with the basics of everyday financial management.

Accordingly, in light of the fact that a large proportion of the resource rent associated with crude oil and natural gas accrues to the Government, fiscal policy is the primary channel through which not only the quantum of the revenues, that is, royalties and taxes is determined, but also the distribution of those revenues through generations. We are therefore ensuring that the revenue gained from the country's natural resources will be enjoyed by many generations to come.

The measures prescribed in the Bill before this House show our commitment to ensuring that Trinidad and Tobago will not go the way of other economies that experienced this problem, but will stay on the development path that we have chosen.

Madam President, I will now examine the Finance Bill, clause by clause.

Clause 1 of the Bill, which cites the Short Title of the Bill, is self-explanatory.

Madam President: I have to listen to the presentation then listen to you all when you are speaking. Can I have some quiet please?

Sen. The Hon. C. Enill: Clause 2 of the Bill proposes amendments to the Central Tenders Board Ordinance so as to increase the spending limits of the Chief Administrator of the Tobago House of Assembly to the limits authorized for

permanent secretaries. Being responsible for the entire island of Tobago, it is only reasonable that the Chief Administrator be given the same resources available to permanent secretaries. This was not done on the last occasion and, therefore, section 27(B)(2) of the Central Tenders Board Ordinance will be amended to achieve this.

Clause 3 of the Bill proposes amendments to the Retiring Allowances (Legislative Service) Act, Chap. 2:03, by implementing the recommendations made by the Salaries Review Commission, which improves the retirement allowances of all legislators and their surviving spouses.

Clause 5 of the Bill proposes amendments to the Gambling and Betting Act, Chap. 11:19 as follows:

Clause 5(a) and (b) of the Bill would amend sections 3 and 13(2) of the Gambling and Betting Act. These provisions define slot machines and tokens, removing any ambiguity as to whether slot machines will be considered "gambling machines" for the purposes of that Act. Accordingly, this measure will enforce the ban on importation of slot machines which took effect from March 01, 2007, and would reiterate the position of the Government on casino-type gaming activities.

Government is totally against the operation of the casinos and also casino-type establishments and studies have shown the link between gaming activities and the erosion of societies. Private members' clubs however, continue to be able to operate within the current law. On this provision, it is intended to continue dialogue with representatives of the Association of Members' Clubs who have commissioned a study on the operations of clubs in Trinidad and Tobago. The Government has given a commitment that the dialogue will continue between both parties. On this basis, the legislation provides that this amendment will not be effective unless proclaimed.

Government pensioners. Madam President, the Government has acknowledged that in recent years the plight of pensioners needed to be addressed. In an effort to alleviate the financial difficulties of Government pensioners, the Government has recommended that the minimum pension payable in respect of service under the Government or other public services will be set at $1,150 per month.

Madam President: Minister please! Sen. Mark, you will have your turn whenever you decide to speak. In the meantime, with your crosstalk in my ear, I cannot hear what the Minister is saying.

Please continue.

Sen. The Hon. C. Enill: This means that all civil servants will receive a pension no less than $1,150 per month. This will apply to the following categories of pensioners in the Government service.

Retiring Allowances (Legislative Services) Act, clause 3 of the Bill; judges including widows' pension, clause 4 of the Bill; the Prison Service, clause 6 of the Bill; Retiring Allowances Diplomatic Service Act, clause 7 of the Bill; civil servants, clause 8 of the Bill; Widows' and Orphans' Pensions, clause 9 of the Bill; Municipal Corporations, clause 10 of the Bill; Fire Service, clause 13 of the Bill; the President (including Widows' Pension); the Prime Minister (including Windows' Pension); Teacher, clause 14 of the Bill; Assisted Secondary Schools Teachers Pensions Act, clause 15 of the Bill; Industrial Court; Defence Force, Police Service.

This measure will take effect from October 01, 2006.

Madam President, the Government is committed to caring for all citizens of Trinidad and Tobago, particularly the most vulnerable, including our senior citizens. We have implemented a number of measures to improve their living conditions, including access to free medical care and drugs, free bus passes, and a minimum old age pension of $1,150 per month, which is an increase from $720 in 2001.

Clauses 11(1)(a), (b), (c), (d) and (e) of the Bill amends the Old Age Pensions Act, Chap. 32:02, to be renamed as the Senior Citizens' Grant. With effect from October 01, 2006, there will be one qualifying income ceiling, which is income not exceeding $25,800 annually.

Clause 11(1)(f) of the Bill repeals section 3 of the Old Age Pensions Act. This clause outlines the provisions for payment of the Senior Citizens Grants. Prior to October 01, 2006 there were two bands of pensions, where persons whose annual income was less than $1,200 were entitled to $1,150 per month, and persons whose annual income exceeded $1,200, but did not exceed $12,000 per annum, were entitled to the $1,050 per month.

Madam President, with effect from October 01, 2006, a person who satisfies the statutory conditions of age and resident, and receives an annual income not exceeding $12,000 is entitled to a Senior Citizens' Grant of $1,150.

Further, the following applies. A person whose annual income does not exceed $1,200 is entitled to a monthly allowance of $200. Therefore, that person will receive $1,350 per month.

A person whose annual income exceeds $1,200 but does not exceed $12,000 is entitled to a monthly allowance of $100. Therefore, that person will receive $1,250 per month.

Clause 11(1)(f)(3) and (4) of the Bill, amends the Old Age Pensions Act to include persons whose annual income does not exceed $25,800 and who previously did not qualify for old age pension.

A person whose annual income exceeds $12,000 but does not exceed $25,800 per annum will now be entitled to a monthly grant of one-twelfth of the difference between $25,800 and the annual income received by that person.

A person whose annual income exceeds $24,000 but does not exceed $25,800 will now be entitled to a monthly grant of $1,150.

Clause 11(f) of the Bill validates any payment in excess of $1,050 which is made on or after October 01, 2006, to a person eligible to receive a Senior Citizens' Grant.

Payments were, in fact, made to senior citizens during the period and this Bill seeks to validate those payments.

Clause 12(1) of the Bill amends section 11A(3) of the Public Assistance Act, Chap. 32:03, to increase the Disability Assistance Grant by $100 from $800 to $900. This increase attempts to alleviate the circumstances of physically challenged individuals, catering to their special needs and concerns. As at May 2007, 16,010 persons are benefiting from the Disability Assistance Grant.

Clause 12(2) of the Bill validates any payment in excess of $800 made by the Board on or after October 01, 2006 to a person eligible to receive disability assistance.

Clause 16(1)(a) of the Bill amends section 8(1)(x) of the Income Tax Act, Chap. 75:01. Section 8(1)(x) exempts from tax lump sum death benefits paid under a pension plan. The amendment introduces no substantive change in the law but merely seeks to make clear that this exemption applies to pension plans approved by the Board of Inland Revenue.

Clause 16(1)(b) of the Bill renumbers section 8A of the Income Tax Act, which was introduced in the Finance Act, 2006 as section 8B. This is necessary because there is already in existence a section 8A which was introduced by the Finance Act, 2004.

Clause 16(1)(c) of the Bill amends section 10(9) and (10) of the Income Tax Act. These provisions deal with the deduction for tertiary education expenses. The Finance Act, 2006 sought to limit these deductions to expenses incurred at foreign

educational institutions other than regional public institutions (that is, the University of the West Indies.) However, this was not achieved due to a drafting error. The amendment in this Bill corrects this error so as to achieve the intention of limiting the claim for tertiary educational expenses to foreign institutions other than regional public institutions. It should be borne in mind that persons attending local institutions as well as regional public institutions, benefit under the GATE Programme.

Section 10(9) and (10) of the Income Tax Act are further amended to increase the deduction for tertiary education from $18,000 to $60,000. Section 10(10) also makes it clear that the maximum amount that can be claimed per household is limited to $60,000.

Clause 16(1)(d) of the Bill repeals section 10B of the Income Tax Act. Section 10B makes provision for a human resource development allowance. A similar provision in the Corporation Tax Act was repealed in the Finance Act, 2006. However, by oversight, the Finance Act, 2006 did not similarly repeal section 10B of the Income Tax Act. This oversight is now being remedied.

Clause 16(1)(e) of the Bill amends section 11(7) of the Income Tax Act. This clause provides that wear and tear allowances shall not be granted unless taxes have been paid under the Land and Building Taxes Act and the Municipal Corporations Act. Further, the clause stipulates that the taxes must be paid in the year of income in which the claim for wear and tear is made. This condition, we consider to be quite harsh. The amendment removes the requirement to pay land and building taxes and house rates in the particular year in question. Instead, the claim for wear and tear allowances will now be allowed once the relevant taxes have been paid, but not necessarily in the particular income year. In the past, we had to pay it in the current year otherwise it would not be allowed. We are saying once it is paid, not necessarily in the particular year, it will be allowed.

Clause 16(1)(f) of the Bill amends section 11B(6) of the Income Tax Act. Section 11B prohibits claims for wear and tear on buildings where a person is entitled to similar benefits under the Fiscal Incentives Act, the Tourism Development Act and the Trinidad and Tobago Free Zones Act. The purpose of this provision is to prevent the double claiming of allowances for the same expenditure.

However, section 11B(6) does not include capital expenditure under section 13B of the Income Tax Act, which provides for the conversion of a house into a guest house. Accordingly, it is possible to make a double claim for such expenditure. This amendment remedies this so as to prevent such a double claim.

Clause 16(1)(g) of the Bill amends section 16(3) of the Income Tax Act. At present, section 16(3) prohibits the set-off of losses from any trade, business or farming against income from employment or a profession. However, losses from other sources of income, such as rental income may be set off against income from employment or profession.

The Board of Inland Revenue has noted that taxpayers have been increasingly utilizing losses from sources other than trade, business or farming to reduce their income from employment or profession. The amendments to section 16(3) would prohibit the set-off of any losses against employment or professional income, which was the original intent.

Clause 16(1)(h) of the Bill deletes section 34 of the Income Tax Act. Section 34 provides for a 5 per cent tax on the surrender value of life insurance policies that were issued prior to January 01, 1989. This provision sought to recover some of the taxes foregone as a result of tax deductions claimed in respect of premiums paid on life insurance policies. This deduction was abolished some 18 years ago. Accordingly, in the vast majority of cases, the 5 per cent tax would be applied to premiums that were not eligible for a tax deduction. In the circumstances, this tax appears to be unnecessary and is therefore being abolished.

Clause 16(1)(i) of the Bill amends section 134(10) of the Income Tax Act This section quantifies the taxable benefit in the hands of employees where motor vehicles and other equipment are made available to them by their employer. Section 134(10) specifies the benefit as 50 per cent of the wear and tear or rental value of the motor vehicle or equipment.

There is some uncertainty as to whether a benefit would accrue to the employee if the employer chooses not to claim wear and tear on the particular motor vehicle or equipment. The amendment removes any doubt that a taxable benefit would accrue to an employee notwithstanding whether his employer chooses not to claim wear and tear on the motor vehicle or equipment.

Clause 16(1)(j) of the Bill amends the Seventh Schedule of the Income Tax Act. In order to calculate wear and tear allowances, assets were placed in a class specified in the Seventh Schedule and the wear and tear percentages relating to that class is used to determine the allowance. This is known as the “pooling” concept.

However, certain buildings and structures on which wear and tear allowances may be claimed were never placed in any of the classes in the Seventh Schedule. For the sake of clarity and completeness, the following assets are now included in

Class A of the Seventh Schedule:

1. Buildings, structures, and improvements thereon completed on or after January 01, 1995; and
2. Industrial buildings and structures under the Income Tax (In Aid of Industry) Act, acquired prior to January 01, 2006.

Clause 17(a) of the Bill amends section 10J of the Corporation Tax Act, Chap. 75:02. This section provides an allowance for the sponsorship of audio, visual or video productions. Prior to 2006, companies could have claimed 150 per cent of the actual expenditure up to a maximum of $1 million. The Finance Act, 2006 removed the 150 per cent uplift so that only the actual expenditure could be claimed. The effect of this amendment is to reintroduce the 150 per cent uplift for the sponsorship of audio, visual or video productions.

Clause 17(b) of the Bill re-introduces section 10(K) of the Corporation Tax Act which was repealed by the Finance Act, 2006. Section 10K provides a deduction equal to 150 per cent of the expenditure incurred by a company in making its own audio, visual or video productions.

This, Madam President, is consistent with the decision taken to support this particular industry as one of the seven industries for which special attention is being provided.

Clause 17(c) of the Bill provides that production companies, in addition to the 150 per cent deduction in respect of its own productions may also claim in the aggregate an allowance up to $1 million with respect to its sponsorship of sporting and artistic works not related to its own business.

Clause 17(d) of the Bill re-introduces section 16 of the Corporation Tax Act, which was repealed by the Finance Act, 2006. Section 16 provides for a tax deduction for approved property development companies. Such companies are entitled to a deduction equal to 15 per cent of the capital expenditure on the construction of commercial or industrial buildings.

It should be noted that this provision is being re-introduced for a limited time only in order to deal with projects that had already commenced prior to the enactment of the Finance Act, 2006. Accordingly, the deduction will only be granted where construction commenced before December 31, 2005 and is completed by December 31, 2007.

Clause 17(e) of the Bill amends the First Schedule of the Corporation Tax Act. The Finance Act, 2006 reduced the rate of corporation tax from 30 per cent to 25 per cent. This was done via an amendment to paragraph 1 of the First

Schedule to the Corporation Tax Act. However, paragraph 2 of the First Schedule was not likewise amended. Accordingly, certain profits of insurance companies are still technically taxable at the rate of 30 per cent, although this was clearly not the intention. The amendment seeks to remedy this oversight.

Clause 18(1)(a) of the Bill, increases the exemption from stamp duty on the conveyance of a property to be used as a residence from $350,000 to $450,000.

Clause 18(2) of the Bill similarly increases the exemption from stamp duty on the mortgage of a residential property from $315,000 to $450,000.

Clause 18(2) of the Bill seeks to validate the actions of the Board of Inland Revenue in applying the increased exemptions from stamp duty on residential properties from January 01, 2007 in anticipation of the enactment of the Finance Act, 2007.

Clause 19 of the Bill amends the Miscellaneous Taxes Act to provide for the appointment of the Green Fund Advisory Committee. This Committee is to be appointed by the Minister with responsibility for the Environment.

Section 64 of the Miscellaneous Taxes Act provides that the purpose of the Green Fund is to financially assist organizations and community groups that are engaged in activities related to the remediation, reforestation and conservation of the environment.

The function of the Green Fund Advisory Committee would be to advise the Minister on the certification of such activities.

With the publication of the Regulations, applicants may now seek funding for their activities from the Green Fund. Their applications must fulfil the requirements as set out by section 64 and the Regulations, if they are to be successful.

The Regulations require the application to be accompanied by proof of incorporation or registration of the community group or organization; the constitution of the community group or organization; the names, addresses and where available, other contact details of the office holders of the community group or organization; the level of membership of the community group or organization; evidence that the activity in respect of which funding is required is to be undertaken in Trinidad and Tobago.

The details of the activity, including the outputs and outcomes of the activity and the expected benefit to the environment; the expected duration of the activity; the human and other resources required; the related contribution of the applicant to the activity by the use of its own monetary and other resources; targets and

performance indicators of the activity; cost of the activity; details of the budget and related timelines for the activity; future projections and cost benefit analysis of the activity, and details of projects for which funding is already received or, in respect of which an application has been made by the applicant, together with the source of the funding.

2.30 p.m.

The committee will have a minimum of five and a maximum of nine members with experience and qualifications in the fields of finance, environmental management, law and forestry. Members may be appointed for a term of two years and may be reappointed for no more than two terms. Clause 18 of the Bill also makes provision for the procedure at meetings of the committee. The clause also specifically requires committee members to declare their interests and excuse themselves from deliberations on any matter in which they may have an interest.

Clause 20 of the Bill proposes amendments to the Customs Act, Chap. 78:01. Clause 20(a) to (f) of the Bill makes provision to amend the Customs Act to empower the Comptroller of Customs and Excise to issue standing and general orders, regulating the duties performed by the Customs Officers and, therefore, removing all legal ambiguity to the Comptroller's ruling. Further, under these clauses, new fines and sentences will be established, resulting in a more efficient and effective Customs and Excise Division.

In the 2006—2007 budget, consistent with promoting the education and knowledge base of the society, Government proposed to exempt from value added tax and customs duty, all computer peripherals, in addition to those accessories that were already free of these taxes, pursuant to previous legislation. As a result of the revised structure of the Common External Tariff based on the 2007 revision of the Harmonized System Nomenclature, changes occurred with respect to the classification of computer accessories due to technical progress in this area. Resulting from these changes, an anomaly occurred whereby a number of computer parts that were free of duty and value added tax under the preceding HS 2002 have now become liable to the payment of these taxes, as exemptions were aligned to specific tariff heading numbers.

Accordingly, clause 20(g) and (h) of the Bill amends the Second Schedule of the Customs Act by zero-rating computer peripherals as well as machinery, equipment and materials in respect of Internet and broadband services.

Clause 21(a) of the Bill amends section 2 of the Fiscal Incentives Act in the definition of "industry" by deleting the words "not being agricultural".

Clause 21(b) of the Bill inserts the following after section 31 of the Fiscal Incentives Act:

"Section 5(1)(a)(i) of this Act shall apply only to an enterprise which was granted benefits prior to 1st January, 2008."

Clause 22 of the Bill amends the Value Added Tax Act, 1989, by zero-rating computer peripherals as well as machinery, equipment and materials in respect of Internet and broadband services.

Clause 23 of the Bill amends the Foreign Investment Act, 1990, to clarify that the order relates to land, not only for residential use, but for business and trade purposes.

Clause 24 of the Bill seeks to validate the collection of certain fees by the Registrar of Companies.

Clause 25 sets out the commencement dates of the provisions of the Bill.

Madam President, the Finance Bill, 2007 shall support the Government's policies in continuing to provide for the welfare of the nation's people. The measure that the Parliament will debate will contribute towards making Trinidad and Tobago a developed nation by the year 2020.

I beg to move.

Question proposed.

Sen. Cindy Gibbs-Nicholas: Madam President, this is a historic time in my life. My family and everyone I know are sharing this moment with me—friends from the Handicap Association, the BWIA workers who are fighting for their pensions, residents from Diego Martin who have seen their homes destroyed by the Government and who are now homeless, Caroni workers and, indeed, my colleagues, Union of Members' Clubs and Lottery Workers.

I am a woman, a wife, a mother, a struggler, a citizen of Trinidad and Tobago representing all those affected by this Bill. I am the voice of the pensioners who are living in poverty after contributing to our country's wealth, which they are all not enjoying, except for a privileged few. I am the voice of the young people who face the unemployment that will be created by this Bill.

Madam President, Members of the Government need to listen to their people's cries. They are elected to lead us. Our freedoms are being interfered with. We are not seeing the justice in our society. The Government is infringing and imposing its personal views on a democratic society such as ours. This is not democracy.

I just take a moment to thank the United National Congress, the hon. Leader of the Opposition, Mrs. Kamla Persad-Bissessar and the hon. Sen. Wade Mark, for giving me the opportunity to give a truthful history of this Bill, particularly clause 5, which deals with the gaming industry.

In 1968, Dr. Eric Williams introduced the lottery to Trinidad and Tobago for the benefit of the public good, which includes education, health and social welfare. On October 04, 2006, the hon. Prime Minister sat in another place and declared his budget as one to tackle social ills in our society. Madam President, permit me to quote:

> "…the gaming industry can destroy the financial security of families, negatively impact marriages, encourage deviant behavior among children…cause increases in crime…The Government is strongly against proliferation of these casino-type establishments…"

Madam President, these casino-type establishments the Prime Minister referred to are Membership Clubs. I go on to quote:

> "…as far as the online gaming system is concerned, there will be no further expansion in the games offered and the Government is moving to eliminate the entire system."

The Prime Minister refers to online gaming. This is Lotto, Play Whe, Pick 2, Donsai, Cash Pot, a system that the Prime Minister introduced in 1994.

Madam President, upon hearing this, 3,000 workers of the members' clubs and lottery industry took to the streets in protest, one of the biggest marches this country has ever seen in over 11 years. After seeing so many people, the Prime Minister recognized them as PNM supporters. He came to Parliament and retracted. He said that he would phase out the industry and retrain the members' clubs workers rather than immediately shutting them down.

At the same time, Madam President, this Government signed a new agreement with GTECH for another five years of lottery, Play Whe, Lotto, Pick 2, Donsai and Cash Pot. The population, by this time of course, was confused. It seems that there is double standard in this Bill, which raises the question of double standards again. What is the Prime Minister and his Government's real intent?

Further, the Minister promised that meetings would be held with the Association of Members' Clubs. Upon hearing this, the 7,000 workers of the members' clubs and lottery industry went back to their work and their lives. They continued to take their mortgages, build their families and do things that settled people do on the up and up.

A report was done—I have a copy of that report, which I am sure they have received. It was sent to the Government in 2002. It was done by the Association of Members' Clubs of Trinidad and Tobago. In this report, surveys showed that 87 per cent of workers in the members' clubs industry come from under-developed areas, which are often referred to as ghatto. Seventy-one per cent of them are single mothers. It is because of them and because the gambling industry has provided for them that this debate is of national importance.

When the Prime Minister first announced this "anti-sin" budget, the population was aroused in many ways. I said anti-sin budget based on the newspaper article after the "born-again" budget. Apart from the workers feeling very insecure, there were many in the population worried about their freedom possibly being taken away. There was much discussion on radio and the airwaves. Talk shows were also heard about dictatorship and Christian fundamentalism.

This Bill before us, Madam President, has again brought worries to the fore for us—freedom of choice, dictatorship and Trinidad becoming a Christian fundamentalist state. Are you aware that after the budget there has been no attack on the other forms of gambling in this country? The Prime Minister has no problem with racing pools; no problems with horse racing or even bingo. The Prime Minister no longer seems to have a problem with Lotto, as he immediately signed a five-year contract with GTECH after the budget statement.

Madam President, the Prime Minister clearly has a problem with members' clubs and members' clubs only. His Ministers of Government are falling over themselves to abide by his dictates, even those who are known regulars in members' clubs. [*Desk thumping*] The Government looks biased and dictatorial and those that will suffer most are those 7,000 members' clubs workers.

The hon. Senator Enill was mandated to speak to the industry and arrange for the workers to be trained. Did he speak to the workers? No! Did he speak to the Union of Members' Clubs and Lottery Workers? No! He met with a minority group of members' clubs representatives—

Sen. Enill: Madam President, Sen. Cindy Gibbs-Nicholas was going quite well until she sought to put me in something that I do not wish to be put in. The Association of Members' Clubs is a group that came to see the Prime Minister. That group was referred to me for discussion. That is the only mandate that came and, therefore, that is the only mandate that has been followed. I am dealing with the owners of the members' clubs.

The matter of the union and other issues are not currently in the remit of this particular Minister because there has been absolutely no discussion with them. I am only aware of them, the group that I met with and continue to meet with even to date. I just want to clear that up.

Sen. C. Gibbs-Nicholas: The hon. Minister, as he said, met with the owners, however, I reiterate: Did he speak with the workers? No! Did he speak with the Union of Members' Clubs and Lottery Workers? No! He met with a minority group of members' clubs owners who gave him a draft plan on regulation. The Union of Members' Clubs and Lottery Workers have written over four letters to the hon. Ministers and the relevant Ministries—of which I have copies—the hon. Prime Minister, Mr. Patrick Manning, requesting a meeting; the Minister in the Ministry of Finance, from the union, requesting a meeting; the Minister of Education, the hon. Hazel Manning, requesting a meeting; the Minister of National Security, the hon. Martin Joseph, the Minister of Community Development, Culture and Gender Affairs, Sen. The Hon. Joan Yuille-Williams, requesting a meeting. Not one of these letters was answered.

Sen. Yuille-Williams: Madam President, I welcome Sen. Gibbs-Nicholas. I just want to make it clear that I am unaware of the correspondence of which she speaks.

Sen. C. Gibbs-Nicholas: I will forward another copy to you. It is dated June 04, 2007. Not one of these letters was replied to or even acknowledged by these Ministers or their Ministries.

Now the Prime Minister and the Minister in the Ministry of Finance are closing an industry and sending 7,000 workers to unemployment and they refuse to meet the union representing them. Is the welfare of these workers and their dependants not important enough to meet with the union? The fact is that the Prime Minister is against members' clubs and is on record as saying so. The Minister in the Ministry of Finance also echoed that sentiment.

How can the Minister in the Ministry of Finance explain that taxes are collected on precisely the same games he says are illegal? Indeed, section 5 of his Bill defines a slot machine and makes them illegal, yet for the past five years the Government has been collecting $10,000 tax on every slot machine in this country. [*Desk thumping*] The Senator said that the machines are imported illegally and assembled, yet his Ministry collects $10,000 tax annually on each machine he says is illegal. In the past five years, the Minister of Finance, the hon. Prime Minister, has raised the amount of tax on slot machines three times, just

like he raised his salary. Yet, again, he says they are illegal. I was privileged to sit in four meetings between the AMC and the Minister and what I heard with my own ear—it was also reported in the media—convinced me and my staff how the industry, if regulated, can work. Once they are convinced, they will convince the Prime Minister.

But, like a thief in the night, Madam President, having fooled thousands of workers into thinking that discussions were ongoing and that their jobs were no longer on the line, even at that very moment, AMC was submitting a $1.2 million report from Mr. Henry Sealy and his group of consultants, a report I have here. The Government has sought to destroy the industry by amending this Bill.

Madam President, by inserting the words "slot machine" into clause 13(2), the Prime Minister effectively converts membership in members clubs into common gaming houses, which, as we all know, are illegal. This will immediately shut down this industry. People do enjoy these slot machines. People make their livelihood from them; people from the ghetto, too, and on a whim these livelihoods will be destroyed. Thousands will be sent back to poverty in the ghetto because the Prime Minister had a bad experience and decided that slot machines, the same machines he was taxing for five years, should now be illegal.

Is this the future we have to look forward to in this country? Will we wake up one morning and be subjected to the whim of the Prime Minister after he had a bad experience, a dream or some advice probably from a magician? Madam President, I remind the public that a few months ago the President of Venezuela, Mr. Hugo Chavez, banned alcohol throughout Venezuela for a whole week. He has also banned gambling and a television station. Citizens of Trinidad and Tobago, be warned.

Clause 5 of this Bill is not about the whimsical banning of slot machines. This is about freedom of choice and the life our nation has grown accustomed to, which will now be eroded. Madam President, it has been said in the other House that the Government does not intend to proclaim clause 5 until the 7,000 members' clubs' workers have been retrained. If that is the case, why rush the Bill? Why hurry it? Why bring it at all? The Government talks about retraining, but they do not mean retraining. They mean simply to close the industry after they get re-elected and they can resume dictating the pace of this nation.

The hon. Fitzgerald Hinds met with over 200 members' clubs' workers in Ma Pau a few weeks ago. He told them that membership clubs are not morally good and that they must be closed. This is the dictate of this Government. He further

stated that everyone would be retrained. He even mentioned that his niece was working there. Every family in the ghetto has a member of family working in the industry so it is only logical that he too would have a niece working there.

If this great Minister in the Ministry of National Security cannot find a job for his own niece, what chance is there that the Government will be able to find a job for over 7,000 workers? [*Desk thumping*] Minister Hinds offered the industry workers Helping You Prepare for Employment Programme (HYPE) and Multi-Sector Skills Training Programme (MuST). These are not jobs themselves; they are programmes to train people to mix concrete, rear rabbits and put fish farms in Laventille. This is a joke. Would I do this to my son? Of course not! If I had the power, I would ensure that my son had a nice contract and a decent source of income; probably a football team or a basketball league.

On the point of retraining, in this industry we are well trained and qualified in our respective fields—waitressing, bartending, machine technician, croupier, business administration, auditing, entertainment, information technology, graphic design, taxi service. I can go on and on. Why is this Government misguided in believing that we are not trained? Not only are we well trained, but we have grown accustomed to a decent standard of living; just like these Ministers here. [*Desk thumping*] Is it their intent to treat us like those poor 9,000 Caroni workers and those 3,000 BWIA workers, who were promised training and got nothing?

Sen. Sahadeo: Madam President, let me also welcome the Senator here. She is making her first contribution and she may not therefore have heard the number of times I have mentioned in this Senate the quantum of training offered to the former Caroni workers. If she needs further clarification, certainly her goodly colleagues will be able to provide it. I, Madam President, would like to provide the Senator with this information and guidance. I know she would not want to say something that is so incorrect.

Sen. Mark: Do not interrupt the girl!

Sen. C. Gibbs-Nicholas: My point is: How many of these workers have gotten jobs? I have spoken to quite a few, so if the Minister can provide me with such information, I have no problem. A few received training, I agree, to rear rabbits. A few of them received lands years after they were sent home.

Another industry, MBM, was closed and 1,000 workers sent home. There are other state-owned industries in trouble right now—WASA, T&TEC, TSTT. The Government said that 7,000 members' clubs workers will be retrained and

retrenched. It will be just like Caroni and BWIA all over. Workers know their destiny but will prepare the nation and make them aware of the perils that lie ahead because of this Bill.

The Minister of Trade and Industry has closed more industries and sent home more workers than all previous Ministers combined. The Minister of Trade and Industry has sent home over 20,000 persons in over five years. He has affected the lives of over 90,000 persons. The only new industry that he seems to have created is rabbit rearing. What a failure!

Madam President, these members' clubs' workers are largely mothers, sisters and daughters who have risen above the challenges of life and made something of themselves. Those are the people whose livelihood will be snatched away by this Government.

3.00 p.m.

I would like to give you at least three testimonials from workers of the industry who are subjected to this injustice: Ayanna, a 25 year-old casino worker, a single mother with one daughter and has been in this industry for just over one year. For five years she worked menial jobs before being employed in the gaming industry. She is presently employed as a cashier and has received, what she describes as tremendous benefits. She makes a decent wage, which covers her rent, transportation and food bill comfortably. She does not want to return to the days of barely scraping by. She wants to improve her standard and quality of living and wants to get out of the dependency syndrome. With her present job she was able to do that.

Kimber, a 24 year-old Laventille resident: She started working at the age of 18, having been forced to leave school. Her mother is now HIV positive and a drug addict. She has two children to look after and receives no assistance from the fathers. However, she started working in the gaming industry as a dish washer and has been promoted on several occasions. She does not want to depend on CEPEP handouts. She wants to maintain her living standard. She now fears that coming from a high crime area, such as Laventille, would cause her to be discriminated against and prevent her from securing another job. When she is sent home by this uncaring Government—her mother's life depends on her income she now generates, a life, Madam Speaker. I apologize, I should be in the other House.

Arabella Thomas, a 37-year-old—I am coming—lives at Pinto Road, Arima and has been employed as a maintenance worker at a members' club in Tunapuna. Her salary is $4,500 per month, burst your bubble. She has a 10 year-old son who

attends El Socorro North Government School. Her son, Kareem, 4 years old, is partially blind in one eye. The cause of illness, unknown. To date, neither doctors at Mount Hope nor at private facilities can identify the illness.

At one time the doctors at Mount Hope believed it was cancer and recommended she remove the eye. They later changed their opinion. Kareem was referred to a private institution for some tests. The tests cost, then $250; they now cost $500. While it has not helped to identify the illness, the tests are required to track the progress of this illness.

Three weeks ago, Arabella met the caring Leader of the Opposition, Mrs. Kamla Persad-Bissessar, and as Arabella said to her: "I am a single mother with rent to pay. That is $1,100. I have a loan, light bill, WASA bill, and when you miss a payment, the finance company does not want to hear anything, they are ready to move in. My child is sick. I can afford to carry him for his tests. What will happen to me or my son when I lose my job?" She broke down and cried. [*Senator cries*] Just excuse me for two minutes. [*Interruption*] You see it may not affect you. It does not affect you. I apologize.

Madam President: Senator, speak to me please.

Sen. C. Gibbs-Nicholas: I apologize. Madam President, my emotion is due to the fact this affects not only this young woman; this affects an industry; this affects human lives.

Madam President, I would address the concern of the hon. Prime Minister's simple budget statement: gambling is not the only industry that can destroy the financial security of families. Gambling is not the only industry that can destroy the financial security of families. Gambling is not the only industry that negatively impacts on marriages. Gambling is not the only industry that can "encourage deviant behaviour among children" and "cause increase in crime".

In fact, alcohol is stated as the major cause of broken homes and marriages. Alcohol, more so, causes deviant behaviour among children. Alcohol is the main contributor of road facilities, yet the Government chooses to ban gambling in members' clubs. The members' clubs are the most controlled industry in this country.

Not everyone can go into a members' club. There are rules, regulations and laws concerning this. For example, you must be 21 years and over, before you can enter a members' club. Upon entering, you must present a form of identification. Dress codes are always in effect. This is the most regulated and fair industry—the gaming industry—available to Trinbagonians.

I hope, I only hope, that carnival would not be banned because that, as well, contributes to deviant behaviour, not to mention crime. However, the nation needs release; more so, now as our rights are being trampled upon.

Why has the Government chosen not to regulate the industry? This Government—they probably just do not know how. The Union of Members' Clubs and Lottery Workers has submitted proposals to the Government concerning regulations, but was never granted a meeting to discuss such.

Some of the suggestions proposed by the union to address the Government's concerns include:

1. The proliferation of members' clubs: Objections were made and raised against the granting of new licences to new clubs. For example, Sunset Members' Club, Tobago and Golden Entertainment, Movie Towne.

If you were shutting down the industry, then why grant new licences?

2. The potential to launder money: This can easily be controlled in a regulated industry. The Proceeds of Crime Act caters for money laundering. Therefore, a compliance report from the Finance Investigative Unit should be a compulsory requirement in the granting of any gaming licence.

A law passed by the UNC.

3. Addiction: Statistics show that one per cent of gamblers become addicted. There are programmes and doctors in place to safeguard this further. As we all know members' clubs are well-known as social centres.

4. Advertisement: Let it be known, with the exception of National Lottery and Horse Racing, any advertisement related to gambling has been withdrawn.

5. Underage gambling: This is unfounded. Members' clubs enforce the law by denying entry of persons under 21. Security checks are further done to enforce this. It would be even appropriate to restrict the placing of lottery machines to a more controlled environment, where the age limit can be strictly enforced.

The Government does not seem to be living in the modern world. A tech park is built in Wallerfield against much advice and, or course, the Chancellor of UTT said that there are no investors because of crime and location.

Has anyone seen the advertisement for gambling in our daily news? I have a copy. I was looking at it today:

"$50 free

Play slot machine

Play it at home"

These ads have been appearing in all the newspapers recently.

Madam President: What newspaper is that and the date?

Sen. C. Gibbs-Nicholas: *Newsday* of Tuesday, June 26, 2007. The Government is banning slot machines in controlled members' clubs. People are advertising the same to be played in many homes in Trinidad and Tobago on the Internet.

Did the Minister of Finance and Prime Minister not know that when writing this Bill, he would be creating casinos in many homes? Here it is, the Internet. The Internet is in almost every home in this country. Now the Prime Minister has banned slot machines and there are companies now advertising the same slot machines that can be played on your computer in your home—www.ttcasino.com. That is a website for those who want to continue gambling unknown to their leaders.

We are getting mixed messages—say it again—www.ttcasino.com—from this Government. The same Government is the biggest advertiser of gambling in this country.

Children are subjected to television advertisement and inducements to Play Whe, Lotto and Horse Racing. Horse Racing has its own television station. Yet, the Prime Minister says that he objects to advertising of gambling.

Hon. Camille Robinson-Regis said recently that the rate of unemployed women between the ages of 20 and 24 was at 7.7 per cent. These are precisely the women who get jobs in the members' club industry, women between these ages 20—24 or probably double that. It is real. These are workers, over 7,000 women, and they are surrounded by crime, drugs and prostitution.

My fellow workers will be sent back to these areas. Will they fall into the same? Of course, some of them will. Through the whim of the Prime Minister, our crime statistics will increase. The number of prostitutes will increase and

there will be more drug rule. I got this information from Never Dirty, Morvant and John-John, Laventille. When you talk about destroying lives, this Government truly knows about destroying them and will continue to destroy 7,000 more.

Let me remind everyone that the Member who read this Bill in the other place serves the nation as a Minister of Trade and Industry. The present Minister of Trade and Industry has closed more industries and retrenched more workers than all previous Ministers in this country.

Let us be realistic, the members' clubs form an industry. People in this country like freedom. They like the freedom to choose: the freedom even to choose a government; the freedom to choose whether or not they shall gamble, especially in a private place, such as their home or members' club. Now we are told this is wrong, that gambling is morally wrong.

I have in my possession some of the charitable work that these members' clubs do, particularly Ma Pau Members who are famous, over the years, for helping the poor and contributing to community development. Some of these contributions I would go through briefly. Permit me to do so:

- Ma Pau joins to help the needy;
- Giving back to the community, Ma Pau;

This was on the *Newsday* of Friday, August 27. I can go right back to 2000, 2003 and up. [*Interruption*] No need.

Let me give you one of the more recent ones. There was a family of nine children out on the streets of the Beetham and Ma Pau Members' Club rescued them and to this day supports those children in a large rented house. This Government did not care to educate, feed or clothe those children. Ma Pau Members' Club did that. The same Ma Pau Members' Club has employed a differently-abled person for over three years, after the Prime Minister, the Deputy Prime Minister and the Minister of Labour could not find a job for him. Morally wrong? I think what is morally wrong is that one social worker is placed in the whole of Morvant/Laventille.

Another reason this Bill should not be passed is that the Government will face legal issues with the foreign casino companies; companies that were encouraged to invest in casino-type gambling. There are foreign-owned entities conducting gambling in Trinidad.

There is a Turkish group that even after the Government introduced this Bill to ban slot machines, this Princes Group will be importing 300 slot machines and placing them in Movie Towne. Is the Government intending to close members clubs in order to bring in huge gambling companies like the Princes Group, which had all its casinos closed by the Turkish Government? They were actually thrown out.

There is also a Malaysian outfit that operates in five slot machine arcades and a huge casino on Frederick Street. Can the Minister of National Security explain how so many Malaysians received work permits and take jobs that locals could do? Instead of banning slot machines in members' clubs, the Government should be banning foreign-owned casinos, which operate with impunity in our presence. I suggest whatever is morally wrong, such as money laundering, might be happening in those places, for those people have no affinity in Trinidad and Tobago, a true recipe for money laundering.

Further to this, a Chinese national was arrested in Princes Town last month, which headlined in the *Newsday* dated April 06, 2007:

"Chinese national on bribe charge arrested"

What was her crime? She attempted to bribe an honest Inspector of Police. What was she doing in Trinidad? She was managing a members' club with slot machines. Did she have a work permit? Yes, a permit issued by the Ministry of National Security. She could not speak English. Is that ironic?

On Tuesday, Labour Day, a Malaysian national was arrested in Curepe. He, too, was also managing a members' club. Did he have a work permit? Yes, issued by the Ministry of National Security, again. His boss, Mr. Lee, a Malaysian. Who is Mr. Lee? What is his status in Trinidad and Tobago? How does this Malaysian run five gaming establishments in Trinidad, with at least one of them running without a licence? How are these Chinese and Malaysians coming to Trinidad and getting work permits from a Government whose leader says that his Government is against gambling? Confusing, is it not? What do you really want? It is illegal, "yuh" tax it, then you make it illegal again. It is workers' livelihood this Government is gambling with.

The Union of Members' Clubs and Lottery Workers was in Fyzabad on Labour Day and it would seem the Government is not the same, as the thinking of its people. Tears came to my eyes—as you see, I am very emotional—to see the thousands of members supporting their unions. These workers have vowed to fight this Government to the bitter end, to save their livelihood and that of their dependants.

In summary, I have addressed all the Minister's concerns when he seeks to justify his vicious attack, not on gambling, because he stands firm behind Lotto, Play Whe and Horse Racing, but continues his attack on Members' Clubs.

I am not here really to support gambling. I am here to support freedom of choice and a society that does not want to become a religious fundamentalist state.

I do not believe the credo of one—

Madam President: How long do you have Senator, because your time is just up? [*Interruption*]

Sen. Mark: She have—[*Interruption*]

Madam President: Let me talk first. Hon. Senators, the speaking time of the 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. C. Gibbs-Nicholas: I thank you for the support, but I would not take very long.

Sen. Dr. Gopeesingh: Not a theocratic state, a secular state.

Sen. C. Gibbs-Nicholas: I do not believe the credo—[*Interruption*]

Madam President: Sen. Dr. Gopeesingh, did you go down there to speak to her?

Sen. C. Gibbs-Nicholas: I do not need—

Sen. Dr. Gopeesingh: No, no, I came to give her support, Madam President.

Madam President: Give your silent support. Please, continue.

Sen. C. Gibbs-Nicholas: I do not believe the credo of one person, is justification in sending home 7,000 workers. This matter might end up being decided in the upcoming election.

Sen. Dr. Gopeesingh: "No votes fuh yuh."

Sen. C. Gibbs-Nicholas: I recommend that the aspect of slot machine gambling in the Bill before us should be removed completely. This should not be hanging over our heads like the sword of Damocles. The fact is, in this country, at

present, most citizens know who they want to vote against. They just do not know who to vote for. [*Interruption and crosstalk*] Do not worry, on this side, blessed are the meek for they shall inherit the earth. You know who you want to vote against and very, very soon they will know who to vote for. There will be not only freedom to gamble in a regulated environment, but freedom and justice for all of us.

I thank you.

Madam President: Let me join with some of the other Senators in welcoming you to the Senate and congratulating you on our first contribution.

Sen. C. Gibbs-Nicholas: Thank you.

Sen. Dana Seetahal SC: Thank you, Madam President. Let me personally congratulate Sen. Cindy Gibbs-Nicholas, for her maiden speech, a very powerful contribution by the Senator.

In the last budget debate, which I gather this Bill is to give effect to that budget—of course, it is some nine months afterwards; long enough for a period of gestation, but it makes one wonder why it took so long to bring this Bill. But, nevertheless, at that time I made the point and I repeat it—it bears repeating, having regard to what the previous speaker said—that in the 2004 budget it was stated by the Minister of Finance—this is in relation to the clause that Sen. Gibbs-Nicholas spoke about; clause 5 of the current Bill—that the gaming industry continues to thrive in Trinidad and Tobago and we have seen a proliferation of new devices, in particular, slot machines.

These devices had attracted a tax of $2,000 per annum. Then the proposal was that the Government proposes to increase the fee on slot machines from $2,000 per annum to $10,000 per annum. That was effected in 2004. To date, every casino-type establishment pays $10,000 on slot machines. I understand—I am seeing someone shaking their head—the law is that they should pass by the current government. Whether or not everyone obeys the law is another point. The fact is that it is the law.

This really is odd, because the Minister of Finance, who presented the Bill, said that it was always the law that there should be no gambling with machines such as this and that this is merely to clarify the law. If it was always the law that people should not be using slot machines and they should not be in these kinds of establishments that are being used, casinos, then why is it that the Government

was taxing an illegal activity? What it means is the Government, by taxing an illegal activity, did something illegal. The Government condoned what the Government knew, or must be presumed to know, was illegal.

I would imagine with the plethora of lawyers available to the Government that the Government must know that. The Minister of Finance is saying that it is so. It was said in 2006, in the presentation of the budget, that that was the law. If you knew that it was illegal, how could any right-thinking government make $10,000 per machine every year on these machines? Saying to discourage people is absolutely no excuse. It is immoral. It is immoral for a government to tax an illegal activity and make a profit. It means that every prostitute in this country should be taxed by the Government for that illegal activity and all sorts of—For the trafficking of drugs, if you carry the natural conclusion, all drug traffickers should pay to the State a percentage. Therefore, it seems to me that it is immoral for the Government to now presume to say that this was always the law. That is the point I am making.

Therefore, the Government should, if it passes this or enforces this clause, return to every casino establishment the $10,000 that has been paid in respect of the previous law. That is the only way that there could be any moral justification for this current proposal.

Having said that—I do not know if the Minister wanted to say something. I thought he was indicating, but apparently he has given up.

Sen. Enill: What was contemplated—the problem is a customs problem.

Sen. D. Seetahal SC: Unless there is some point that is being made specifically, or a point of order, otherwise he can say all these things in summing up. I do not need an explanation as to some kind of rationale, unless it is to tell me that I am wrong and the Government did not knowingly do this or that the Government did not know the law.

Having said that, I agree with the previous speaker, that the Government is not supposed to be in the business of legitimizing morals. In fact, as she said, if one wants to gamble, one can spend a lot of Trinidad and Tobago dollars converted into US dollars on the Internet.

One needs to look at whatever industry we have here, if it is operating in a way that is detrimental to the society as a whole, which is why in 1961 those narcotics listed in the Act became illegal. If it is now said that casino-type gambling is detrimental to the society, then I would expect the Government to

prove that and show some way, especially if there is a report from the industry showing otherwise or making other points. I do not expect that somebody should make a general statement three years after condoning the establishment and industry and taxing it and suddenly, out of the blue it is breaking up families or undermining work ethic.

It leads one to suppose that there is some personal motivation. I am not saying there is. I do not know people's business, but it leaves one to suppose that. It is presumptuous to make that statement and attempt to pass the law in this way, having supported the industry by implication, by taxing it.

Having said that, if it is that we are talking about destroying financial security, do Members of the Government know that everyday people religiously go at certain times to play their mark? This is something that is advertised all over the place. You see it on television. People dream a number and then they run to play the mark. Everybody is dreaming a number and running to play a mark. This is an industry that is promoted by the State. Is it not hypocritical to say, the least, to come now and say that you are looking after the interest?

There might be individual members who would fold their arms and say: "I am totally against all forms of gambling", and you may well be, but that is your business. The point is, look at the country as a whole and decide whether or not people ought to have personal choices, as they do, to drink, to smoke and many other things; as they do to have—anyway, I would not get into that.

Many people engage in what we may decide are totally immoral activities and against one of the 10 commandments and no one does anything about it, except probably end up in the Family Court. That causes family breakdown and many other things. If we carry this rationale, there is the natural conclusion that there are many activities that many of us engage in that might be said to be—or might become illegal.

I have visited a couple of these establishments and I have seen persons employed there. By and large, as Sen. Gibbs-Nicholas said, they are mostly young women ages 18—21. Many of them are short, coming to think of it, I do not know if that is a thing. We probably cannot get jobs elsewhere. Tall people tend to command the employment industry much more effectively, but they are usually often single mothers and waitresses. They are people who also work as clerks in the accounts section. There are bartenders, cleaners, car park attendants, security, and more female security than male security these days. There are entertainment workers and management. There are also many, many different people working in this industry.

Is the Government seriously expecting that in some reasonably short space of time they are going to retain these people and provide them with sustainable jobs? That is not realistically possible. With the best will in the world, this Government does not have a very good track record of doing that—not only this Government, but other governments—in a short space of time.

Let us look at what was proposed in the 2003 budget. There was MYPART. Remember that thing? I do not know if Senators even remember. They were going to have this military-led thing and MILAT and all these things. They were going to train all young men and take them off the streets. For every budget for three years, I asked what was happening. Eventually I was told that a vehicle was bought. I believe—last month, I was told, that the first batch was being trained. It took three and one-half years to put measures in place. It is not looking good, to say the least, for these industry workers, if they are to expect that they are going to be trained and given any sustainable jobs.

My final point on this issue is that clause of non-proclamation. If there is a serious realization by the Government, if there were any real justification and if this law meant anything, then why have a proclamation date? I am not saying do not have it now, having regard to what Sen. Gibbs-Nicholas is saying. If you are seriously coming with this, for some reasonable basis, then you would have a proclamation date for that. Usually a proclamation date is to put regulations in place such as the police reform legislation. Here we have this. Is it really not to hold this like a sword of Damocles over the industry? I find personally, that proclamation is sinister.

Therefore, I am not in support of the clause, because I share the same view that people are entitled to make choices and the Government is not supposed to legalize or attempt to legalize morality, more importantly, because it is hypocritical.

It is hypocritical to tax the industry in 2004 and come so many years later and say: "We always knew it was illegal." For that reason, if no other, I think that any right-thinking person should not support that clause. You cannot make money out of it and then say you knew it was illegal all along. It is nonsense.

My next point is in respect of clause 11—nothing to do with illegal gambling. Clause 11 proposes subclause (5), which talks about:

> "A grant under this Act is subject to review and may be increased, decreased or discontinued."

I would like to find out from the Minister of Finance what the purpose of that clause was.

Any Parliament can pass legislation within reason to do anything. So if it is that some time afterwards, let us say there is no oil or gas and the Government needs to rethink its proposals, then it would surely come back to Parliament at that stage and say why it needs to do this or stabilize the grant. If you are talking about a grant is subject to review and may be increased or decreased, what is the point of putting that there, if Parliament has the power to do this anyway? I do not know if this is intended that it would be done arbitrarily without coming back to Parliament. If so, tell us, or if not tell us why it is there.

Madam President, that is all I want to say on this. Thank you very much.

The Minister of Local Government (Sen. The Hon. Rennie Dumas): Madam President, thanks for the opportunity to contribute to this Bill. Having heard the last Senator, I do not know if I should be the one speaking. After all, she talked about young, female and short. Old, male and tall maybe, do not qualify me.

I rise to support the provisions of this Bill. The provisions speak, not just to gaming and gambling, but also treat with the provision for dealing with pensions. A number of different groups secure the pension rights of prison officers, judges, firemen, teachers, diplomats, et cetera. We think those are credible and I would really hope that whoever is addressing the Bill would express support for these measures, as well as the provision for education and training and some other matters. The question of pension transferability is also dealt with and generally, a number of issues which, for years, different sections of the country and the community, including different sections of the working class and the representatives of various unions have been clear should be treated with.

Therefore, it is quite important that anyone, whether on the Government's side, the Opposition or the Independents would examine these matters with the appropriate level of regard.

At the beginning of the Bill, it treats with the Central Tenders Board Ordinance and changing the capacity of the Chief Administrator in the Tobago House of Assembly, to deal with contracting and the authority to contract, to make contracts of certain sizes, where he had been constrained before. I think that is a good reason to support the Bill.

The retiring allowance is a good reason to support the Bill, because it has to do with legislators and their allowances, et cetera. I hope that will also find support, and as I said before, the provisions for the pensions of certain classes of workers at various levels: the fire service, et cetera.

The issue of pension transferability is a matter that I know that unions around the country—all the different services in the public service—have been dealing with over an extended period of time. In fact, from since the goodly Sen. Mark was a Minister in another incarnation, quite a number of years ago, that was a matter that was being treated in the reform of the public service.

The issue of the transfer of properties that would encourage the capacity of people from various communities to treat with local tourism, was part of the programme established by this Government.

Again, the issue allowing individuals freedom of choice as to where in the world their children could be educated, is also part of this Bill and another good reason to support the Bill.

Therefore, I want to suggest that the Bill, as a whole, demonstrates Government's capacity, willingness, foresight and innovation in treating with the whole gamut of interests that serves the country as a whole.

The Minister, in bringing the Bill to the table, was able to point out how the Government's programme and development programme has been able to treat with changing the trajectory of development for the country upwards, ensuring that every measure that you can bring to economic development has been placed on a positive footing.

People choose to put this one matter—I must congratulate Sen. Cindy Gibbs-Nicholas on her contribution. Although I have to whisper that she has to be careful who she lets whisper in her ear—[*Interruption*] you would say so. I am not sure that your reputation would allow you to whisper in anyone's ear.

The Government also has to treat with costs: social and economic costs that are thrown up by individual industrial activity and by the activity of any industry, because a number of industries have the capacity to externalize costs, these costs having a negative impact on the society as a whole. Therefore, as the Government has been looking at those things that are likely to be positive, in terms of the development of the economy and the development of various industries, so it must also look at those industries and those activities which are likely to throw up negative impact on the economy, which may express itself in terms of social and other costs.

To treat directly with the gambling matter, it is a mistake for anyone to think that this administration operates on whim. We are told that in 2004, there was a tax put on certain betting instruments. I want to assure you this afternoon, as well as Sen. Gibbs-Nicholas and the rest of the country that the Government did not act on whim when it treated with the gaming industry as a whole.

However, in contemplation of the gaming industry as a whole, in the context of a proposal that was brought to the Government's attention, in terms of the expansion of the National Lotteries Control Board, the Betting Levy Board and other advocates of a certain form of gambling, the Government commissioned the report. So, it is presumptuous to suggest or infer that the decision was based on a whim and then to go off on all these suggestions that the Prime Minister woke up one morning, religious fundamentalism and all of that. I want to assure you and the rest of the country that none of this impacted on the decision of the Government. The decisions were all based on hard and cold research, logic and rationality.

I draw to your attention that this question is well rooted to those who want to follow the scholarship. It is well rooted, whether you go back to Samuelson or you go back to all these writers of economics. They will tell you that the gaming industry is not a real industry. The gaming industry does not create wealth. It is a matter of transferring wealth, and transferring income from one person to another, most times to the detriment of a significant portion of those who participate to the benefit of quite a few of those who manage the industry. That is the history and the reality of the system.

It is true that the Government will be concerned about the workers. Just to demonstrate the concern, I assure you again that the Government wanted to find out how many people would be impacted in the matter of decision-making in this way.

Sen. Dr. Gopeesingh: 30,000.

Sen. The Hon. R. Dumas: The last person I would ask to count for me is Sen. Dr. Gopeesingh. He cannot count anything above two; that is the maximum he would get in the clinics he runs; two out of one emission and issue, only two. Beyond two, I would not ask him to count.

The question was asked of the Inland Revenue Department: What was the number of persons registered with the Inland Revenue Department for gambling and betting? We are looking for hard facts and not feelings. Although that is quite important in terms of what we do when we treat with human beings. The number of persons registered with the Inland Revenue Department for gambling and betting is 72—registered as owners or managers in the system, 72. [*Interruption*] May I finish? We do not have easily retrievable information of the number of employees in the industry, but we roughly estimate that it may not exceed 2,000 persons.

Am I to respect the Inland Revenue Department, in terms of its counting of people who it treats on a tax basis, who put in their BIR returns, et cetera? Those are the ways in which you count. I am not suggesting that they should not be concerned about the 2,000 people or the 72.

I have had the good fortune to be a workers' representative and I understand how Sen. Gibbs-Nicholas would feel. Is it a situation in which the Government is faced with the people that Sen. Gibbs-Nicholas represents, being put between us and the 72 owners who run the system, whom we never hear about, whom we are not sure paid the appropriate taxes and who may be just creaming off from the income that is coming into the society? As we know, with the increased income and the increased distribution, there is a large flow of funds going into these organizations, which are not being transferred to the people whom Sen. Gibbs-Nicholas represents, but who are in fact transferring the funds in ways we do not know where and how.

One of the ways we are suggesting is there is a significant number of people who are paying the negative social cost of that activity. We are noting, as we have noted, the admission by the very workers' representative, that we have some problems, in which they sought to make proposals to address.

In the script that was written—sorry. It was written. I hope authored—I am assured that it was authored by Sen. Gibbs-Nicholas. [*Interruption*] I am assured. I am assured. I said the script that was written. What is wrong with you, Senator? I said the script that was written. Then she assured me that it is written by her. I am saying to you—Madam President, I hope, again, that she remains careful of who whispers in her ears.

Madam President, sometimes in presenting evidence, we have to be careful what we say. The lady Senator, in her maiden speech, pointed to the age and gender of the people who are employed. In any industry, including one that has been in existence in Trinidad and Tobago for so many years, it must be curious as to how sustainable the jobs that are enjoyed in this industry are, if all the members who work there are so young and of one sex. One will want to know what is the rate of turnover, what are the employment practices followed, what is the recruitment pattern and a number of other things, which can lead us to speculate that the externalities and the external costs that we talk about are not matched by the so-called income that we say we are having and that the overall impact may be much larger and of a type that we prefer not to have. I do not want to suggest that people should abandon the jobs. I am sure that, in giving the evidence you gave, one should treat with what other messages you are sending, other than the ones you intend us to have.

There was a reference to the Government's capacity to meet its promises. I want to suggest that an examination of the record of this Government will not disclose very many promises that were not kept.

When we made the point of what will happen to the Caroni (1975) Limited workers, in terms of their training, et cetera, people said that it was unattainable and could not be achieved. I think history would demonstrate that the Caroni (1975) Limited workers did get their due, did get what was promised to them and did get the training they wanted. I want to suggest to you that the Caroni (1975) Limited workers got one of the best settlements of any group of workers in this country, if not the best. They walked away with a benefit that most workers in this country would be envious to receive.

Therefore, when the Government suggests that it has a concern about the industry and that the workers will in fact receive training, and will in fact receive sustainable jobs, that is a promise the workers can depend on. Contrary— [*Interruption*]

Sen. Dr. Gopeesingh: It does not follow.

Sen. The Hon. R. Dumas: I do not know why this gentleman would not stop. If you are willing to continue, I would take you on. You know that.

Sen. Dr. Gopeesingh: Go ahead. I will take you on too.

Sen. The Hon. R. Dumas: Madam President, sorry, I apologize. I am being provoked to step off the path.

Madam President: You would know better.

Sen. The Hon. R. Dumas: I am being provoked to step off the path. I am sorry. Maybe it is the reference to MYPART and MILAT that we had earlier.

Sen. Dr. Gopeesingh: I would silence you.

Sen. The Hon. R. Dumas: You would silence me? You can only say that I am an honourable son of Aldwin Dumas and Dinah Sandy.

Madam President: Come back to your contribution.

Sen. The Hon. R. Dumas: Madam President, I want to draw to the attention of the Senate a particular statement coming out of this report that we had. I referred to the report already, as a *Report of the Committee Appointed by Cabinet to Evaluate the Social and Economic Impact of the Gaming Industry*. It is dated January 2005. It was a matter from quite a while ago.

I am quoting from page 9.

> "The Law Reform Commission has also noted that many of the private members' clubs are operating in direct contravention to the terms of their licence. Despite the fact that there are a number of conditions under which a members' club may have a certificate cancelled."

In other words, this is not whim and fancy here. This is the conclusion of the Law Reform Commission. They are suggesting that they do not operate in good faith as a members' club. We can go on to list a number of these things, but I do not think it would help us very much, except that I want to demonstrate that there were arguments that said that what was supposed to be private members' clubs may not be operating as they should.

We want to go on clearly, further, that there is a blurring of definitions between the private members' club and other gaming houses that would have emerged, illegal casinos, et cetera. Some people boldly declared themselves in the face of the fact that the law does not permit the casinos issue. I am hearing that any non-action by the Government was condonation. The Government, if it erred, it erred in the fullness of allowing the widest possible freedom of choice and making sure that decisions are made after full consideration of all the issues.

You cannot suggest that a government coming into office and seeing things that it may think are not right, should not have the responsibility of setting up a committee to look at it, see what it means and be informed by it. If after it has been informed, there are these negative social costs and breaches of law, the Government should not act. The very way in which the Independent Senator said to us that it is illegal, immoral and hypocritical, that it was illegal; if we do not study the issue, then the argument that we cut out choice would have had more force if we went in without reference to proper study. I want to suggest that we did what a government should have done, which was to examine the issue and not operate on presumption.

4.00 p.m.

Madam President, under the Gambling and Betting Act, Chap. 11:19, there is the question of a common gaming house. The only two instances in which the classification of common gaming house does not cover most of the activities that go on in Trinidad and Tobago are where you are gambling in a private dwelling house—If I am playing cards with my brother for 25 cents or something like that, I do not think the police could intervene—or in a members' club within the meaning of the regulations of the Clubs Act. With respect to the number of

instances, if you take section 4 of the Act, you would see the ways in which you fall into illegality, and if you ever had cause to visit a private members' club, you may very well find that you are falling into illegality.

With respect to section 8 of the Act which deals with the issue of the appliances like slot machines and one-arm bandits and so forth, the truth is that few persons bring them in. Some people may have hidden one or two somewhere in a container or something, and they may have come in illegally, because they are not allowed to be imported wholly. Most of them would have been brought in by parts and assembled in Trinidad and Tobago. We then suggested that the numbers should be controlled where they are found, and the whole question of how they are defined should be made clearer. When the law was written, most things were mechanical, and now these things are computerized—the goodly Senator ridiculed all of us old people who do not know better and who do not know the modern things and how they work.

Sen. Seetahal SC: She did not say that.

Sen. The Hon. R. Dumas: Let us say that she was less than charitable describing how unaware and out-of-date we were. We just want to suggest that being aware of that, the definition has to change. You cannot define a slot machine the way you used to because the mechanical ways in which it used to work are not the ways in which it works now. The "touch faces" that the machines have and the kind of graphics and so forth did not exist when they were first built and defined. We now need to treat with them.

There is one point that I think is relevant. Madam President, contrary to the argument on the other side, the Government is also in the business of morals. It is not true to say that the Government should not take regard or cognizance of morals in its decision making. It is not true to say that the Government cannot examine the behaviour of the population or sections of the population, and suggest that these behaviours should not be controlled, regulated, licensed or banned. The Government is in the business of permitting or debarring, because in those two ways, the Government acts on behalf of the majority of the people.

When we sit and consider whether we should allow smoking in some places, we do that because there are issues of health and the externalizing of cost. We do that because the Government has the responsibility of paying for families, communities and individuals what they should pay for themselves. If all individuals were strong and had the same capacity; both economically as well as

morally, to treat with the matters maybe we would not need Government. The reality is that in the regulating of the private behaviour as it impacts in the public place, the Government has its reason for existence.

Madam President, I want to suggest that any presumption that this Government acted on the whim of an individual is out of order. The decisions were made calculatedly on the issue of the externalizing of social cost by the gaming industry. The other matters that are in this Bill, we made them on the basis of the benefits that they confer. On the question of those that impact on gaming, we made them on the basis of the cost created in terms of the national economy.

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

Sen. Wade Mark: Madam President, I would like to begin my contribution by sincerely congratulating Sen. Cindy Gibbs on her contribution—

Sen. Dr. Saith: You do not know the Senator's name.

Sen. W. Mark: I said Sen. Cindy Gibbs. I did not say Sen. Dr. Lenny Saith.

Sen. Dr. Saith: Her name is Cindy Gibbs-Nicholas.

Sen. W. Mark: I know her as Cindy Gibbs. [*Interruption*] Okay, Nicholas. That is irrelevant at this time. Do not worry. Madam President, I want to record my congratulations. She has, in fact, made a very powerful contribution in the interest of the working class, the oppressed and the exploited in our country. [*Desk thumping*] This regime seems to have an inclination, a tendancy towards disenfranchising and also continuing their oppression.

Madam President, there has been a pattern of behaviour that we have discerned in this Government over the last six years. They have been invading people's rights; they have been undermining the citizens' freedoms; and they have been seeking to destroy all our independent institutions under our Constitution. We see them at it once again.

I want to put my contribution in some perspective. First of all, I would like to indicate what I understand to be a Finance Bill, and the abuse of power and the abuse of process that we have been subjected to by this regime that is definitely on its way out. My understanding of a Finance Bill is that a Bill of this nature that we are discussing today, is supposed to give effect to provisions arising out of the Appropriation Act or the budget. That is how I know a Finance Bill is supposed to be. That has been my experience as a very long-standing Senator in this Senate.

I have seen the invasion of several provisions in this piece of legislation that had nothing to do with the budget of 2006/2007. There was no reference in the Minister of Finance's budget on the Miscellaneous Taxes Act, but we are seeing it parachuted into this piece of legislation that is before us. Nowhere in the budget speech did we talk about the Central Tenders Board and the Tobago House of Assembly, but the Minister of Finance has invaded this Bill by having this provision. Madam President, if you go to clause 17(d) of the Bill you would see "deduction of expenditure approved by property development". That was a provision in the 2005/2006 legislation, but the Government has brought this provision. This is a sleight of hands. Why are you using the Parliament and abusing the power that you are entitled to? You are not entitled to abuse the power. You have power, but do not abuse your power. You have invaded the Finance Bill with provisions like 17(d). Do you know what is even more dangerous? It is retroactive to January 01, 2006. This was not in the 2007 budget.

If you go to clause 17(d) it says: "…an approved property development company…" That was not contained in the 2006/2007 budget. The Government has, again, parachuted this provision into the Finance Bill, 2007. Let the Minister explain to us who will be benefiting from these provisions. Which property development companies will be benefiting from this provision? Is that an act of corruption? We need to know! We want to know: Why did you not effect the measure dealing with production companies where they would be entitled to 150 per cent of actual expenditure? Why did you not effect that in 2006? They need to explain that to us.

They need to tell us about section 19 of the Bill which deals with the Miscellaneous Taxes Act. Where in the budget speech was mention made of this? The Government is abusing its power.

Madam President, clause 24 takes the cake. Here on our Order Paper, we have an amendment to the Companies Act, and we are waiting to debate that Bill in this Parliament, and the Government puts into a Finance Bill, a provision that has nothing to do with the 2006/2007 budget. Why? And we must support that! We cannot support these things. The Government is misusing and abusing its office and it is flouting the Standing Orders, as far as I am concerned, with these measures that it has proposed.

I want to deal briefly with what has been said so far. The UNC stands for democracy. We believe in people's freedom to choose. We do not believe in any Government seeking to impose its will or its own beliefs on the population. This is why we believe that what this Government is attempting to do in our country is

absolutely wrong. They ought not to be attempting to impose their own personal views on an entire population. These amendments, particularly to the Gambling and Betting Act, it appears to us—I agree with Sen. Dana Seetahal SC—that the Government is being hypocritical on this amendment.

Madam President, do you know that last week in the *Business Guardian*, there was a particular article that dealt with subsidy for horse racing? The Government subsidized the horse racing industry to the tune of $11.6 million. Is that not a form of gambling? Why is the Government subsidizing horse racing, but trying to abolish and close down the gaming industry? Is that not hypocritical? The Government must come clean and tell us exactly what is taking place. What is the reason driving this particular act on the part of the Government?

If I have a son who is a chronic gambler and gambling all over the country, I must call in my son and put him under pressure and tell him how to conduct himself and train him. If my son is behaving in that way, I will not allow that to influence my behaviour as a Government. I understand if I have a son that went and burnt $250,000 in a place called Casablanca which is now closed, up at Long Circular Mall, I do not think that, for instance, I should come here and punish the whole country. I do not believe in that. I do not believe that if my son used my credit card and "max it out" at a place called Island Club in Grand Bazaar, I do not think that I should come here and punish the population, because of my son maxing out my credit card. Why did I give my son my credit card? He took it. He took my credit card.

Sen. Sahadeo: Madam President, the Senator is imputing improper motive.

Sen. W. Mark: I am talking about my son.

Madam President: The Senator has not referred to any particular person. He has not called a name. He is saying "my son", and under those circumstances I cannot say that he is imputing improper motive, but I would caution him that he needs to be very careful of what he is saying, and make sure that it is not being misunderstood as referring to anybody in this House.

Sen. W. Mark: Madam President, I am just hypothetically telling you, if I had a son—

Hon. Senator: Do you have a son?

Sen. W. Mark: I do not have a son. If I had a son and this is what my son was doing—$250,000 gone up in smoke; "he take my credit card and max it out"; and my son eventually went to the point of trying to take my home as collateral in

order to get credit. How can we allow that to take place? I have to counsel my son. I must send my son for training. I must be able to educate my son if he is not properly educated, in terms of doing these things. People are concerned, because close to 20,000 persons could be affected by this.

I understand, my son, if I had one, and he is engaged in Poker and Black Jack and Baccarat—those are card games that my son is engaged in if I had one—I must object to these things. I must not use my son's personal experience and then come to this Parliament in order to put that as the experience of the entire nation. That is wrong! I object to that! The UNC government will not support this measure. We are committed to democracy; we are committed to the freedom of choice. We do not believe that any Prime Minister of this country should impose his personal will and morals on a nation. We do not believe in that. [*Desk thumping*] This is a personal matter involving the Prime Minister. We do not believe that the Prime Minister should come to this Parliament and impose his will on the people in his capacity as Minister of Finance.

We want to tell the gaming industry that a UNC Government will never shut down or close down the gaming industry. [*Desk thumping*] When we take power very shortly in this country, we will regulate the industry and allow it to strive and develop in this land. Why must we close down the industry? People must have choices! This is not an Islamic republic; this is not a Christian fundamentalist state; this is a secular state and every man and every woman must have the right to choose. I am not a gambler! I do not gamble. If I want to go and gamble, I will go and throw some money and if I get through I get through, but I am not going in my pocket. I am going once and after that I gone. That is my experience, but do not come and impose your personal will on the population.

Madam President, I am calling on the gaming industry workers, and there are about 30,000 of them in this country. We in the UNC will not close down the gaming industry. We will open and expand that industry. We will not do it. We believe that people have a right to choose, and we do not believe in a Government choosing for the people. That is wrong. These are matters that we believe that the Government must take on board and do not attempt to abolish an industry, because you had a personal experience. On the campaign trail, we will go from the hypothetical to the real in terms of this situation. I would not want to tell you that today, but I am going to tell you that on the campaign trail, because this election is very crucial. This Government has been tampering with the rights of

the people at all levels. They have now reached the ordinary workers in the gaming industry. Where are they going? They must be stopped. This Government must be stopped. Look what they are doing with the people of Bagatelle! They are invading people's rights.

Madam President, we have said that if on August 01, 2007 which is Emancipation Day, this Government does not give the 50,000 squatters who have Certificates of Comfort their deeds of lease, a UNC government will do so when we take power in November. [*Desk thumping*] So, we are giving you until Emancipation Day to issue deeds of lease to 50,000 squatters. We are telling those "squatters" with Certificates of Comfort that a UNC government will issue them deeds of lease when we take power in November. [*Interruption*] You must know that. You tried to overthrow a government. Madam President, tell this man—

Madam President: No, I am not telling that man, but I am telling you that you are not to bring that topic up again in this Senate, Sen. Mark.

Sen W. Mark: Madam President, we are very clear about what we are about in the UNC. We have always been committed to democracy and freedom of choice. We are saying to remove that provision completely. We do not want you to hold it over the heads of the industry and over the heads of the 30,000 workers, so when you want to move you would move. No! You have to remove it completely.

Madam President, I want to go to another topic. Do you recall sometime ago I raised the issue that this Government was out to abolish old age pension, and Sen. The Hon. Dr. Lenny Saith got up and said that I was misleading the country. Let me quote what he said. He said:

> The Government is not abolishing pensions or payments to old age pensioners.

He said the Government said that it would change its name to a "Senior Citizens' Grant" which is a more accurate term for payments being made. He went on to say that those persons who are now getting pensions would continue to do so. That was a mistruth on the part of Sen. The Hon. Dr. Lenny Saith. He misled you and he misled the 80,000 to 100,000 senior citizens in this country. I want to make it very clear that there is a difference between a pension and a grant. A grant is a gift; a grant is a discretionary income provided by the State. A pension is a stream of income that is guaranteed by right and that could be manifested in various forms including Acts of Parliament, trust deeds and regulations.

The Pension Act has been with us since 1939; 68 years. The UNC was there for six years and we never abolished old age pension. We never changed the name to Senior Citizens' Grant. Madam President, how suddenly this Government is changing the name from "old age pension" to "Senior Citizens' Grant'? Do you know what is even more alarming? The elderly in this society will be educated by the UNC, because they would have to vote out this Government. This Government has told a big untruth to the elderly in this country. They are mamaguying the elderly in our land. Hear what this Government is proposing in clause 11(f)(5). It says:

> "A grant under this Act is subject to review and may be increased, decreased or discontinued."

That was never in the Old Age Pensions Act. What are you telling the elderly in this country—persons who have been receiving old age pension as soon as they have reached 65 years, and those who are moving toward 65 years and have a legitimate expectation to get old age pension? This fascist regime is telling the elderly in this country: "You see this grant that I am going to offer you, I could give you it; I could take it back and I could abolish it." Madam President, how can we support this measure? How can any Government in a modern society, where by 2050 close to 30 per cent or 40 per cent of our population will be 60 years and over—We have an ageing population and the Government should be trying to take care of those people. Instead, is this how you treat the elderly? You are telling them that you are going to take their pension; you are now going to give them a grant; and you would review this grant whenever you see it is necessary, and you could increase the grant or you could discontinue it.

Madam President, this is a callous and cruel provision. It is an attack against the elderly in our country. We will go to every nook and cranny to educate the 90,000 to 100,000 elderly persons in this country on why they must vote out the PNM. This Government is heartless, callous and cruel to the elderly in our country. Madam President, do you think that came overnight?

Madam President, let us go to the budget debate of October 08, 2004. This is what the hon. Prime Minister said:

> "The responsibility on the State to provide for one's welfare in retirement must be reduced and eventually removed."

I want to re-quote him:

> "The responsibility of the State to provide for one's welfare in retirement must be reduced and eventually removed."

This is the PNM in the 2004 budget. This is the Prime Minister telling you and me that the intention of Government is to remove all forms of pensions or review them or reduce them so that we will now be able to stand on our own legs and deal with our own pension.

Madam President: Hon. Senators, we will now suspend for tea and we will return at 5.00 p.m.

4.30 p.m.: *Sitting suspended.*

5.00 p.m.: *Sitting resumed.*

Madam President: Sen. Mark, you may continue. You have had 25 minutes.

Sen. W. Mark**:** Thank you very much, Madam President. [*Desk thumping*] I referred to a statement made by the hon. Minister of Finance, delivered in the House of Representatives on Friday, October 08, 2004 in which he said:

> "The responsibility of the State to provide for one's welfare in retirement must be reduced and eventually removed."

This is the thinking of the PNM Government. They are saying that it is imperative that there be a shift in the culture to one of individual responsibility. Such a fundamental shift in responsibility would require an aggressive programme of information dissemination to educate the public at large on the benefits of individuals taking increasing responsibility for their own welfare during their retirement years. Madam President, in essence, this summarizes the philosophy of this Government.

This is reflected not only insofar as the elderly are concerned. I want to warn public officers in this country. I have an IMF report that I am going to refer to in a short while which deals with the whole issue of public officers and their pensions in the future.

I just want to quote again from the Minister of Finance speech on page 146 of the budget statement of October 08, 2004. Among other things, he said that there is a working group and that group will address, among other things, taxation issues in the pension industry and changes to the retirement age in the public

service. I just want to make reference to that particular area. Why is the Government seeking to shirk its responsibility to the working class, including public officers and old age pensioners as it relates to their retirement benefits?

In 1997, the then Minister of Finance, Mr. Brian Kuei Tung, stated that the cost to the Government of providing the public service pension amounted, at that time, to $391 million in 1992. Five years later, in 1997, it went to $562 million, and he was forecasting by the year 2002 that these payments would be over $1 billion.

Madam President, the hon Minister of Finance and the hon. Prime Minister, on Wednesday, October 04, 2006, indicated on page 13 of the budget statement that as at the end of 2005, the total pension bill stood at $2.2 billion. So, this Government did not get its inspiration from any working group. This Government got its inspiration for the reform of the pension system in our country from an International Monetary Fund Report, which is a confidential report that I happened to get. This report is dated April 2002 and it is entitled *Options for Pension Reform in T&T*.

This was supposed to be a strictly confidential report that was done for the Government of Trinidad and Tobago on the instructions of the Minister of Finance, when he invited the IMF to Trinidad and Tobago. They conducted this programme from April 02 to April 12, 2002. Let me give you the summary of the key recommendations of the IMF to the Government. They have begun to implement it. What we are dealing with now with respect to the Senior Citizens' Grant and the alteration of the Old Age Pensions Act to reflect what is called the new senior citizens thrust is anchored and embedded in this particular document.

Madam President, what was proposed by the IMF? They said on page 6 of their report that the central elements of a reformed pension system will involve the following: the introduction of a new fully-funded pension scheme to replace the NIS partially advanced funded programme. The new system could be either of the defined contribution or defined benefit type. So the IMF is going to advise this Government or has advised this Government to introduce a new fully-funded pension scheme to replace the NIS partially advanced funded programme. They went on further to say that an Old Age Pension Programme that is integrated with the NIS—implying that the old age pension fills the gap—in household income needed to reach the poverty line. Furthermore, the old age pension benefit would be frozen. That is why they only offered pensioners $100 in an economy that was generating GDP of $116 billion, according to the Prime Minister.

Furthermore, the old age pension benefit would be frozen until the sum of the two benefits reaches the poverty line. Hence, the Prime Minister is talking about NIS pension going up to $2,000 from January 01, 2008. It is the integration of old age pension and NIS. They said that for new applicants eligibility would be based on household. Madam President, I want you to listen carefully. They are saying that new applicants eligibility would be based on household rather than individual income.

So, here it is the Government is seeking to amend the Old Age Pensions Act, and do you know what they are doing? They are reflecting the recommendations of the IMF. [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. Dr. Gopeesingh: Well said.

Sen. W. Mark: How can you tell this country that you are not being driven by the IMF in your Pension Reform Programme, and you said in clause 11(5) of this Finance Bill, under the Old Age Pensions Act that a grant under this Act is subject to review and may be increased, deceased or discontinued? That is the objective. You are saying that old age pension is no longer to be based on individual income; it is now to be based on household income.

So, if three of us are in a home and we are seeing about our mother—you and I are working for a certain sum of money—do you know what the Government is saying? The Government is saying that when it adds up our money together—if you and I are earning a certain sum of money—they are saying that my mother is no longer eligible for old age pension or what is now called the Senior Citizens' Grant, so you and I would now have to take care of our parents. This is the implication of this document. When we expose the PNM to the people of this country, "crapaud smoke your pipe".

Madam President, 91,887 persons receive old page pension and public assistance in this country. In an election year, they are proposing to decease and to discontinue the Senior Citizens' Grant. Madam President, I am telling the Government today that a UNC government will repeal this legislation, and we will reintroduce old age pension. [*Desk thumping*] Further, we are going to have a benchmark for old age pension; a minimum of $3,000, and we are indexing that to inflation. [*Desk thumping*] This Government is mamaguying old people and the elderly, but we shall expose them.

Madam President, let me go on further. I want the public officers of Trinidad and Tobago to listen very carefully. On page 146 of the Minister of Finance statement delivered on Friday, October 08, 2004, he talked about a pension

working group that is going to be responsible for the development and introduction of a contributory occupational pension plan for the public service. But we said that. Kuei Tung introduced that in 1997 in his budget statement. [*Interruption*] Well, we did not carry it out completely. We needed another five more years. Robinson kicked us out and put you inside illegally. [*Crosstalk*]

Madam President, hear what they are proposing. This pension scheme is going to cover public officers, teachers, police officers, prison officers, fire officers, judicial and legal service, statutory authorities, municipal corporations, members of the defence force, members of the higher Judiciary, members of the Industrial Court, members of the diplomatic service of Trinidad and Tobago, parliamentarians and hourly- and daily-rated employees.

Madam President, in terms of NIS, hear what the IMF is proposing. The IMF is saying that to enhance the fiscal sustainability of the NIS, the retirement age would gradually increase to 65. So, you are moving from 60 to 65. That is what the IMF has told this spineless regime, and that is what they have begun to pursue.

Hear what they are proposing for the civil service. First of all, the IMF is saying that there should be a reduction in the generosity of civil service pensions—that is what they are saying—particularly for new hires, and a modification of retirement ages in line with those proposed for the NIS. Do you know what they are saying? They are saying that public officers, particularly those in the civil service, would now have to increase their retirement age from 60 years to 65 years. This is the first thing this is proposing. They are saying that the share of pensions that can be commuted as gratuities should be reduced as these pensions are meant to ensure income in old, not middle age.

Madam President, you will know when a public officer retires from the public service he gets 66⅔ per cent of his final salary, and 25 per cent of that can be taken in gratuity. That is now non-taxable. Do you know what this criminal group from the IMF is proposing to this Government and what this Government is seeking to introduce?

Sen. Montano: Madam President, with the greatest of respect, that report is not before this Parliament. It is not even a policy of the Government.

Sen. W. Mark: I am not saying that it is before the Parliament.

Madam President: Why do the two of you always insist on standing at the same time. If somebody gets up and you give way, then you sit, or else you should say that you are not giving way. I hope that he is not debating that report and that he is only using it as a reference.

Sen. W. Mark: I am using it as a reference.

Madam President: Well then use it as a reference and do not debate it.

Sen. Montano: Madam President, with the greatest of respect—

Madam President: Will you give way?

Sen. W. Mark: You have ruled and I am not giving way.

Madam President: He said on a point of order.

Sen. Montano: He is reading from it and these were his words—you could check the *Hansard*. He said "this is what the Government is going to do". Madam President, this is not even a document of the Government. It is a report that we have received.

Madam President: On the point of irrelevance, it is difficult to decide that because he is referring it back to the Bill in front of us which deals with old age pension. Go with the Bill. Raise the Bill that is in front of you and talk on it.

Sen. W. Mark: Madam President, may I advise that out of the 22 amendments here, 10 concern pensions. There is one that deals with the public service. There is a Pension Act called the Pensions Act of Trinidad and Tobago that deals with the public service, the teaching service, the fire service and the civil service. All that I am saying is that in the IMF report of 2002, the Government of Trinidad and Tobago has been advised by the IMF to reduce the generosity of civil service pensions.

Madam President: Please come back to the Bill.

Sen. W. Mark: I am quoting from a report. So, I do not have the right to quote from a report and tell you that I am referring to the section that deals with the Pensions Act, Chap. 32:02 which deals with the public service? If the Government is not going to do these things they have a chance to respond, because this document is not in the public domain today—

Sen. Montano: Madam President, with all due respect—

Sen. W. Mark: I am not giving way.

Sen. Montano: On a point of order.

Sen. W. Mark: What is the point of order?

Madam President: He is going to tell me when you sit down.

Sen. Montano: Madam President, there he goes again. He is talking about the report—

Madam President: What is the point of order?

Sen. W. Mark: Madam President, the man is taking over my time. He is disrupting my contribution. It is a strategy now. He is taking away my time.

Madam President: Sen. Montano, what is your point of order, please?

Sen. Montano: Madam President, the report that he is reading from has absolutely nothing to do with this Bill and, therefore, it is not relevant at all.

Madam President: Well, I have ruled and I have asked Sen. Mark to please obey my rule, and that is to come to the Bill. Put that report down and talk on the Bill; the clause that you are debating. You know better than that.

Sen. W. Mark: Madam President, what I am saying is that I referred to the Prime Minister's statement. I told the honourable Senate what the Prime Minister had proposed, and I am saying consistent with what the Prime Minister had proposed here for public officers, I was making reference to an IMF publication, and that is how I am linking the two.

Madam President: Come back to the Bill now.

Sen. W. Mark: I am linking both—

Madam President: Link it to the Bill.

Sen. W. Mark: Madam President, that is what I am doing. You are not allowing me to do it. Sometimes I wonder—anyway, I would not go further. I have a right to speak.

Madam President: Speak on the Bill, please.

Sen. W. Mark: I am raising a point dealing with the future of civil servants in this country.

Madam President: Well, link it to the Bill.

Sen. W. Mark: I am saying that under the Pensions Act, when a public officer works up to 33⅓ years, his or her final salary is 66⅔, because the accrual rate is 2 per cent. What the Government is attempting to do and what the IMF has advised them to do is to reduce it from 2 per cent to 1 per cent.

Sen. Montano: Madam President—

Madam President: Is that in the Bill?

Sen. W. Mark: Madam President, I am telling you what the Government has been advised to do, in terms of the reform of the public service.

Sen. Montano: Madam President, on a point of order.

Madam President: I am getting very tired.

Sen. W. Mark: He is only disturbing my contribution.

Madam President: I have ruled and you are still not obeying.

Sen. W. Mark: You are not giving me a chance.

Sen. Montano: I will not give you the chance.

Madam President: Senator, let—

Sen. W. Mark: Who is in charge of this Senate? Is it this white man?

Madam President: Senator, stop making racial remarks like that.

Sen. W. Mark: Well, who is in charge of the Senate?

Madam President: I am.

Sen. W. Mark: Well, why is he disturbing you?

Sen. Dr. Gopeesingh: He said that he is in charge.

Madam President: Are both of you in charge? Sen. Mark, I am still waiting to hear how you are connecting it.

Sen. W. Mark: Madam President, you are not giving me a chance.

Madam President: Because you are going on and on with the same thing.

Sen. W. Mark: He is only interrupting me.

Madam President: Come off that report and come back to the Bill.

Sen. W. Mark: Why must I come off the report if I want to make a link?

Madam President: Link it now.

Sen. W. Mark: Madam President, you must protect and preserve the rights of the minority. [*Desk thumping*] Please, do not take on these people and so on who are there. All I am saying is that this Government is mamaguying not only public officers. In this Bill that they are going to establish a minimum pension of $1,150 and they are telling you that your final salary, in terms of pension would be 66⅔; I am telling public officers that this is all part of a game plan. The Government's intention is to reduce your take home gratuity. That is what the Government intends to do.

Madam 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. T. Gopeesingh*]

Question put and agreed to.

Sen. W. Mark: Madam President, we are talking about old age pension here. We are saying that this Government is intent on cruelly and callously mistreating the elderly in our country. We are saying that these amendments that are being proposed here for the old age pensioners are not going to provide them with any sense of social security in the future.

[*Sen. Montano and Sen. Dumas on their feet*]

Madam President: Senator, there are two points of order. One of you, please. What is going on here?

Sen. Montano: Madam President, I did not see him. I am sorry, my back was turned.

Madam President: What is your point of order, Minister? [*Interruption*]

Sen. Montano: He is imputing improper motives when he says that we are cruel and we have evil intent and so on. I let many things pass. Earlier, he called us a fascist government. That is completely out of order. He cannot go there. He must not go there today.

Madam President: There are words that are unparliamentary. I did not hear the fascist part, or else I would have pulled him up, because that is definitely unparliamentary. I would suggest that you be careful with the words that you are using.

Sen. W. Mark: You see, these people times are coming to an end, and we know it

Sen. Dumas: Madam President, on a point of order.

Madam President: Senator, a point of order.

Sen. Dumas: Madam President, I have to protest. He is inferring improper motives. When he says we are clearly intent, that is a statement for which people have been killed in the world.

Madam President: All right, Minister. I do not need a speech. I have warned him and I will listen more carefully to what he is saying. Continue.

Sen. W. Mark: I know that they want to curtail my freedom of speech for a long time, and they are attempting today. Madam President, you are in charge of this Senate. They are engaging in vexatious and frivolous objections. You know that. May I continue my contribution?

We would like to know when these elderly people are given a sum of $1,150, how would they be able to survive? In addition, we have been told by this Government that they would have the power to review, with a view to reducing increasing or discontinuing the pensions which have now been translated and transformed and called a new name, "Senior Citizens' Grant".

Madam President, I want to indicate to you that there is a complete distinction and definition between these terms. A grant cannot be described as a pension. I made it very clear that a grant is a gift. It is discretion on the part of the State to provide for people an income at the end of the month or at the end of the week. A pension is a stream of income that people are guaranteed under certain acts of Parliament or, in this instance, if you have a pension plan, for example, there are trust deeds and regulations.

When one looks at the poverty level in our country and relates it to this meagre $1,150, and in some instances $1,250, what do you see? The Government has indicated to this country that through an EU survey, some 221,000 persons have been reported to be living under the poverty line in this country. They used a figure of $655. You would recall that in 1999 the figure was $625; and seven years later there is a mere 4.8 per cent increase in this particular number that I have outlined.

I want to share with you, based on the figures from the Central Bank, that between 1999 to 2006, the price of food increased by an average of 14.1 per cent per year. If we take 1999 to 2006, the price of food alone increased by 14.6 per cent per year. Therefore, it is really difficult for a Government to try to fool this country. Poverty should be measured by a number and the number is $655. So, how are the elderly to live on this meagre pension of $1,150 or in some instances of $1,250?

Madam President, if you go to 2000, the inflation rate was 13.2 per cent to the present. When we analyze this figure of $655 which is the poverty line used by the EU, we realize that it is clearly out of line.

In 2001 inflation stood at 7.5 per cent, therefore, if we were operating in accordance with the figures and the numbers provided for us, that figure of $625 would have increased as at the end of 2000 to $708.75. If we go to 2001 with an increase of 7.5 per cent, the new figure would have been $761.91.

At the end of 2002, with an inflation rate of 11 per cent, the poverty line would have been close to $847.

At the end of 2003, that figure climbed to 12.3 per cent and the value of the poverty basket of goods should have jumped to $949.

In 2004 when we accumulate these increases, we got about $1,145.

When we go to 2005, with food inflation standing at 22.6 per cent, the poverty basket should have been crossing $1,404. You would recall that last year there was a 22 per cent hike in food prices. The real poverty line should have been elevated to $1,713. We have not included inflation for 2007 which would push the figure to close to $1,800. How could you tell this country that the poverty line in terms of the number is $655 at a $25 increase from 1999 to 2007?

Our estimate is that poverty line should really be reading about $1,800 to $1,900 a month. That is what we have calculated. We have to be very clear. The Government is fooling the population. The Government has directed the EU to conduct a study. That is what the Government has done. They have told them how to go about their terms of reference. If you give them terms of reference, they must follow the terms of reference. I am not blaming the EU; I am blaming the Government of Trinidad and Tobago for this faux pax in terms of this matter.

5.30 p.m.

Madam President, as far as we are concerned, this Government is "mamaguying" and fooling the population insofar as these measures are concern.

I just want to deal briefly with Tobago. I see there is a question of the Central Tenders Board Ordinance. I think the time has come to bring the Tobago House of Assembly before a joint parliamentary committee for them to account for the finances over the last five to six years. We believe that the time has come for a forensic audit into the finances of the THA. There are too many financial slippages taking place in the financial management of the Tobago House of Assembly and we believe that the people of Tobago are not being given a proper deal; they have been given a raw deal.

We know a road that they call L'Anse Fourmi; it took them five and a half years to almost complete that road. Up to now the Tobagonian people, I understand, are not aware of the final cost; if it is $30 million or $40 million; they

do not know. Tenders are being awarded in secret; people are not aware; it is not transparent. The Tobago Secondary School was experiencing problems with the sea in terms of erosion. They gave a contractor, a "fella" called Etienne Mendez; it cost the Tobago House of Assembly, as we understand, millions of dollars. This man constructed a retention wall or a retaining wall and within one year the wall collapsed in the sea. We are talking about Tobago, the Central Tenders Board and the corruption that is taking place in the award of contracts in Tobago.

Madam President, we call for a forensic audit into the finances of the Tobago House of Assembly because we believe there are too many underhand dealings taking place there; there is not sufficient transparency, accountability and openness in terms of public funds. That is why I make this call today for the Tobago House of Assembly to account for the billions of dollars that they have spent. I am not accusing Orville London of any untoward development, he might be a decent "fella", but I am saying that the system in Tobago is being used by certain forces within Tobago and within the THA to corrupt—

We want to make it very clear that the UNC is not supporting these measures in this Bill. We will not support the Senior Citizens' Grant to be taken away from the senior citizens two years later. We will not support that! We place notice that a UNC government will repeal this legislation. We are not in favour of the Government closing down the gaming industry. We believe that is a personal matter involving the Prime Minister and his family; we do not want to be part of that. And therefore we are not going to allow a government or a Prime Minister to use its private agenda in order to determine the public agenda of this country. So the gaming industry will continue to exist under a UNC administration.

Madam President, we are saying that these pensions that the Government is proposing for public officers are very measly and we believe that the time has come for public officers to enjoy the same privileges and rights as the Prime Minister; going home with a hundred per cent of his salary as pension. We believe that public officers should go home with 100 per cent as their final salary when they leave the public service and they leave their jobs.

I thank you very much, Madam President.

Sen. Dr. Eastlyn Mc Kenzie: Thank you very much. Madam President, as the speakers before me, I would like to welcome to the Senate, Sen. Cindy Gibbs-Nicholas and to say how pleased we are to have another female—[*Desk thumping*]—substituting for a female who is not very well and let us hope that Sen. Raziah Ahmed feels better and she will be with us soon, but that does not

mean we do not look forward to the time when there is need for a temporary Senator on the UNC side, that we would see the face of Sen. Cindy Gibbs-Nicholas again. So, ma'am, welcome to you and thanks for your very spirited contribution. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam President, when I looked at the Finance Bill 2007 and I looked at all of what we intend to do, I said at last, we are seeing the implementation of some of the proposals as outlined in the 2006/2007 Budget. One of the things that I am happy about that is not mentioned here, is the fact that the exercises in the financial literacy programmes are taking place all over the country and I hope that this will better serve so many of us to prepare for the time when we will not be working.

I note the fact that we are going to have legal implementation of the 10 pensions listed in the Finance Bill; pensions to all different categories of retired professionals, including the spouses of the judges, where you know they had a meagre thing and now they are getting something that is not sufficient but is better than what it was. At the same time, let me make an appeal that in the 2007/2008 Budget, the hon. Attorney General will push a plea for something to be done about some of the judges and their pensions. Because some of them retired a long time ago and we know that the pension is calculated on a ratio basis; they have lived long; they retired when their salaries were low; also there are restrictions on how soon they can work after retirement; I think it is 10 years; then I think there is need to review the pensions that the judges are getting.

I note that the House of Representatives accepted the recommendations of the Salaries Review Commission as it relates to parliamentarians and I say, although the House Committee did not get all that it wanted, we have seen an improvement and we want to urge the Government to push, even though some of the proposals were not accepted, that they continue to put forward more and more proposals so that—it is not for those of us who are serving as legislators now, it is to encourage people with the competence out there, who are unwilling to leave their jobs and come to the Parliament to serve with no gratuity in some instances; no pension in some instances; that they would be encouraged if they know that the conditions of service are better and we will encourage a brighter and more brilliant set of parliamentarians.

I am glad that this situation with the increase in the tax allowance for tertiary education for people studying outside of the country is cleared up, because I remember earlier this year, there were many people questioning whether the grant was for income year 2006 or income year 2007 and this Bill has cleared this up and I am happy about that.

I am also happy about the increase in the ceiling for stamp duty on properties, conveyancing and so on. Also the Green Fund Advisory Committee will be set up, so I am hoping that these matters will really be implemented as soon as possible after this Bill is passed. As a Tobagonian myself and as someone who brought this up in my budget contribution in the 2006/2007 budget, I am happy that the Government has acceded to the recommendation for foreign investors to obtain a licence before acquiring lands in Tobago. Because we have seen where there was an abuse of the process by people who were pretending that they were coming to invest and they were doing other things.

Finally, I want to deal with the gambling or the gaming industry. I said as I sat there what a pity that this has gone in the way of party politics. You know, Madam President, I do not gamble; I have never played Play Whe, Lotto and I am in a Play Whe booth actually every day, because I have a close relative who operates one of these booths, so I know the industry inside out. My father used to own race horses, so I know what you are talking about and I am sure that there are many people on that side who have never played; they do not know anything about gambling and so it is from that kind of standpoint that I want to talk about this.

Madam President, as it stands now, we cannot change what the Bill says. In fact, these were points outlined in the Budget earlier in the year and therefore they are actually in the Act and I want to say something about that. When I looked at the situation before coming here, I said, you know what, it is as if we are up against the wall and as we say in Tobago, "You catch more flies with honey than with vinegar"; "When your hand is in the lion's mouth you ease it". It is in that kind of light that I want to talk about this.

I note that the Government has said that they have a ban on importation of new machines with effect from March 01, 2007. I thought that that would take care of those people who had ordered machines. Not knowing that the Government would put a ban on it, but give them a transition period within which time they would actually receive their machines and have them in the country. Therefore, they would know from the date that the budget was announced, after a certain date you would not be allowed to bring in machines; so I note that.

I was happy to hear the hon. Minister say that there was dialogue with members of the gaming industry, whether it is the owners, the agents, whoever they were and it told me that they wanted to understand more of the situation and what impact this would have on what we are doing. I noted with a certain amount of relief and if I were talking with the members of the gaming industry I would

say to them, listen, this Act will not come into force until it is proclaimed. When I looked at the fact that we have some Acts that have been passed since 1981 and they have not been proclaimed, I would say to the members, keep heart; the Government might well take 10 or 15 years before they proclaim this Act, so just rest easy, sleep cool. That is what I would have said to them. And I am hoping that the Government would listen and say, well listen, let me hear why you would want this thing to go on without curtailing it in probably five or ten years and these are the points I would raise. I would say, I know that the industry would have negative impacts on different areas of life. As we heard from Sen. Gibbs-Nicholas, we have some good in it too. We have so many thousands of people employed and I know because I have been around them. Very many of them are females; their hours are flexible; the owners or the operators pay National Insurance for them; they are well paid; I have been in the booth and see people winning and saying to the teller: "hold a $40" and if they win plenty they say: "hold a $100". They get good tips. I have seen it; I know. So, they have flexible hours of work; some of them work on shift. It is not everything that is bad about the industry.

I also know about the problems. Some are addicts; some wives come down there and pull out the men; push their hands in their pockets; take out their house money and say, look, here is a $5, you could gamble with that and they gone with the children money for their milk and so on. So, we know, but we also know that there are good things.

I want to say to the Government; near the booth I am talking about, is a Whe Whe booth in another village. Whereas the National Lotteries Control Board pays 24:1 when you win; they pay 30:1 and it is underground. You want to tell me, we want to ask the hon. Minister of National Security to take the police who should be solving crime, to send them to chase down people in the bush; who knows where to run; the police do not even know the terrain or anything, when you "buss a mark" and you hold the "casa".

Madam President, let us be realistic; let us look at the problems that will come up when you try to ban it. You cannot legalize morality and you cannot stop gambling. [*Desk thumping*] No Government could stop gambling; none. You could catch a gambler every minute, it will not stop gambling. It is just like trying to stop people from smoking. I see doctors with withdrawal symptoms from smoking and they know better; they are addicted to it. So, let us be realistic. I am saying the underground betting is going on, the "fellas" paying 30:1; lottery paying 24:1; they are going there; they are honest; they are paying you your money. Let us ask the Government to look at it.

The next thing I want to say is that, when you clamp down and you stop the slot machines, what do you think they are going to do with them; they are carrying them home. They are going to carry them home in their basement and so on; they invite their friends and they say they are having a slot machine party. You have to get policemen to leave what they are doing, to go to these homes; to knock on the door, except you bring another law to say, I can go into your private house and ask if you have slot machines.

You have to be careful of what you do and they are going to sell beers. You remember as young people, you are having a house party, they say you have to have a bar licence; what do the people do who do not have it; they say, buy a sandwich for $5 and get a beer free. So they knew how to go around the rules and the laws. And what I am saying is this, in order to police all of this you are putting pressure on the Minister of National Security. He has to take policemen off the beat to solve crime, stop raping and all sorts of things, to go into people's home to look for slot machines.

Madam President, I would say this, police have better things to do and I am saying that I want to appeal to the Government; I am not going to back the Government against any wall; I am not going to pose any threat to the Government; I do not even have any mouth to say to the Government vote this and vote that; I am not doing that. I am saying that you have young people in the industry; you have many women in the industry; they depend on this; they are accustomed to that way of life. They are not doing anything that is wrong or immoral in it; we know the impact, but you have the impact on anything else. People talk about the worthlessness of the CEPEP; they talk about the URP; they talk about the people who drink; they talk about the money you spend on smoking and everything has its pros and its cons. I want to appeal to the Government that you delay the proclamation of this Act as long as humanly possible; give it a long gestation period; consider what will happen to these people; give them a long time to decide well okay, while I am doing this in my flexible time, I would do this type of training if I want to. But for heaven's sake I want to appeal to the Government, whether it is moral or immoral, that is not my business; I am looking at the economic, social and cultural issues that would come out of banning it immediately.

I have seen some sort of accommodation on the Government side when you say that it will not be implemented until it is proclaimed. I thought that was a subtle way of saying, we are delaying the implementation for as long as possible until we can set things in motion, where these people who are in the industry will

not be adversely affected and read that into what I have been hearing from the hon. Minister in the Ministry of Finance. I go along with you, Sir; I implore you; delay it as long as possible; let our women feel a burden off their shoulders that you would not close down the industry tomorrow or next week and that they can go along and plan for the future of their lives because you will accommodate and understand their situation and allow them to live happy.

Thank you very much, Madam President.

The Minister of Legal Affairs (Sen. The Hon. Christine Kangaloo): Thank you very much, Madam President. I rise to speak on this Bill to dispel some of the dangerous allegations that were being made by Sen. Wade Mark. I have been a Member of this Parliament for some time now, so I am now accustomed to Sen. Mark's contributions; I am accustomed to his manner of delivery; I am accustomed to his hypothetical questions, but today what we on this side clearly saw was a desperate, desperate man. They really do say that desperate measures are for desperate times and that is exactly here and now Sen. Mark and the party that he represents, they are all desperate. When he declares, so heroically that he is going to form the next government in a short time, Sen. Mark is very well aware of desperation that is lying beneath all that he says.

Madam President, clearly I am surprised that a Bill that seeks to increase the benefits that are being paid to the elderly throughout Trinidad and Tobago, would attract such hysteria from Sen. Mark. That he would seek to distort in every way what the Government has sought to do with the measures that the Government has sought to introduce in this Bill.

What has happened is that the elderly, who—previously, 65,000 persons who were accessing the old age pension—are now receiving increased benefits, they are now being paid the sum of $1,350 a month; they are now being paid $1,250 a month. [*Desk thumping*] When this administration assumed office old age pension was at the rate of $720 a month. So, can you tell me that this is not a Government that cares about the elderly, Madam President? [*Desk thumping*]

For the 17 years that Sen. Mark has been in the Senate—you know he tells us that at every turn, the same way Sen. Dr. Gopeesingh gives us his CV, Sen. Mark tells us about his 17 years—I have never seen someone completely misread a Bill as Sen. Mark did this afternoon. Therefore it is incumbent on me, as a Member of this Government to set the record straight.

The first thing I want to point out is that what this Bill has done; what this Bill seeks to do; what it has in fact done, was to increase the payments that the elderly would be receiving; that is the first thing. The second thing was to widen the net

because what used to happen was that if you received $1 more than $1,000 you were not eligible to receive anything from Social Welfare Division. However, it seemed unfair, because as the Minister with responsibility for social services, at one time, I remember speaking to persons who wanted to receive old age pension and they would tell you that it is just $1.00 or 50 cents that I am over the $1,000. What the Government has sought to do here is to widen the net so that more persons would be entitled and eligible for this grant. [*Desk thumping*] But Sen. Mark has attacked this Bill. Sen. Mark has said that this Government does not care about the elderly. [*Interruption*]

Madam President: Sen. Mark, you have had your turn; you repeated all that over and over and over; let the Minister rebut now, that is her right.

Sen. Mark: If she is misleading the Senate, I will get up and say so.

Madam President: Sen. Mark, it is me to decide who is misleading the Senate; was it you or is it she? So, please let the Minister speak. Continue Minister.

Sen. The Hon. C. Kangaloo: Thank you very much, Madam President. I am in no way misleading the Senate by reading the provisions of the Bill before us and what in fact the Bill is doing, in addition to having increased the amounts that the senior citizens will receive. It has widened the net so that more persons will be able to receive this grant to allow them to meet their living expenses and everything else.

This Bill has been very generous; the way Sen. Mark has portrayed this Bill, it is the exact opposite. I just want to point out that at no time can this Government ever be accused of cruelly and callously mistreating the elderly. The provisions of this Bill show the very opposite. So that is the first thing that I wanted to say.

The second thing is that Sen. Mark is turning to cameras and alleging that this Government intends to remove the Senior Citizens' Grant. The hon. Dr. Lenny Saith had already refuted that allegation on a different occasion, the Minister of Social Development when this matter was being debated in the Lower House, categorically refuted that allegation.

So, Madam President, once again let me put it on the record that the Government has no intention of removing the Senior Citizens' Grant. [*Desk thumping*] If you look at the history of what this administration has done with the old age pension, why would we, having increased it from the $720 that it was,

now, when it is at $1,350 all of a sudden decide that we are going to remove it? It makes a mockery of what this Government has publicly stated time and time again as its social development agenda.

When he talks about how the Government is cruelly and callously mistreating the elderly, once again I have to say and I have to point out that this Government under this administration, you now have the policy on ageing; a comprehensive policy on ageing, within which all the initiatives that are being done for the elderly are done within that context.

Remember we have the CDAP which provides medication for the elderly. I think I need to point out to you that there are other grants that are available from the Ministry of Social Development that the elderly can receive. I think I need to put it on record. You have the Medical Equipment Grant and Madam President, remember that this grant was increased by this administration from $1,500 to $5,000. [*Desk thumping*] So that if someone who—[*Interruption*]

Madam President: Sen. Mark, if you continue with that crosstalk to the Minister and that terrorism talk—

Sen. Mark: He was cross talking with me, you know.

Madam President: No, not what you were saying; that is a different thing. If you continue with that terrorism allegation in whatever way—[*Interruption*]—then we are going to have to do something about it, all right. Please, I would like to hear what the Minister is saying. Please continue.

6.00 p.m.

Sen. The Hon. C. Kangaloo: Thank you very much, Madam President. If someone who is in receipt of the Senior Citizens' Grant wanted to get a new pair of spectacles they can access the Medical Equipment Grant and they would be able to get that new pair of spectacles and, as I said, the grant has been increased from $1,500 to $5,000 under this administration. [*Desk thumping*]

There are other grants issued and administered by the Social Welfare Division, all of which, Madam President, the senior citizens can access. You have, for example, the Pharmaceutical Grant which was increased by this administration from $300 to $500; you have the Education Grant, increased from $80 to $140 a month; you have the Book Grant, increased from $500 per family to $500 per child. In other words, all of these expenses can be met by a senior citizen accessing these grants, and all of these grants were increased, sometimes double the amount, sometimes triple the amount by this administration. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam President, there is the House Repair Grant, again, administered by the Social Welfare Division. [*Interruption*] This was increased from $3,000 to $5,000; so if a senior citizen wanted to replace galvanize on the roof of their home they can access this grant to do that; increased by this administration from $3,000 to $5,000. [*Desk thumping*] You have the Household Articles Grant increased from $1,500 to $3,500; increased by this administration. A senior citizen wants to get a new stove he can access this grant and obtain that stove. All of these grants increased and provided by a government that has always stated as its mandate that it would help the disadvantaged. Always stated that! Not a government as Sen. Mark would have you believe is callously mistreating the elderly.

Sen. Mark: Cruel and callous.

Sen. The Hon. C. Kangaloo: Madam President, before I finish what I am saying, [*Interruption*] I just have to point out:

1. We have increased grants being paid to our senior citizens; and
2. I have pointed out all of the different grants that they can also access, increased by this administration, and it is not limited.

All the senior citizens who can access will not be limited to one Ministry of Social Development; you have, for example, programmes that are being administered by other ministries. You have the Geriatric Adolescent Partnership Programme where caregivers are trained to provide for the elderly; you have the Ministry of Housing that provides a grant of $15,000 in materials to help persons do repairs to their homes. Senior citizens can access that grant. You have the Ministry of Community Development, Culture and Gender Affairs through the Self-Help Commission; they give a grant of $10,000. So you understand that this Government has ensured, across the board and across ministries that the needs of senior citizens can be met, and it is very important for us to understand that. [*Interruption*]

So, Madam President, let me just point out a few other initiatives taken by other ministries. T&TEC has a facility that assists senior citizens in terms of rewiring their homes, which is a free facility. [*Desk thumping*] WASA provides rebates and discounts to senior citizens who have difficulties in paying their rates. You have the senior activity centres that have been opened by the Ministry of Social Development; four centres have been opened and are located in St. James, Maloney, Rio Claro and Couva, and, Madam President, we all know that additional centres will be opened throughout Trinidad and Tobago.

I have gone through this, but this is not new to Sen. Mark, you know. A lot of this information was already given just a few weeks ago when the Minister of Social Development was here dealing with the Homes for Older Persons. [*Interruption*] So, Sen. Mark gets up here in his hysterical mood and seeks vainly to convey [*Interruption*] to the senior citizens throughout this country that this Government does not care about them. That is what Sen. Mark has tried to do. [*Crosstalk*]

Madam President, Sen. Mark also said that he was going to now have a minimum of $3,000 for old age pensioners. [*Interruption*]

Madam President: Sen. Mark, how many times do I have to—the next time I will have to ask you to leave!

Sen. Mark: Madam President, you hear what he now said—[*Inaudible*] [*Crosstalk*]

Sen. The Hon. C. Kangaloo: Sen. Mark has said, in part of his hysterical contribution, that the UNC would provide a minimum of $3,000 for old age pensioners. To me, I heard Sen. Mark a few weeks before, saying that it would be a minimum payment of $2,000. I am sure I heard him say that; I may be wrong. So he has gone from $2,000 to $3,000; his policy changes.

Hon. Senator: Mischief maker.

Sen. The Hon. C. Kangaloo: Yes. Next week that will be $5,000.

Hon. Senator: You are a mischief maker.

Sen. The Hon. C. Kangaloo: So, I do not know if Sen. Mark believes that he can fool the members of the public who are looking on—

Hon. Senator: No one believes him.

Sen. The Hon. C. Kangaloo: I do not know if he believes he can fool them, but I just want to say that this Government's track record in dealing with the elderly speaks for itself and that the old age pensioners who Sen. Mark was hoping that he would hoodwink by listening to his hysterical outburst this evening, I think that they would know better and they would understand better, because they know that this is a Government that has delivered to them, this is a Government that is committed to their needs, this is a Government that at the outset said it was committed to a social development agenda and it is moving onwards to that. All of those senior citizens will move with the Government despite Sen. Mark's hysteria.

So, Madam President, I thank you.

Sen. Ronald Phillip: Madam President, I rise to make my contribution to this Finance Bill and as the Minister of Finance explained, it seeks to validate the collection of certain fees, and, I just want to emphasize "the collection" and amend several pieces of legislation of a financial nature. When we look at the 20 pieces of amendments that are stated here, 10 deal with pension reforms and I wonder if there is some kind of goodies, in terms of, and to divide the population and to give them some kind of incremental benefit as the hon. Senator was saying before, they are widening the social net.

When we talk about catering for the social needs of the population, we need to look at this from a holistic view and I will like to go back to the Minister of Finance in his presentation when he said that the Government was on track with the Vision 2020 and the economy was favourable, buoyant and they were working in a very buoyant environment and they were doing good. He always alluded to the fact that the Government has good financial measures in place and they are performing well. He went on to state that poverty is now 17 per cent and the rate of inflation is 7.9 per cent.

You see, Madam President, when we talk about this oil and gas economy and we look at our boom in supply, this does not mean that we naturally have an increase in revenue. Because the increased supply does not mean that we control the demand, if we look at the supply and demand criteria. The possibility is a possibility of a very volatile price in the market, and we have seen that. We have seen our oil being at $22 and increased to $64. This increased revenue that we are now sharing with our population or trying to divide the population and let them think that we are widening the net to give them something, is not a permanent feature but a very transient type of revenue collection. So if the revenues are transient then we must ensure at this stage that we save as much as possible and we do not spend as much a possible. Whatever development that we are proposing that is very sustainable, and it means now, that the people of Trinidad and Tobago are catered for.

So, Madam President, when I look at 10 pieces of amendments being for pension and social reform, I would like to put on record that they should have catered for a national health insurance scheme; one that would allow the workers to benefit in our country; they should have probably catered for unemployment insurance. Also, I know that they intend to distribute smart cards to people, in terms of food distribution. But, when we talk about the poverty line in this country and we say that 17 per cent of the people are below the poverty line, but we still say 5 per cent unemployment, we are saying that people are working very

hard in this country and they are still poor. So, when we talk about pensions and to cater for putting something away for the later days; you know that there are certain sectors of our society that want to work for $1, but because of consumerism they want to spend $1.15 and, really, a large percentage of our people need to be educated, to be financially literate in terms of spending the money and even saving the money. So, when we talk about pension reforms and catering to the needs of the society, we are really trying to buffer a group of people to make sure that they spend their old age in a certain amount of decency as opposed to squandering the money in their youthful days and then having little or nothing.

When we talk about these programmes, these programmes are very expensive. They are expensive and they are a bit elastic in terms of the design, because to a large extent they really depend on the discretion of the Government, and we know in law the discretion of the chancellor is really his foot size. So you realize that these are the things that the Government of the day comes to canvas with, and try to get support rather than trying to look at this thing in a very holistic manner in terms of making sure that people are catered for. Because the Minister talked about how people could access all these grants, but I would like to ask the Minister to come in Parliament and lay the number of persons who have actually accessed these grants, and more importantly, state the geographic area in which these grants have been accessed.

Hon. Senator: Oh my God!

Sen. R. Phillip: Madam President, there is a big inequity in terms of the distribution of these grants.

Sen. Yuille-Williams: That is not so.

Sen. Dr. Gopeesingh: That is true! That is the truth. [*Crosstalk*]

Sen. R. Phillip: So, Madam President, as I look at the ageing population, and as our population age, with the better medical technology and facilities, it means now that people would live longer because of better care. Because of that, if you put the burden on the State then you would find more and more, we would have to take money that we could have used for developmental and infrastructural work and try to buffer a certain group of people, so, I would want to recommend that—

Hon. Senator: Do you want to explain that?

Sen. R. Phillip: What I am saying, Madam President, more and more, if we do not help our citizens to get proper jobs; we do not educate them to be financially literate and we do not encourage them to save, as I mentioned, that

even the Government in its days of plenty should start to save and cater for these things, then we would have people who would depend more and more on the State. So, I was suggesting that we have a pension system that allows people, even when they retire to have as much as their income when they were working.

If the system could be such that they could get 100 per cent of their moneys, because it means now that they would not have in retirement to be living in a substandard state. So, based on that, inappropriate pension schemes—[*Inaudible*] Yes, and definitely, you know that the pension systems have non contributory pension schemes and so on. I am saying that the people should be able to contribute and the Government, jointly, with the employees, especially public servants, should be able to engage in these kinds of pension reform and pension schemes that they would be able to benefit when they retire. [*Desk thumping*]

We see now that there are a lot of daily-paid workers, especially like in the city corporations; these people for years are never promoted or are given any different status in the job and I think that this pension scheme should definitely be extended to daily-paid workers to ensure that they are beneficiaries to this. So, any kind of social service that we are looking at should really be for our people, and more importantly, for the group of people that we are looking to ensure that they have a decent living.

Madam President, when we look at the National Insurance Scheme there is some conflict between the National Insurance Scheme and people being able to get their pensions, the old age pension. And the Government had made a policy that people cannot get both. In fact, up to last year, 2006, 19,000 persons were being able to benefit from both of them and they were trying to regularize this. What we are looking at is if in some way this pension system could be designed to allow people to have a decent pension, one that is based on the cost of living, one that is based on inflation rate. I mentioned that the discretion of the Government in these social services should be a very valid point, and we should not be pegging these things down right now. $1,250 old age pension, and stating that five years ago it was $720, that is too much of a meagre increase when we look at the cost of living, the food prices, the standard of living and the fact that all our citizens should benefit from the natural resources we have in our country. All our citizens should benefit from our wealth and be able to have the good quality of life, and because of that, it means now, that our social services and our social net—[*Interruption*] Yes, I agree it should be broadened, but it should be to those people who need help the most, and to bring them up from those cycles of poverty and those cycles of poor training and unemployability that they have to move them up to decent standards of living.

So, Madam President, we talked about our pension service and the services that we have from the Ministry of Social Development, but I would recommend that these people go out to the rural communities in the villages, do not wait for people to access the grant, because the old woman and citizen who is living in a house that is very meagre and, probably does not have the support of children and so on, most of the times might be illiterate and they do not know where the services are and they do not know how to access them. So it means now, that the Government must increase its outreach to ensure that these social services meet the people who really need them.

The Minister of Finance in his presentation also spoke about the miscellaneous taxes and the Green Fund. I would just like to comment on that Green Fund because in light of what I was saying the Minister of Finance did say that the country's natural resources would be enjoyed by the many generations to come.

Madam President: Senator, please give way? Sen. Dr. Saith.

PROCEDURAL MOTION.

The Minister of Public Administration and Information and Minister of Energy and Energy Industries (Sen. The Hon. Dr. Lenny Saith): Madam President, I have to admit that I was so enthralled by the contribution of the hon. Senator. [*Laughter*] He could have been speaking from the PNM Benches. Madam President, I beg to move that the Senate continue its sitting until the completion of the debate on this Bill.

Question put and agreed to.

FINANCE BILL

Sen. R. Phillip: Thank you, Madam President. In this Finance Bill we are now looking to establish in clause 19 a Green Fund Advisory Committee and I just want to bring to the attention of this Senate that the Green Fund of Trinidad and Tobago was established by the Finance Act, 2000, seven years ago. This Act was really a 0.1 per cent taxation that was called the Green Fund Levy on the gross sales or receipts of all companies conducting business in Trinidad and Tobago and was payable by the end of each quarter. The Green Fund was really established to enable communities, rural communities and groups that are concerned about the development of the environment, to be able to access this money that corporations were taxed; because corporations in doing their business would have contributed to a certain amount of pollution and degradation of the environment, and so groups were to engage in activities of remediation, reafforestation and also generally conservation of the environment, and this was seven years ago.

Madam President, when we try to develop our oil and gas sector and we know that because of this kind of degradation of the environment in terms of exploration work and we have to cut down forest to put platforms to get inland drilling and offshore drilling, we know that we have to balance that and I think it was in good spirit that the Government went to try to put a levy in terms of corporations, but, the business society did not look at that so favourably. Because when I look at the Chamber of Commerce breakfast meeting, "Trinidad and Tobago Economics Association Pre-Budget Breakfast Seminar" as quoted in www.chamber.org.tt; they had this meeting on October 17, 2002, and from 2000—2002 they were paying this Green Fund levy and David O'Brien who was the President of the Trinidad and Tobago Chamber of Industry and Commerce at the time was very concerned and he expressed in the budget analysis "Concerns of the Business Community" and he was making some suggestions that the Government took on board, and the suggestions really, were in a broad sense, but they incorporate the Green Fund levy. So, I just want to dive directly into that and he was saying:

> "…tax credits for contributions made to Crime Stoppers programmes…in 2002…the removal of supplemental tax rates for oil prices under US $25 and/or the remission of royalties for all small operators of oil producing properties."

Madam President, we have small operators, about 2,000 of them, that are able on land to take out this oil, it comes out two to 10 barrels a day, and we probably need to get proper technology to be able to access more of this oil. But it will continue for 200—300 years at that rate. And what happens is that once they move the trucks in, they move the equipment in and operate the pump at that location, it continues to damage the forestry, the animals and this affects, basically, the environment even though the production is so small. So, in terms of what they were suggesting, they wanted to offset the Green Fund levy against the Corporation Tax. They wanted to get rid of this Green Fund as far as they are concerned, because, really, it was an inability of the Government to really operationalize systems for people to access the Green Fund. It is not because we do not need to protect the environment or we do not have people who are willing to engage in environmental projects.

The Government has imposed this Green Fund levy, the money is there; it is in the consolidated coffers and people have not been able to access it, and even in 2007 when we talk about the environment, I just want to list some of the things that they proposed in the budget, and they spoke about:

> "…proposed two aluminium smelter plants; will be constructed one by Alcoa, at Cap-de-Ville and the other, the Alutrint Project, at the Union Industrial Estate, La Brea."

They also spoke about a National Environmental Policy, that they had revised in 2006, but still did not really cater for any kind of amelioration of the environment, and they were just concerned with the rapid industrialization of Trinidad and Tobago. What they said is that their environmental policy will be further guided by respect of the community of life keeping within the country's carrying capacity, empowering communities to care for their own environment, the polluters pay principle and the precautionary principle.

So, Madam President, they keep saying that they are going to do something about the environment but they are promises that are never fulfiled really, and when we look at—

Sen. Dr. Saith: Senator, please? I know you are new here but I think the policy was laid before you came in Parliament. The Environmental Policy is now laid in Parliament.

Sen. R. Phillip: But, Madam President, the point is that their systems of pollution control should be enforced with permits and licences, and they are really supposed to set pollution limits and performance standards for air, noise, water, waste and hazardous substances, and to some extent it is implemented, I know, by the EMA.

In making those budgetary promises—and I am just reading it as taken from the budget report—based on that, we realize that when we talk about the environment, there are really four pieces of legislation—there are other types of related legislation, but four pieces of legislation—that really, is at the forefront, when we talk about this Green Fund, is the Forest Act, and this Forest Act talks about the regulation of the exploitation of timber and non-wood forest products from the state land. I would like this Green Fund to really be catering to that kind of amelioration to the forest and the systematic degradation of the forest, in terms of once you are going to harvest the forest. Because in our Northern Range, we have a mora excelsa benth, which is the most abundant tree species in Trinidad and Tobago, and the mora as a hard wood has been used by the railway industry as slippers on the railway lines and so on.

They are excellent for making furniture, houses, panels and so on, and even in the older days they used them for roofing. To some extent we have imported a lot of foreign white pines and lumber that is not conducive to our environment so in a

few years they become water soaked and they become termite infested and so on. We need to look at this Forest Act and really ensure that our environment does sustain this kind of activity.

6.30 p.m.

Also, when we look at the Conservation of Wildlife Act, this money from the Green Fund should be used for the protection and the conservation of the fauna, that is, mammals, birds and reptiles. The conservation of wildlife is really geared towards issuing permits and stating the hunting seasons, the gaming sanctuaries and so on, but we could use these things if developed properly to allow us to be revenue generating in that small community groups could be developed in a systematic way, registered and licensed so there could be guide tours; they could work as environmental groups for protecting and replanting of the forests from grants given to these groups from the Green Fund. So, there are several ways in which we could ensure that this Green Fund is really operationalized.

Madam President, quickly, I just want to state, similarly we are living on an island and so the Fisheries Act governing the fishing industries really talks about the size of the catch, the types of nets and other implements that are used for fishing, that we could really educate our people and so on. In Tobago, there is a thriving fishing industry and to a large extent the people depend on that kind of industry. They would be able to have conservation mechanisms in place and we would not destroy certain areas like the Buccoo Reef and so on from an excessive amount of tourism.

Relating to the Green Fund, I know that the EMA deals with coordinating approaches of the environment to ensure that there are policies in place, programmes and then develop legislation, and as I mentioned before, the noise levels and so on. But, what we need to have, is to establish a better system that allows the distribution now of these moneys to the rural communities and the communities where in the natural setting, there are the flora and fauna that the people need to protect and live in harmony with. Based on that, I want to recommend that this committee actually develop regulations and procedures to ensure that this taxation that we take from the corporations that are really extracting our oil and gas really reach to the people to develop the communities that they are in.

Madam President, what has happened around the world really, is that there has been a kind of collective and a public consciousness where any multinational corporation or any big corporations which are dealing with any issues that would

lead to some kind of degradation of the environment, there are Acts really to invest money. And so we find that in—and I am looking at the *Wall Street Journal* of June 23, 2005, where the title is "Clean Energy has Investors seeing Green" and without going much into the article, what it tells is that while we are living in a world that depends on this fossil fuel and this is a non-renewable fuel, the price of oil is about $60. It means now that we are to encourage and even energy corporations are now looking at alternative forms of energy.

So, Madam President, not only the preservation of the environment in terms of this, but to engage in other types of bio-fuels rather than people cutting down the forest as in the olden days to get firewood and so on. People should be able to conserve the forest, to live in harmony with it and to also look at alternative types of energies and this is one way in which the money could basically be used. What I am suggesting is nothing really new to the world and nothing even new to the Caribbean.

What has happened in Jamaica is that they had established a Green Fund since 1993, and they have been able to allow members of the public and community groups to look at the management and at the projects that involved the natural resource management, conservation, waste management, pollution control, energy conservation, rural energy alternatives, sources of energy, sustainable agriculture, eco-tourism, health and sanitation, community and natural tourism, species and habitat protection and also, looking at practical application of appropriate technologies that are environment friendly.

And so, Madam President, you find that other Caribbean countries, such as in Jamaica, they have been able to look at the whole policy of the Green Fund and to be able to establish mechanisms by which people could live in harmony with and be able to sustain the environment and would be able to continue life in a meaningful way that they are able to help themselves get a decent living and be able to operationalize this money. My concern really for going into such detail about the environment, I am looking at the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), Global Environment Facilities Small Grants Programme (GEFSGP) and this programme talks about strategies that countries engaged in and it deals specifically with Trinidad and Tobago. They said, at present, 80 countries participated in the Small Grants Programme (SGP) and they have been able to engage in bio-diversity programmes, climate change programmes and international waters programmes in terms of island states. This UNDP gives grants up to US $50,000, and so far the average grant is about US $20,000 and they give this grant to CBOs, NGOs and more than 6,200 grants have been awarded worldwide to date.

Madam President, what is interesting as we look at this report, they said,

> "To date, there are no national programmes and projects funded by the GEF in Trinidad and Tobago."

I want to read that back. To date, while they have granted 6,200 grants as much as US $20,000, internationally in terms of the different countries, to date, there are no national projects funded by the GEF in Trinidad and Tobago—

> "… although there have been a few enabling activities funded by the GEF under the UN Convention on the Bio-diversity (UNCBD); and the UN Framework Convention on Climatic Change (UNFCC) and the Montreal Protocol (MP) on ozone depleting substances."

Madam President, the point that I want to make is that while we talk about doing some work for the environment and ensuring that our people are able to access a future and as the Minister had said, the country's natural resources would be enjoyed by many generations to come, I simply want to ask—how? How are they going to enjoy this national resource if we do not utilize it properly; we do not educate our people to ensure that they are able to live in harmony with society and they are unable to really etch a life and to live a life basically in sync with the environment. Because of that, you have a Government who is part and parcel of these programmes and we do not access any grants for our people; we do not allow our people to be educated in such a way; and even when we do tax our corporations, since 2000/2007 we are now coming just to establish a committee.

So, it is clear that while coming back to this Bill, this Bill talks about being a money Bill, in terms of the collection of revenues. Clearly, it deals heavily with pensions and the provisions for people, but slipping in inside of here was the provision for the Green Fund and I hold Trinidad and Tobago very dear to me. I would like us to make sure that we have very enjoyable natural parks and we have generations to come as the Minister said to be able to benefit from our flora and fauna, but that would only come if we structure programmes in place to take care of the environment.

With that, Madam President, I thank you. [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. Prof. Kenneth Ramchand: Thank you, Madam President. I just have a few points. I had not intended to speak on this Bill because it is doing something that we had already decided in the budget, but certain matters have come up and I thought that I would take the opportunity. The first thing I want to refer to is

pensions. There are about 10 different pensions dealt with in the Bill and all I want to say is that it seems to me that there is an oversight which the Minister might want to consider for the future. We have grown accustomed to this oversight so that we do not often remark on it. We have not adjusted the pensions of those who retired at a time when salaries were not as inflated as they are today. At the time when they retired the pension was a reasonable pension in relation to what they had been earning and to the cost of living, but they are stuck at that level and I feel that something ought to be done about that.

The other matter that I would like to draw to the attention of the Minister in relation to pensions and I do not know how he would do it, is that it just seems to me a little bit unfair that if a person works his full working life, suffers all the statutory deductions, contributes to a pension fund and then when he retires he gets a pension, unless it is a huge pension, it just seems to me a little bit unfair that he should have to pay income tax on that. I would not be dissuaded from this point of view by the argument that he has a $60,000 allowance, I feel that some fraction or some part of the pension perhaps could be tax free. It may not be the whole thing, but a part, if it exceeds $5,000 per month or if it exceeds whatever sum seems appropriate, I feel it is something that we need to think about.

Madam President, the next item that I want to say something about, 11(5) was drawn to my attention by Sen. Mark. Clause 11(5) with reference to the grant for senior citizens, says that:

> "A grant under this Act is subject to review and may be increased, decreased or discontinued."

Well, I thought about it and when I heard Sen. Seetahal SC speak about it, raising questions, I have the same questions. I want to know if this provision is necessary. What is its purpose? From my position, looking at it with all the facts that the Minister may have, I would say that it is not necessary and could easily be removed. It would take away some of the fears that people have. Whether those fears are historical or not, just get rid of it. But I want to look at Sen. Mark's argument about pension versus grant, I must argue for the retention of the word "pension". I prefer "pension" to "grant".

At the time when my mother became due for a pension, and we tried to persuade her from applying for it, she said she was not going to do so because all kinds of people would come to her house and ask her all kinds of questions. After she answers all those kinds of questions and they agreed to give her the pension,

when she goes to the Warden's Office, the person in the Warden's Office would treat her as if she were a beggar, because she sees it when pensioners go to the Warden's Office, the clerks there treat them badly. I said to her—I remember it now because of Sen. Mark's discourse—and I now understand what I was saying to her at the time—"No, you worked harder than your husband; you brought up your children; you have done a lot of unremunerated work, but you have served the country and you have earned a pension. To me a pension implies that you have earned it. [*Desk thumping*] And so I tend to hold and especially with respect to people who have done unremunerated work all their lives, they have played a part in building the country and they must not be made to feel that they are the objects of charity or a grant. So, I would support a return to the word "pension" instead of "grant". [*Desk thumping*]

The third matter is a little quarrel I have been having with the Minister for years—I am referring to clause 17, new section 10(k). When this was first brought in, I said to him that a publishing company which produces books with local content and deals with local culture should come under this provision and he did say to me that he would think about it and if an application was made, he would consider it, but I think that is not good enough. I feel that it should be embedded in this, publishing houses as well as production companies. Is there a bias towards production companies as against publishing houses? Is there a bias against the book? I think it would be a long time before we get to the point where the book ceases to be a major instrument in education and in the dissemination and exploration of culture. Therefore, I would like to appeal to the Minister in the next budget to amend 10k to include "publishing houses."

The last point is, of course, in relation to the Gambling and Betting Act. I cannot resist the amendment to the Gambling and Betting Act. The first thing to make clear is that this is not an amendment against all gambling and I cannot argue against it as "gambling" because it is not an amendment against all gambling. We are allowed to bet on horses, Lotto, Play Whe, stock exchange, nobody is stopping us, these have not been targeted—[*Interruption*]

Sen. Dr. Saith: Roulette.

Sen. Prof. K. Ramchand: Roulette—and may be legal, so this is not an amendment against all gambling. Therefore, it lends a certain credence to the view that has been expressed, which is that the amendment is targeting members' clubs. If somebody would like to explain what it is targeting, I would be very happy to—[*Interruption*]

Sen. Dr. Saith: Slot machines.

Sen. Prof. K. Ramchand: Slot machines, which are the staples of the member's clubs, I do not know. Slot machines are not bad in themselves. The machine did not do anybody anything, it is what people do with the machine. So, what we have to do is to ask what harm is done when you have a slot machine in a club? And when you ask what harm it does, the rational thing to try and work out is what can we do to reduce the harm? If something is wrong with my right hand, I would only cut it out after I have explored all possibilities of curing it.

So, before we say get rid of the slot machines, let us see if the harm that they are doing—you see, the Senator is very clever, there I was being super clever and making my pun about these one-armed bandits and he starts to unravel it, but leave it there—but ask what harm, and if we find out the harm, maybe we can do things to stop it from being harmful.

But more positively, what functions are served by those places that have the slot machines? We had a very moving argument about the displacement of people; the loss of employment; the loss of the opportunity to gain a sense of self-worth that people are given by these members' clubs. It is only late in my life that I have really come to understand and be sympathetic to what we call the service industries. I am generally opposed to what happens in tourism because people who work in hotels are being reduced to being glorified servants—that is my politics.

But when I think about it, the person is being given an opportunity to do something for a wage and although ideally, I do not like the circumstances in which I am placing them, yet they get a sense of well-being and a sense of worth and they do not think about doing other desperate things. They do this work and from inside of themselves they ennoble the work. Although the work could demean them and some of their encounters with people and make them feel that they are nothing, still if they focus on it and lock in on it and decide I am going to do this job to the best of my ability, with an exercise of my capacities, then it is something that you have to think hard about before you remove such opportunities.

If the Government wants to create a situation where people who are employed in this industry are going to lose the opportunity of employment or for getting a better sense of themselves, if you are going to do that, you first have to put alternatives in place, and you have to have a net waiting. Come here and work, we have a job for you that you could find just as fulfilling.

Now, I have to say that I agree with a clause that has been criticized—I do not "have to say" it because that would be grudging. I have to say it because I feel the Senate ought to be much clearer about it. When I read the Bill and I saw 5(2), 5(2) jumped out at me. It happens to be highlighted and it says,

> "This section comes into force on a date to be fixed by the President, by proclamation."

I said, "What, the Government is ferocious, boy, they intend to"—Then I said, no, no, no, it is just a bit of bad writing. What they mean is, this section shall only come into force on a date to be fixed by the President, by proclamation. So, I inserted the "only" because looking around at the other provision in the Bill, this condition was not stated anywhere else, and so, the people who were preparing this were giving us an assurance that they were not going to proclaim this tomorrow. At least that is my interpretation and that is my hope.

We do not caucus on this side, so when I heard Sen. Dr. Mc Kenzie read it in that way, well, I prefer to be wrong with Sen. Dr. Mc Kenzie than be right by myself. So, I think that she is right, that this clause is telling us that and if it is not telling us, we can at least force the Government to believe it is saying that they are prepared to hold their hands and wait and see what would be the consequences of carrying out this piece of legislation.

So, I thank Sen. Gibbs-Nicholas, for her contribution. If she is accurate and I believe that she is, Sen. Seetahal SC has also pointed it out, the Government is in a self-contradicting position with respect to gambling. On the one hand, we have the legislation against slot machines and as it has been pointed out, on the other hand, the Government is signing a new contract with GTECH. On one side of the mouth, slot machines are illegal; the other side of the mouth, the tax on slot machines is increasing. So there is a contradiction there and I think it is not a contradiction only for the Government, it seems to me that we all have a kind of ambivalence about gambling.

I have been to casinos and on one celebrated occasion I went to a members' club and I signed up as Basdeo Ramesh [*Laughter*]. The man at the front knew I was not Basdeo Ramesh—he told me I have to sign my name if I want to be a member, so I signed Basdeo Ramesh. He looked at me; he let me in and I went in there and I had a good time. I had my $200 and I said if I lose that, I am done and if I win back my $200, I am putting $200 back in my pocket, and when I lose the change, I done too. So I am not winning and I am not losing when I leave. I went there, very pleasant girls came serving coffee, bad quality whisky, but the

atmosphere was very pleasant, nobody was fighting. I saw respectable people there doing their thing and "Boy, you are a gambler", that is what I told myself afterwards, "Look at you, you are in a casino; in a big casino. Write and tell your children, let them know that you are with it." So I could—

Madam President: What happened to the $200?

Sen. Dr. Saith: What happened to the $200?

Sen. Prof. K. Ramchand: I did not lose. [*Laughter*] I won something quite early and I went in and cashed my $200 and put it back in my pocket and when I lost out the rest, I stayed there, just looking on. I had a good time. I am a spectator of many sports, you know.

Sen. Dr. Saith: If everybody was like you, they would have to close down. [*Laughter*]

Sen. Prof. K. Ramchand: I know, well employ me to close them down. After all, if everybody is like that we better close down. And when the Lotto goes up to $7 million or so, you will see me rushing out to buy my ticket. So although I know how bad gambling can be—and of course, I am waiting for the draw really hoping that I would win. When they are calling the numbers I feel that I would get through this time. I could imagine the kind of pleasure and excitement that people feel about it. On the other hand I know how dangerous it is. I think that because we have not really thought this thing out, if the Government wants to have any kind of legislation about gambling and I agree with Sen. Dumas, there cannot be a free for all. Government has a responsibility to regulate individual behaviour in a society for the benefit of other Members of the society and for the benefit of the individuals themselves. But what has to be done, has to be done with consensus.

7.00 p.m.

If the Government wants to bring in any kind of legislation for gambling, then we have to have a full debate about it in the Parliament and in the country at large.

The Government might very well want to decide that there is a right or responsibility to legislate in some way. I would hope that the result of the discussion would be that we would come up with regulations that we all agree with and we would have satisfied everybody's feelings that, "I have a choice". We have not abolished the choice; we have not banned it and said, "Do not gamble." As Sen. Dr. Mc Kenzie said, you cannot ban anything. Whatever you say do not do in the

open, people are going to do in the dark. You cannot ban it. [*Laughter*] Nothing can be banned; people find ways of doing; so forget a complete ban. We know that the civilized way is proper and enforceable regulation.

I wanted to have my usual bash at GTECH. I do not understand why after all these years, we have to allow GTECH to skim off so much of the profits of our Lotto, and we do not have persons here who can run the machines. After all these years we have to outsource persons to run Lotto? Many of these corporations that we do not like to be here really try to win our hearts by being good corporate citizens; perhaps persons have benefited from GTECH.

The point I am going to make about gambling and Lotto just struck me. When the debate about having the lottery first took place, a lot of people objected that the Government was going to sanctify gambling. The argument that was most impressive and the one that helped the thing through, was that a portion of the take would be dedicated every time to certain designated projects. We say, "We are going to build a nice school in Icacos, so this week's Lotto money is going to that, the Government's 30 per cent is going to that." So that when I buy my lottery ticket, you almost ennoble the act, because if I lose, I still win; I have made a contribution to something the country needs. If I win, I win and the country wins. I get a little something and the country gets something.

I believe that if we are going to think about gambling and if we are a rational State, not a State gripped by any kind of extremism or fundamentalism, we can turn, whatever we are trying to regulate to some kind of good for the country. That old argument about the lottery seems to be one of the ways to go in terms of dealing with the whole question of gambling.

Madam President, with that, I thank you.

Sen. Dr. Jennifer Kernahan: Madam President, thank you for the opportunity to make a small contribution on this Finance Bill, 2007.

First of all, I would like to congratulate my sister, Sen. Cindy Gibbs-Nicholas, for her outspoken and powerful defence of the livelihood and welfare of thousands of young women in the East-West Corridor, some of the most depressed areas in the country, where, contrary to popular belief, not everyone wants to stand by the side of the road in a URP or CEPEP programme and hold up a net so that stones will not hit passing windscreens. Not everyone wants their children going to school to see their mothers at the side of the road.

Contrary to popular belief, women in the East-West Corridor have a sense of dignity, have a sense of self and they want to know that they can be engaged in work; that they can dress nicely and work in a nice atmosphere, that they can work for decent money to support themselves and their families. These are some of the issues that would have to be looked at in the context of Sen. Gibbs-Nicolas' contribution.

One of the things I took umbrage to really, in that context too, was Sen. Dumas' implication that Sen. Gibbs-Nicholas had a script. I do not know if it was a Freudian slip, but that was not just his thinking; that is the thinking of this Government, that the people are not intelligent enough to understand and articulate the issues; that people are not intelligent enough to understand their own self-interests; that they are not capable of self-determination, of understanding where they want to go and to understand serious developmental processes. This Government has a sense that you always have to talk down, to impose without consultation. This is the essence of what is happening here.

I believe Sen. Prof. Ramchand made the point that anything you do, must be done with a sense of consultation, a sense of applying to the people; you find out what they think and how it would affect them; that interaction must be there. Sen. Gibbs-Nicholas also made reference to the Bagatelle situation. It is the same thing: you impose; you run there; you brutalize; you impose your will, because you have the power. As we have said on this side so many times, that is an abuse of power. That has nothing to do with governance. It is an abuse of power, plain and simple, unless you consult, talk to people and understand the issues.

A lot of you are cushioned from the realities of life; cushioned by your thousands of dollars income; cushioned by your cars and by your air-condition as you drive on the Bus Route. You become very isolated from reality in the society. Who drives on the highways to feel the reality? Who feels the reality of that young man in Bagatelle who sits on a bed in the open cold and contemplates what will be next in his life. That is why when my sister, Sen. Gibbs-Nicholas, began to cry and she became very emotional, one of the Ministers on the other side said, "We are not affected by that; I am not taking that on." Can you imagine that heartlessness? It is because they have been isolated by all their wealth, pomp and power.

Sen. Kangaloo could talk from now until the cows come home, it does not affect the price of corn, because we have it here in black and white, in clause 11(5) where it says.

> "A grant under this Act is subject to review and may be increased, decreased or discontinued."

This is going to become law. This is not just "ol' talk". I remember earlier on when Senators on this side made the observation that we were concerned about that fact that the change of name from a pension to a grant signified the fact that it was discretionary; it could be discontinued or reduced. Sen. Dr. Saith said, "We have no intention of doing this, that and the other." We know what the intentions of this Government are and what they lead to. There is a saying that the road to hell is paved with good intentions. [*Interruption*]

Sen. Dr. Saith: Senator, since you raised it. I reaffirm my statement, but tell me, whether it is called a grant or a pension, if right now under the Act the Government does not have the right to increase, decrease or abolish and even when it was not in the law, as shown during the NAR days, you could bring legislation to cut people's salary, which they did? So why do you assume that because something is there that is the intention of the Government?

Sen. Dr. J. Kernahan: Madam President, my contribution is based on the whole thinking of social pensions; I will come to that in a while.

This Government is saying to us that they have the power to increase, decrease or abolish pensions. Pensions are socially accepted mechanisms to secure the livelihood, health and well-being of persons in this society. They said that they are able to do so at any point in time. I am glad they have said that tonight to the national community, that they have the power and they can exercise it at will.

Why not leave it as a pension and whenever you want to abolish it, come to the Parliament and abolish it? Do what you have to do. Do not sneak it in; bring it as a grant and then say that you could always abolish that. It sounds worse to come to the Parliament and say you are going to abolish old age pension than a grant. You can always tell the population that it is a grant, a discretionary form of transference of income, therefore, we can do this. This is psychological warfare; it is a mind game. We understand the mind game. I am glad that the Minister said just now that they could abolish old age pension at any time, because now the people of Trinidad and Tobago know where they are coming from.

I was actually dealing with Sen. Kangaloo. Everything she said, all the funds and the benefits that she referred to does not negate the fact that it is now law, according to the gospel of the PNM; that this is a discretionary transfer they will decrease or abolish at any time. That is why Sen. Mark went to the genesis of this shift in Government policy. He showed us that Government was signalling its intention to divest itself from any social responsibility to older persons and, by extension, whole communities.

We want to let this Government know that protection against poverty in old age is included in the United Nations (UN) Declaration on Human Rights and other international agreements to which all member states are committed. That is why it was so interesting, that Minister Dr. Saith should get up and say that they could abolish old age pension at any time. [*Interruption*]

Sen. Dr. Saith: I did not say you could abolish it at any time. The Act allows you to increase, modify or abolish it; that is the law. Why would we increase pension to abolish it?

Sen. Dr. J. Kernahan: I am glad he mentioned increasing pension. I would like to remind the Minister that under the previous administration, I remember when the UNC took pension to $700, we took it from about $300. For years old age pensioners were getting about $300; they were totally ignored in society and we took it to $700. In subsequent budgets it went up $1,000, then $1,200; but we met it at $300.

Half of the developing countries have identified an ageing population as a major concern. We know the facts; as men and women in society age, they face spiraling debt, hunger, isolation, loneliness destitution and so on. In Trinidad and Tobago specifically, older persons have been facing, over the last four or five years, astronomical increases in the prices of basic foodstuffs. The recognition that poverty in terms of the incomes of persons at that age, is a fact of life, therefore, it is not just the poverty of old age pensioners. As many studies have shown, old age pensioners are, in fact, the heads of many households.

In a document that I would refer to later on, called *Policies and Programmes for Older Persons in Trinidad and Tobago, 2002*, it has been shown that 91 per cent of older persons head the households in which they live. [*Interruption*] This is your document, 2002; it could be more now. This was five years ago. We could understand the implications for that. They are saying that whole families are affected: younger persons and dependants are affected by the pensions. Their livelihoods and their standard of living are affected by pensions.

It has been a tradition in our societies that grandmothers are the ones who carry the children and grandchildren, who contribute their pensions to the household funds for food and so on. In African countries you find that persons who receive old age pension have to carry the brunt of orphans whose parents are dying from HIV/AIDS. We are going to see that trend here too, because a lot of young people are dying from HIV/AIDS epidemic, therefore, it is the grandmothers who have to carry the burden of supporting these families.

The nutritional status of young children is dependent on grandmothers and older persons. Whole local economies in the little villages and districts are dependent on incomes that older persons get. The little village shop and the groceries where they go to change their cheques benefit from the incomes that older persons get. The service providers in the communities like the young girl who would come in to help an old lady take care of herself, to provide a meal and so on, are all persons who benefit from the income from old age pension. So old age pension has a whole train of events and persons who benefit from the income.

Old age pension also has a developmental aspect, because a lot of times grandparents have to send their grandchildren to pre-school and, therefore, the future earning power and development of children are dependent on these things. It is a very serious issue when we have before us an amendment which says that old age pension is no longer considered a right, but a grant and it can be abolished or decreased.

I just want to look at what this Government is doing in this particular Bill before us, in the context of other countries that have much less resources, how they are dealing with these situations. In the UN Declaration of Human Rights, the concerns and social impact on older persons is considered crucial and integral to human rights.

I am going to quote from a document before me. A lot of the information that I am going to quote has come from this document. It is called *Age and Security*, *How social pensions can develop effective aid to poor older people and their families*, by HelpAge International. It was said in this document that even resource poor governments running pension schemes in countries such a Bolivia, Nepal and South Africa attach great importance to them. South Africa has called the means tested pension for over 60-year-olds, a core poverty reduction measure.

Sen. Dr. Saith: How could you call it a pension if it is means tested?

Sen. Dr. J. Kernahan: There are other countries where it is not even means tested, countries that do not even have the resources that we do. It says:

> "Evidence from existing pension schemes and research by a range of agencies, including the World Bank, the International Labour Organization (ILO), the UK Department for International Development and HelpAge International, demonstrate the benefits of social pensions as part of a package of social protection measures for all ages."

They did not just say for older persons; they said for all ages. The income to older persons impacts on the lives of a whole range of other people; the families, villages and wider society.

I want to bring some examples. Look at the developing countries providing social pension; they are not saying that it could be grant or that they could discontinue it at any time. They see it as a core part of their poverty reduction programme. This Government pays a lot of lip service to poverty reduction and they come here this afternoon with an amendment that is very threatening to poverty reduction.

> "Africa: Botswana, Mauritius, Namibia, Senegal and South Africa operate large-scale social pension systems."

In South Africa and Senegal, it is means tested, similar to here. In Botswana, Mauritius and Namibia it is universal, that means everybody over a certain age is entitled to old age pension. Look at the kind of countries we are talking about; they do not even have one-tenth of the kinds of resources that we have. Mozambique has a cash transfer system targeting households headed by older, chronically sick or disabled persons.

Sen. Dr. Saith: We have that as well.

Sen. Dr. J. Kernahan: In Antigua and Bolivia you have universal old age pensions. Just recently Antigua introduced a very substantial pension benefit for their people. Nepal is a country that also has universal social pension benefits. It is a question of political will; it is a question of how you look at poverty reduction, how you look at older people, how you value and understand the social implications of that income to older persons, how it impacts on their families and the societies.

This document, *Age and Security* says:

> "Regular income support to the older poor can be considered as a core element of the global commitment to reduce poverty, in line with international development and human rights targets."

It is not a question of it being discretionary and you can do what you want with it at any point in time. Michael Barr of the London School of Economics said that macro stability is important; social protection is important. A budget that is so stringent that it does not allow social protection is self-defeating.

We understand that the measures outlined in this Bill with respect to old age pension have nothing to do with improving the living conditions of our people, as asserted by Sen. Enill in his introduction. With regard to old age pension and the impact it would have on the thousands of young persons in the service industries, have even less to do with moving this country in the right direction, as asserted by

Sen. Enill in his introduction. Clearly it has very much to do with a blatant attack on the income, security and welfare of thousands of citizens, especially the young people.

My sister and colleague, Sen. Gibbs-Nicholas, made reference to different case studies of young people who are on their own, single mothers who have to face the reality that in the morning, at any time, this Government with a stroke of a pen can put them out of work and their livelihood. There is this so-called comfort that, "We will retrain and restructure and allow you to access comparable jobs", but we know the history of this Government. People have seen the history of this Government, and there has been no such retraining for comparable levels of income employment.

If this Government had paid serious attention to development of the agricultural sectors and agri-sectors, there would be jobs in the service industries around those sectors being able to absorb a lot of young people who would be able to enter very technically advanced jobs, like supervisors or inspectors. If they were to establish the national programme for sanitary and phyto-sanitary inspection, those are high level technical jobs that you have to study for, go through them and can earn decent remuneration.

There are a lot of institutions which have been ignored in terms of the agricultural sector. Where are the good, high level paying jobs going to come from, especially in districts of the East-West Corridor? What is the Government's policy with respect to developing high level paying jobs? The only jobs they have developed in the last few years have been largely in construction, based on Government spending, and in the service industries. Of course, all these young people are not comforted by any airy-fairy plans for jobs that are of a similar remuneration. Therefore, they know exactly that they are going to be left out in the wind; they are going to be left in these communities already reeling under the impact of high crime, lack of social infrastructure, lack of opportunities; their communities are going to degenerate.

Internationally, you have this dialogue about the cost of social development programmes. We have an ageing population here. In the relationship between the working population and the ageing population, things are weighing more heavily on the side of the ageing population. Therefore we have to look at the question of funding these social programmes in the long run, in a sustainable manner. That is a valid concern, but what do you do?

It is even more untenable that the non-oil sector of the economy is not being developed to provide jobs so more people can enter the work force and pay taxes to support these pension schemes that are a social right of older persons and their

families. It was contradictory when the Minister in his introduction made the point that oil and gas were still the major driving forces of this economy. He did not deny it, and that is the root of the problem.

Every Senator on this side and on the Independent Benches have been making the exact point, that we have not moved forward in the last 30 years in relation to the structural adjustment of our economy to allow for more non-oil jobs and the development of the non-oil sector. That is why they are so afraid now and they are talking about grants, because they understand that because of their mismanagement of the economy, very soon the whole system of social welfare and social pensions will become very ticklish, because they would not have the work to sustain that system in terms of providing the taxes necessary to sustain the older population. They are panicking. Their inefficiency had made them panic.

Do you know who they would take it out on? We the poor, the vulnerable, the underdog. They will jump up here and say, "Is not your right to access these funds; we can take it any time we want"; that would be their attitude in direct opposition to everything they sat and agreed to in the international community.

It has been shown that the ballpark figure for the funds necessary to fund social pensions in the underdeveloped countries is between 1 and 2 per cent of the gross domestic product (GDP). In Namibia, the social pension funds cost 2 per cent of GDP; in South Africa, 1.4 per cent; Mozambique, 1.4 per cent. Given the figures we have here, we are in the region of .8 per cent, the cost of the social pensions in relation to GDP, so why are you talking about the possibility of changing it to a grant and discontinuing the grant? Because we can well afford it! We have enough resources to allow our older people a decent standard of living.

As we have said on this side, we would index that to the cost of living, so their cost of living is not eroded, as this Government mismanages the economy and inflation jumps into double digits and the cost of food goes up year end by 20 and 25 per cent every year. The UNC is committed to the health and livelihood of our older persons and the families they support, because in Trinidad and Tobago, as their documents showed, 91 per cent of older persons head the households in which they live. That is an extremely high figure.

You are talking about 5 per cent unemployment, in these depressed communities, as we know and you have the statistics, they may quote the national figure, but we know that it is understated. In the depressed communities, if you do the math, you know that it is between 20 and 30 per cent unemployment. So the national figure that you quote so blithely has nothing to do with the reality of 20

and 30 per cent unemployment, in the same constituencies in which you want to discontinue old age pension at your whim and fancy and that you want to take away the jobs of thousands of young persons at the stroke of a pen, because you personally have an aversion to the slot machines.

It has been said ad nauseam this afternoon that this Government must be consistent; their problem is a lack of consistency. If you say that you have a problem and you want to look at how gambling affects families and so forth, it cannot be just one aspect of gambling, you have to look at the whole gamut. You cannot advertise Lotto and Play Whe and inculcate the mentality of gambling in young people, and when they grow up into the whole gambling aspect, you tell them, "You see, no slot machines; that aspect of gambling is wrong." Any five-year-old would ask you why. Why is Lotto good; why is Cash Pot good; why is Donsai good and slot machines bad? You have to be consistent for you to be credible. You have a credibility problem because of your lack of consistency.

I totally agree with Sen. Prof. Ramchand, that if you want to open these discussions it must be done with consensus and openness; you must discuss with the people; you must lay your views on the table; we must be able to lay our views on the table; you must go nationally and talk to the people. At the end of the day, the workers who are involved in this industry must be assured that you are going to open up new channels of employment generation that would take them to a high level of income earning capacity, training and career path development. This is what people want.

What career path development you have standing by the side of the road holding up a net so that stones would not touch a car? How far can you go with that? What is the promotion, if you get to hold the right side or the left side? Is that the career path development involved there, that somebody would stand and say how to hold it, "Twist it so, and twist it so?" [*Crosstalk*] There is no advancement for women at the side of the road with CEPEP; there is no career.

I am sure you would have heard my sister Senator speak about women in these industries who advanced themselves. They started off at the lowest levels, they are trained and then they advanced themselves. This is what people want; they want to work to advance themselves and to see some progress in their lives; from point A to point B. You start off at one point and at the end of 10 years you can say, "I have achieved this; I have risen to this level; I have been able to save; I have been able to send my children to school."

What makes you feel that women in the East-West Corridor do not have these dreams of sending their children to university, being able to approach a bank or being able to get loans? You are not going to get it in CEPEP, URP, HYPE and MuST. [*Crosstalk*]

Hon. Senators: Why not?

Sen. Dr. J. Kernahan: You must have a job letter. Madam President, in the bank the requirements for a loan are that you must have a job letter; you must be in a job for over a year and you must be permanently employed. Which of those programmes can you go to the bank and say, "I am permanently employed and I want a loan to send my child to university?" Their job is to keep the people of the East-West Corridor under dependency and civility, and anytime you raise your head to be independent and do something that will carry you and your family forward, they want to shut you down, because they want you in CEPEP so they can ask you to do whatever they need to do in terms of the politics. [*Crosstalk*]

I want to give you the statistics on Antigua, just to wind up. I just want to show you what a small Caribbean country is doing in terms of social security and income for its people. They introduced a universal old age pension in 2005; it is EC $750, which is US $281 to all persons over 60 years. They intended to increase it to EC $900, US $337 in January 2005. The plan was to increase it in January 2006 to $1,000 or US $375. This is a universal social pension. [*Desk thumping*] But we come here in 2007 with a $43 billion budget, including what we have just voted, and we tell the older people, "You know what, you see dis ting that you call pension that you feel a sense of entitlement to; it is not no entitlement; we will give you a grant which we can discontinue."

They put it in black and white; they are so bold face. They are making it law. So the whole world moving forward understanding the importance of these social pensions in poverty reduction, in reducing hunger, in getting people access to health care, understanding the impact on village economics, but our advanced Government is telling people, "You do not have any entitlement to anything; we will give you what we feel to give you, when we feel to give you and if we feel to give you, and we will take it away whenever we feel like." [*Crosstalk*] They are telling us also, "Doh feel that because it name pension we cyar take it away; we could take that away too; so you eh have no security with us, anyway yuh take it, whether is pension, whether is grant, whatever we call it; we will take it when we want it."

This is what they are telling the people of Trinidad and Tobago, that we should not have a sense of entitlement, that we are to live and die at their whims and fancies. I hope that the people of this country are listening very attentively and understand what this Government is doing and understand its mentality. I hope they understood today the disrespect meted to our sister here, when she was told that she read from a script; that they had to write it for her, because she did not understand what was going on in her own life, in her own economic situation. Those thousands of young women do not understand what is happening to them, so somebody has to script something for them to read it here, because they are dumb, foolish and ignorant. This is the mentality of the PNM Government towards the people of this country, my brothers and sisters. [*Crosstalk*]

These amendments this afternoon are really a two-pronged attack on the working population. The first prong of attack was against the thousands of young people who have a dignified form of employment, a career path, who can look forward to promotion and rise in their income earning capacity. The second prong of attack was against the aged persons and their families who have worked so hard in this country and have contributed, and they came to tell them whether it is a grant, pension or whatever, "We taking it from you anytime we feel like it." A two-pronged attack waged against the people of Trinidad and Tobago this afternoon by this Government. [*Desk thumping*]

When we forget sometimes, they come back and remind us, "It is the law and we can do it anytime we want; there is no sense of entitlement, we will give you what we want and if we want." Madam President, I lay my case before the people of Trinidad and Tobago. They can judge for themselves whether they want this Government to continue after 2007.

Thank you.

The Minister in the Ministry of Finance (Sen. The Hon. Christine Sahadeo): Madam President, before I get on to the substantive part of my contribution, seeing that so many of the Members on the other side spent so much time on pensions, my colleague in the Ministry of Finance did such an excellent job, but it appears there has been a deliberate misunderstanding in terms of pensions. In the debate on the budget, I thought I had done quite a lot of work in explaining more in terms of what pensions are all about, but some of our memories may be short. I kindly asked Sen. Mark if he would give way, seeing that he did not, I think it is important that I take some time to bring clarification to this Senate.

A lot of argument has been put forward regarding the name "grant" versus "pension"; let us clear for the record what a pension is all about. A pension is a reward for past service. If you go to the dictionary or anywhere else they will tell you that is what a pension is all about. A pension can be contributory or non-contributory. In other words, you can either contribute to a pension, in that way you have different kinds, a defined benefit or other types. In other situations, as it is presently, it is a non-contributory pension. In therefore redefining the pension and stating that it is a Senior Citizens' Grant, is really to bring clarification in terms of what this payment is all about. I hope I have set the record clear. There is certainly no hidden agenda in calling it a Senior Citizens' Grant.

Do you not think the name is a bit more appealing? We are all going to get there some time along the way. Some will take a bit longer than others, Sen. Dr. Gopeesingh, but we certainly will all get there. [*Laughter*]

Beyond the name I also want to add that in a lot of the debate Sen. Mark went on and on about our trying to affect so many people. He talked about different pensions, that there was a Pensions Act and, therefore, we should not have brought it in the Finance Bill this evening. I thought that Sen. Enill was most eloquent and clear when he made his introduction, in stating the reason he introduced all those pensioners in the government service was really in cases where there were anomalies, where some of these pensioners may have been getting less than $1,150. He said that, in fact, they were all pulled up to $1,150.

I heard grumblings and rumblings on the other side; no one took time to congratulate us in recognizing that loophole was now being addressed. At least, in the first instance, we heard the statement, and we had been looking into it: What must we do for Government pensioners? If you recall we have in the past addressed this issue only in the 2005 budget. I just wanted to bring some clarity regarding that fact.

We recognize and you would have also heard that pension reform is certainly on our agenda. Like all other countries, non-contributory pension is a thing of the past. We have countries like America that are now complaining of the extreme high cost and they fully recognize that they must introduce measures where there is what is called a "contributory pension". We have a situation where there is a high level of job mobility. We are now looking at portability of pensions. This Government is taking a holistic view in terms of pension reform. Therefore, in introducing the measures in this Bill and in the last budget, I would have thought that it was very, very clear where this Government is moving in terms of pension reform.

My colleague also indicated that in introducing a new income ceiling of $2,150, we have now introduced over 20,000 new pensioners, new individuals into the net. [*Desk thumping*] I will repeat it; I want to make sure those on the other side hear it today. [*Interruption*] I am glad to see you Sen. Mark; I hope you will have a seat.

Sen. Mark: "Yuh giving them now and taking it back later."

Sen. The Hon. C. Sahadeo: By introducing this qualifying income ceiling of $2,150, approximately 20,000 new individuals are, in fact, going to receive the Senior Citizens' Grant. [*Desk thumping*] My colleague certainly elaborated very clearly all the other measures introduced there.

I think I congratulated and welcomed the new Senator in this House. I just thought for clarity that I must really again indicate the success of our training in the Caroni (1975) programme. Very early in the game I was assigned to Caroni. When that programme began, in order to ensure it was effective, we did a total diagnosis of the entire arrangement. I want to put on the record that the former Caroni workers, in fact, would have reaped cane for just about half of the year. It meant that many of them were actually employed in other types of jobs during the other six months of the year. Notwithstanding that, this Government undertook a comprehensive training programme. In excess of 3,200 individuals accessed training.

Sen. Mark: Jobs?

Sen. The Hon. C. Sahadeo: I am going to get there. I am happy to hear that they are listening; that is an achievement.

There would have been training programmes, agriculture, arc welding, even as much as university degrees. It was interesting to note that when we started those training programmes we had to reschedule them in order to get participation, as some of them were already on their way in terms of being employed. When we did the allocation of the residential and agricultural lands, you would be pleased to note that we started as early as 7.47 a.m. to accommodate these former workers, because many of them were now employed.

So we facilitated them to ensure that they would come, do their draw and return to their place of employment. I want to advise the hon. Senator that certainly we have a model for training and the training has worked.

Sen. Mark: What about the Caroni pension?

Sen. The Hon. C. Sahadeo: In that same breath let me say that model has worked well. The Ministry of Science, Technology and Tertiary Education (STTE) has several training programmes. As this Government does when it makes commitments, we honour them. I really want to assure the Senator, I know for a fact that the Deputy Permanent Secretary is, in fact, working very closely on developing the training programme and meeting with the sector to ensure there is a smooth transition. So you are pretty new here and certainly I want to reassure you and your colleagues that a training programme is being developed.

Sen. Mark: There will be no transition; you would be out of office. [*Crosstalk*]

Madam President: Please, Sen. Mark, somebody is on their feet!

Sen. Mark: Sorry, Madam President. "Licks for allyuh."

Sen. The Hon. C. Sahadeo: A lot was also said regarding honouring our commitments. In this Finance Bill we have the exemption level for stamp duty increasing from $350,000 to $450,000. [*Crosstalk*]

Madam President: Gentlemen on both sides, can I have some peace and quiet?

Sen. The Hon. C. Sahadeo: Madam President, in this Finance Bill we have seen an increase in the exemption for stamp duty, the ceiling being increased from $315,000 to $450,000. All this is what the Government is putting forward in terms of making housing more affordable.

I have to go back to our commitment to the former Caroni workers, because I said that one of the commitments was the provision of a residential plot of land to former Caroni workers. I see we have a new Senator and whoever else is visiting; let me for their benefit say that the prices of those plots are $20,000, $25,000 and $30,000. [*Desk thumping*] For those of us who are not good with math, that is $4, $5 and $6 a square foot. [*Desk thumping*]

This Government, in addition to making parity access to the former Caroni workers, we decided that we would increase the scope of that development. We have now put on the table 22,023 serviced lots. You would have seen just about three weeks ago in the newspaper the Housing Development Corporation advertising these lots of lands for the general public. [*Crosstalk*] [*Interruption*]

No, we are responding very, very clearly in terms of the comments here regarding the commitments to the former Caroni workers. In this Bill we talk about exemption in stamp duty. The fundamental point is making housing

affordable. In talking about affordable housing lots of $20,000, $25,000 and $30,000, I do not see how you can be more relevant and more transparent. [*Desk thumping*]

Seeing that we have all night, I will probably take my full time. [*Desk thumping*]

When we talk about affordability, we have not only increased the limit of the exemption, we have now looked in terms of increasing the subsidy arrangement. We also have a 2 per cent subsidized interest rate on these residential plots of land. We have taken this a step further. Regarding Government housing, we have now put in place a system where persons with an income of $8,000 or less can actually afford a house, there is up to 100 per cent financing up to $450,000 at a subsidized interest rate of 2 per cent. [*Desk thumping*]

On top of that, we have indicated that in order for them to acquire basic appliances, we have even introduced an additional $15,000 at a 2 per cent interest rate. If you were to go to one of those finance houses—I do not want to call names of companies, to take something on hire purchase—you know the price you would pay.

We have also introduced a rent-to-own programme. So when we talk about making housing affordable and we introduce measures, we do not do so for one sector of the society, we make sure it is expansive and we cover all segments of society. You call that equity; you call it transparency. That was just a little in terms of housing and where we are.

Sen. Dr. Kernahan is a former Minister of Agriculture. I listened to her intently, because I believe if you held such an important office, you should know what you are talking about. [*Crosstalk*] You should also, therefore, be able to enunciate to this Parliament, "What I delivered during my term in office." [*Crosstalk*]

Hon. Senator: Nothing!

Sen. The Hon. C. Sahadeo: Whenever you get up to speak, I believe that to have credibility you should say, "This is what I delivered." [*Crosstalk*] [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. Mark: [*Inaudible*]

Madam President: Sen. Mark, you should not shout across the floor at a Minister. Sen. Mark, that is imputing improper motives. [*Interruption*] It is not nice; I think you should withdraw it.

Sen. Mark: She is a failure! She accused our Senator!

Madam President: She said that she should talk about her tenure; what is wrong with that. [*Crosstalk*]

Sen. The Hon. C. Sahadeo: Madam President, I seek your protection again. [*Crosstalk*]

The English Language is sometimes a bit difficult. Let me restate or recall what I just said. I always like to listen to the goodly Senator; she was a former minister of government and she held a very important portfolio in agriculture. Therefore, when she rises to make a statement, I always listen to hear what contribution she has to make. [*Crosstalk*]

Madam President: Can I have some silence, please!

Sen. The Hon. C. Sahadeo: Madam President, I have to share this with you. As I walked out the corridor, Sen. Mark said, "Christine, I love you; you are a good girl, you know." I do not know why he is terrorizing me. [*Laughter*] [*Crosstalk*]

Sen. Mark: You dreaming! I would never tell you that. [*Laughter*] [*Crosstalk*]

Madam President: Sen. Mark, there is no need to deny your love for the girl; let it be. [*Laughter*] [*Crosstalk*]

Sen. Mark: I withdraw it then! She might be dreaming of it, but I never talked about it.

8.00 p.m.

Sen. The Hon. C. Sahadeo: Madam President, let his political leader deal with him. I prefer to withdraw that statement. [*Laughter*]

Let me get to the facts of the issue. I know the goodly Senator asked where we are with agriculture. I did not see much in the Bill here but I think I should respond to her because this is what a debate is all about: How do we respond to issues raised? Again, let me indicate here that one of the commitments to the former Caroni (1975) Limited workers was the assignment and lease of a two-acre plot of land. You would be pleased to note that 6,490 of the former workers who applied for these agricultural plots have, in fact, taken delivery. Delivery means physical delivery. What we did, in addition to doing the random draw, we actually went to the locations on several days and they were shown physically where the land was located. We are still in the process of completing our infrastructural

work, but by giving them physical allocation it means many of them have been able to begin their agricultural work. [*Interruption*] That is all right. It is great. I have 9,000 people who I work with very closely.

Let me get back to the Bill. I want to share a little on what we are doing with agriculture. I am proud to say that agriculture is certainly being put on the front burner, where it deserves. [*Desk thumping*] [*Crosstalk*] Some may say it is in response to inflation; some may want to say we are reactionary. Even if it were all these things, the important thing is that agriculture is being put on the front burner where it deserves to be put. [*Desk thumping*]

It is not a secret that those on the other side do not like to share good news. You know, I always find good news to be just so wonderful and I always share good news. Just recently we formed the Trinidad and Tobago Agri-processing Association. This is a non-profit organization and, therefore, one of the major functions of this entity is, in fact, to refocus from primary agriculture in terms of agri-processing. As you would appreciate, in addition to having primary production in order to give agriculture the impetus, we must look at how we go down the road.

In addition to this, I am pleased to report that a lot more has been put in place in terms of contract production and marketing service. What does this mean? It means that what we will be doing now is planning ahead. In fact, we would be looking at what is our demand and putting mechanisms in place to ensure the supply coordinates with demand. You would see an advertisement this week in the newspapers—

Madam President: Have a drink of water.

Sen. The Hon. C. Sahadeo: I just want to finish this; I am not going to be too long. TTAPA is putting an advertisement in the newspapers for contract production of paw paw, cassava and I think it was sweet potato.

What I am, in fact, saying here is that in agriculture a lot of effort is being placed in terms of support mechanisms. Only last week the Cabinet approved an arrangement between PCS Nitrogen and the Government, where we will provide land and PCS Nitrogen has undertaken, as part of its corporate social responsibility, to work with the farmers of this country and demonstrate to them new methods of technology in terms of how fertilizers should be used; in terms of green houses and shade houses.

The area of agriculture is an interesting one, certainly one of the most interesting times ahead of us. You know, when we talk about agriculture, many times we look at what is happening today. Agriculture has a time span. We must put

measures in place at this time in order to see and reap the rewards of this. Only yesterday I congratulated what we are looking at introducing, in terms of commodity associations. Yesterday it was brought to my attention that we have, what is called the Cunupia Farmers' Association. So what you now have are communities coming together in order to have a joint agricultural effort. What we are putting in place are commodity associations—community associations. These will also help in terms of measures being introduced to curb praedial larceny. That is just a small bit I wanted to add in terms of where we are in terms of agriculture.

Much was said in terms of what is going to happen. Again, I come back to Sen. Cindy Gibbs-Nicholas when she spoke about training and whether this is happening or not. Let me remind Senators here, we have full employment. What that means is, you have employers screaming for additional labour. We have a market ripe for labour. The universities are doing a detailed diagnostic in terms of where we need skills and therefore training programmes are going to be put in place in order to make available training in those areas where the jobs are required. So let me indicate that with this situation where you have full employment, there are many opportunities available and, therefore, I think that any concerns that this group of individuals may have—it will certainly go a long way.

I want to congratulate, particularly Sen. Dr. Mc Kenzie, for giving such a holistic view in terms of what should happen with this industry. The Senator has been in this Senate for quite a while and I really appreciate when she makes her comments, just so simply and eloquently. Really, I think her comment was: Let us make sure that what we should be doing here is holding the Government accountable and that we could only introduce this measure as and when the training has occurred. I think that is fair. I think she is right to insist that this is what should be done and as a Government we will deliver.

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

Sen. Brother Noble Khan: Madam President, it is not so late so I think we could stretch this a little longer. Firstly, let me express my thanks to you for allowing me to share some words on what is before us today, this matter of the Finance Bill. I would like to structure it around three major areas; one, the question of what our new acting Senator, Cindy Gibbs-Nicholas has so beautifully explained to us and passionately shared her thought with us; secondly, I would also like to touch on the Green Fund and, thirdly, on the pensions. I would start with the area of gambling, so to speak.

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

It does raise some very significant questions to my mind. It brings to bear a nation seeking to establish itself and we have heard some comments on democracy, on freedom, which are all recognized as worthy parameters and elements which we should have guiding our nation. Indeed, over the period of time since we first started as an independent nation, I think substantially we have kept within those borders. However, as far as our great traditions are concerned—and these are informed by our Constitution and also by the majority of the people that live in our country—it raises serious questions of our values. This is very important because it is based upon what our values are and these values are expressed in our way of life: our thinking firstly, our speaking, our living and whatever area of activity we pursue, even in our dying; that these values are expressed, the respect we have for our living; the respect that we have for our dead.

But freedom itself, and even democracy, could be very wide terms and as we come within the concept of living we will see that the borders of freedom and democracy are dealt with. They are hinged; they are not open-ended systems. This is where the question of values comes in. Even in this chief decision-making body in our land—or we like to think so here; at least coming to get formal approval—our decisions are guided by what our values are. I remember as a student the question of some of our values with respect to what a goal is; what an objective is; what our facts are; what our efficiency and effectiveness are supposed to be in achieving those goals and objectives, the key element of it would be the question of values and what guides these values. It does, of course, bring to bear on the question of ethics and morals and these impact on whatever we do and say; if we could give any creditability to that simple definition—but obviously not simplistic—of what a decision comprises of.

So it is within that area I would think that when we come to the way we live and what we practise—what our games are—that I will make my few comments. Obviously, a point we could start off with, I would like to posit that the bad and the good are not equal, though the abundance of the bad may please thee. The advice to that is that you should keep your duty—and that is referred particularly to men of understanding—if you are to succeed.

So this being a major input in how we go about ourselves, I would like to think in terms of the major part of my first contribution, the question of the gaming industry which is legal in our system and I think there is some attempt being made to excise part of this gaming thing. I would also like to think that this

might be an initial attempt to bring to bear on our society which is not really something we ought to be proud of, despite how much we would like to think it is. Of course, I may run up against, what has been referred to as the existentialist and the humanist, some of these new traits that are permeating the society at the moment. These are the thoughts that guide our decisions. It is against this background that I myself would think that when we look at what is before us, I view it as a step forward in dealing with something that is viewed to be undesirable.

I remember, too, as a young man, what obtained in the society, because this part of the Act that we are dealing with, the question of the slot machines, are just part of a system that permeates the society as far as gaming is concerned. Of course, we have races. This is not touched by it. But I do remember as a young person that it was legal even at that time, in a sense that there were gambling houses. You would hear places like Mansingh Club, Papit's Club, Boongcans Club, Maple Leaf, Paragon, Batalal Club, Morgan Club, Bidima Club, Gibbs Club, and what have you. These are some of the clubs where people could have gone in and could have played games—private members' clubs as they were—and got some sort of comfort, so to speak. We have seen that graduated into new areas now, in a sort of legal status being selective in certain areas, which I think this law is being made to address.

I would mention in passing, too, the question of what has been referred to as the legalizing of Whe Whe. I myself live in an area which was once called the cash bar, and they used to "buss" mark there, and you will have the turfing. It still exists. Up on the hill in Never Dirty the turf is still there. I think our goodly Senator made mention of the odds that are played: one against 36; one against 30 and you come down to one against 24, with the marker taking off six. These are just the mechanisms which I know existed in this area, and they still do. But then we had this legalizing—I think somebody made reference to 1968 where that law was brought about, where lotteries came about. I can tell you that in the days of the first management and accounting of the lotteries, it was extremely of the highest calibre, as far as book works were concerned; as far as the counting of the money was concerned. I do not know what takes place now but we hear strange stories of distribution of these moneys in certain areas. Well, I guess some of the other committees in our Senate and in the other place, may be better poised to address these questions as they arise.

With respect to what is being identified and has been directed to, what occupies my mind is that if there is going to be a change or a movement away, firstly within our minds and we are directing it, what are we going to do with the people who were very primal in having those systems in operation? I think that is critical.

We glorify the work; that persons are making a living; they are raising children; raising families, and it seems to be that it was a high point that they were thinking in terms of many of the people in this were women and they were one-parent families; were from the poor areas, so to speak, and this, in itself, appeared to be an inducement to ensure that there is some continuity in that form of existence.

I heard Minister Christine Sahadeo demonstrate that in the movement in Caroni, which was a legal industry and which has been shut down, so to speak, that there were "proper attempts" for those people who were displaced. I would like to think that the majority of these people—if you leave here tonight, or maybe on Friday or Saturday night, around 5 o'clock you could go down by the Brian Lara Square and you would know the young ladies who just left work finding their way home. You will know them by their outfit if you move around; that they are people who did an honest day's work and they are going home. Perhaps it is the nature of the work that they work at that time and at five o'clock in the morning they are now going home. These are our young people. It is a job, as they say, and some would say there is no harm or disgrace in a job. But to consign quite a bit of people, especially our young women, where, according to some of the older traditions and people like myself, would think they should be at home seeing about their children and their family. This is part of our culture. You would think that a redirection of possibly the whole economy of these people, or maybe shift areas of economic activity from this type of investment into an area which might be more—again I am bringing a value judgment here that might be more amenable to what we may call dignified.

Of course, these might be just notions, but they do exist and a substantial part of our nation follows that pattern. If anyone, no matter what their position might be in decision-making, if they do not bring to bear their decision-making qualities and their values into their decision, I think they would be deceitful and unworthy of a trust that has been placed on them. They should be guided by their values. Of course, that would be tempered by the situation in which they are. But you cannot deny that. So towards that end, this is what I share on that subject.

I would like to mention the question of the pensions, a very important part. I think the majority of this Bill dealt with that. How I understand it in my own simple way is that there has been some change in it and there is need to change

the laws to bring it up to what has been perceived as something that might be creditable, something that you should be glad for. I guess if anybody gave you anything out of the goodness of their heart, you should be thankful. And the very nature of us, if there is no gratitude in us, we are not worthy of high elevation, so to speak.

But notwithstanding that, we must think in terms of the quantum. Of course, you could be like Oliver Twist, when you say: "I want some more" and you collect a ladle. But it is a question of what is really due to you. We have heard an explanation of what "pension" is perceived to be. I do not know why they want to change the name, but it creates in my mind that the desire to change the name is to make you feel that you are getting something from somebody. We have heard the explanation earlier today by Minister Sahadeo that this is some contribution which you have made in your working life—this is how I interpret it—and this is the end of the twilight of your years; this is a sort of pay back, so to speak.

I am on old public officer and I always looked upon it as the salary that I drew was part salary and my contribution at that time did not have a monetary value—would be echoed in my pension. So technically, my pension formed part of my earnings while I worked, so make no mistake about it. My mother drew a pension. She worked for some time. She had to go out to work because she had many children. She worked for herself, so to speak, and when she reached age 65, I think it was, she received a pension; maybe about $4 or so at that time, until she passed away. She lived for quite some time and I give praise and thanks for that.

I mention her because I know that, and there are many of our people who have reached age 65 and would have contributed to our country. That is something they have done and I do not think we should have it in our minds—perhaps I am mistaken in this—that this is something we are giving you as a grant. It comes like some words that carry a certain amount of pejorative meaning. This is what I feel it is, in that sense. [*Desk thumping*]

So I think that if possible we should pay the respect that is due to it. Of course some men may say—I think our colleague, Sen. Prof. Ramchand made mention of his mother, too, when she said she did not want to go because it would look like she was taking something from somebody. Perhaps this might be the way of our older people in maintaining their independence, but it is my own feeling that when you reach to that age, you should come forward and take it with dignity and

you should be given it with dignity. You should not have to go and fill up any form and answer stupid questions—dotish questions. [*Desk thumping*] They should call you: "Miss X; Miss Y; Miss so and so, your time has come." Even on the day that it is due: "Here is your card", or what have you. [*Desk thumping*]

It should apply to everyone. I mentioned it here. I think we have put it up in our recommendation to the Minister of Finance, too, that this should be across the board. Poorer countries than ours are moving towards that. And we hope by the grace of Allah—*Sab ha na wa ta Allah*—that that would come.

I would also like to mention, that though we are thinking in terms of legally bringing it from $1,000 to $1,150, as the case may be, there are some people who have worked in our country—and I think with due respect and deference to Sen. Dr. Eastlyn Mc Kenzie; she has raised it in the Senate before that there are people whose pensions have not been adjusted in accordance with the salaries that had been paid. Later on we might see something coming up on the Order Paper. But it could be addressed. It is unfair; it is vicious. In some of the old traditions they say: "Pay a man before his sweat dries." You have people dying; some have passed away and there is a big question mark about what is due to them for services they have performed. I mean to say, to ask why or why not, or what have you; even to raise it here, something that is due, I would leave it at that for the moment. I think I have said enough on that, because very often we hear it mooted that our vision for our people, before we were born, while we were being born, while we are living and growing and even to meet the needs when we leave, this is the hope and aspiration of a noble nation in dealing with its citizenship. So I will leave the pension for the moment.

The other area which I would like to touch on is very close to all of us. If it is not close to us, I do not know what it would be. Very early when I started out in this Senate, I made mention that the ice is melting and that refers to what is taking place further north. We are seeing the effects of that coming—the global warming thing and what has been happening. Even though we are very small we still contribute minimally to it—like the bigger nations—with respect to the environmental trust.

I see we have here the question of the Green Fund. It has been accumulating for quite some time and some mention is made of it in the Bill that is before us. It does offer me an opportunity to make an extra plea again. Who benefits in this trust that has been given to us? In another language it is referred to as a "distrust" that has been given to us as humankind. Who is responsible? We heard mooted for quite some time: Where is the sustained growth as far as the use of the earth's

resources are concerned, that God Almighty, as believers—and I think all of us here have contributed to that when we took that oath. What is our responsibility? How should we really motivate ourselves to providing stimuli? Because when we neglect the earth—make no mistake about it—and its resources, we start to forget ourselves.

It is this basic earth that we live on that is responsible for our very existence and it is obvious that if we do not take good care of it, when we misuse and we abuse, we are definitely on our way to a culture of death. It does not only express itself—I am speaking on the question of the purpose of the Green Fund—by what we destroy; it expresses itself by what emerges from within ourselves, and this we have to be very careful of. I would suspect that many of us, particularly those in our sister island, who have had the opportunity—like your good self, Mr. Vice-President—to feel that closeness with the people and the earth—the soil. I do not feel it too much in our own country here, but I feel it there.

I share this with respect to that because it is important that we take care of it. Even the way we are treating this part of the Bill in the debate, with due respect to all my colleagues, and the feeling from the outside, you get a feeling that it is just slipping in there, and this finds expression within recent times of how we had dealt with some of the major inputs when we think in terms of development, because this part of the Act definitely has to do with the question of the environment and how we utilize the resources, as I have mentioned.

How will we integrate this Green Fund and its functioning with the other areas of development? I think, with due respect to some of our earlier thinkers—my mind runs on 1848, in Europe, the sceptre of communism with the publication of the Communist Manifesto by Marx and Engels, when the question of land, labour and capital was dealt with in a so-called scientific way.

I have touched on that aspect of it because, to some extent, the theory that was proffered out of that stock of knowledge—Economic Terrority—has run into a sort of blast; it is not going. One wonders if some of it is not relevant to when we mix these elements. I think later some economists had put land, labour, capital and entrepreneurship, and what have you, but I know it has shifted quite a bit now and we are in, what has been referred to as the modern capitalistic system.

Even in that area where there seem to be appendages, the Green Fund here seems to be just on the hinge of that, because even in the area of the protection of the environment, as what emerged particularly within the last 25 years in the last century, not much has been done. I think even here in Trinidad and Tobago, we

have quite a few people, if not all of us, who are concerned that we should make that attempt with the people who are in it and give it that support. Because that responsibility not only rests with us for now but for forthcoming generations and how we utilize those resources and the developmental thrust that we have; the participation of our people in it and those open spaces that we are now using without even proper planning, some may claim. But some may say that we are travelling on a road and we have to go with what we have, but we should draw back on all those resources that we have within our people and what is available on the scientific fields and make use of those.

8.30 p.m.

I know from the political decisions that are being made. I recall some years ago a famous economic scientist who was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize—which is supposed to be the highest recognition some countries think they could have received—made the point that very often, we pursue a path that is not best according to the analyses, but by what is politically expedient. Political expedience is not bringing together values for the advancement of the nation as a whole. The political expedience he was referring to was for the survival of elitist groups, wherever they may be, even within the smallest organization. That theory could have applied to that. It is a feature of human behaviour that we should look at when making decisions. We should bring on the forefront the values we should inculcate and continue. I speak from my position and my way to integrate more of our faith-based systems into our education system; way of living and decision making.

I look forward to see what would emerge. This debate could be one that was most stimulating. It raised very serious questions about our nation; our values and how we want to go as a nation.

Thank you.

Sen. Dr. Glenn Ramadhar-Singh: Mr. Vice-President, when the Minister introduced the Bill, he indicated that the initiative intended to fulfil the objective of Vision 2020; goods and services were being given for the development of our people; planning was moving in the right direction and we were experiencing buoyant economic times.

Indeed, he is right. It is definitely a time of great wealth, but also a time when the nation is in crisis. The great wealth gets trapped at the top by big business pulling their nets, while the money flows in and even as the nets try to catch everything, the pennies fall to the ground and are picked up by the hands of the

poor. With this Government, we seem to be building castles while sending the poor into the wilderness. We seem to be experiencing growth, but there is a question of whether we are experiencing development. Plenty money, plenty poor people and a stealthy and frightening polarization of the economy, that could issue a spark of revolt. It is the distinct movement almost like in a cell or battery where we have positives moving to the positive pole and negatives moving to the negative; the haves and the have-nots. It is just that they have no equilibrium. This does not make for a good reaction and could spell an ugly recipe for unrest in this country.

The UNC's philosophy is that the purpose of the citizenry is to be happy and to ensure that the lives of the citizens are so built, that they could be happy and the quality of their lives can be improved. Today, in Trinidad we see the tears of Sen. Cindy Gibbs-Nicholas; Mr. Gonzales from Bagatelle and Mr. Jaggernauth for water, in Scotts Road, Penal. What is the quality of mercy? Who is to stop the sparrow from singing and a Robin red breast in a cage, sends all heaven in a rage.

Sen. Dr. Saith: "Robin left yuh know."

Sen. Dr. G. Ramadhar-Singh: When we look at public assistance that we talk about so glibly, what is it? To what does it amount? In clause 2 and the amendment in Chap. 32:03, it amounts to an increase of $100; from $800 to $900. Who are these people who are given public assistance? They are handicapped; usually they would be shut in their homes; they would have people coming to take care of them; they would be differently able; definitely very poor or a single mother. In this time of plenty, $100 increase, we are happy and boasting about? It is definitely not enough.

Although the Minister indicated that 6,010 persons have benefited, it means therefore, that only the persons who would have lost jobs because of their handicap or disability would have gone out of their way to access this product. It is not reaching enough people and the amount is not enough. This money sometimes has to feed an entire family. With the rate of inflation, it is little this money can do.

What is future money under the PNM? That is a question we have to look at. Our teachers who are included in the part that deals with pension are negotiating their wages for the period 2005—2008. The latest I saw is that they are at a standstill and by the time they are finished, it would be time to renegotiate; the real value of the savings would continue to decrease and a difference in parity would ensue between the inflation rate and savings. When the teachers get the

money they struggled for, it would be worth much less than on and across the bargaining table. All the negotiations with regard to labour in this country and the treatment meted out to labour which I will refer to later on, suggest anti-working class behaviour. Is it an anti-small man agenda? We keep hearing from their spokespeople that the CPO is in negotiations with the unions and would get back to them, when we know that the CPO is an agent of the Government and a particular ministry. Usually, it is a "shot call" to the unions.

The last time I spoke, I quoted from the Rev. Cyril Paul about the breakdown in society. He indicated that we are living in jail because we are being managed by a government that cannot control crime. On Monday, the Roman Catholic priest, Fr. Clyde Harvey indicated that with a country that continues to grapple with crime and many other social ills, we must be bold enough as a nation to make some radical changes. I hope that the nation takes note.

With all the figures pointed out by the hon. Minister Conrad Enill, he spoke so glowingly about the economic prospects. When we look at the results of the second quarter of the corporate confident indices under key findings, done by Arthur Lok Jack Graduate School of Business, we would see that executive opinion deteriorated with respect to financial performance; financial outlook and local economic outlook for their organizations.

I turn to the local economic outlook. The index fell from 44 to 28 CCI points over the six-month period and from 54 to 27 CCI points over the 12 month period. Over 85 per cent of executives attributed their declining confidence in the local economy to perception of uncontrolled government spending, while inflationary pressure and crime remain the most influential factors.

We listened to the hon. Minister boasting of the delivery of goods and services for the development of our people; planning and moving in the right direction; buoyant economics and good macroeconomic indicators. The increase in oil prices would generate sustainability. He also admitted that oil and gas would create uncertain economic policies. We agree with him. He then went on very quickly to talk about real GDP being 10 per cent and when it doubled. He boasted about the unemployment rate being at 5 per cent, the lowest on record; 17 per cent poverty; a decrease in corporate and personal taxes. He admitted that while the energy sector was growing steadily, the non-energy sector was growing at a robust 7 per cent. If it is growing at 7 per cent, he should have indicated where it was, because therein lies the problem in this country.

Gross domestic product (GDP) measures the goods and services produced in a country. When we divide the GDP by the entire population, we would get the GDP per capita. In his budget, the Prime Minister boasted it was at US $13,978 which is

an incredibly high figure. It is one of the highest in the western hemisphere and in this part of the world. If oil increases by $100 a barrel the GDP would be doubled. The GDP per capita does not speak of distribution of that money. The statistics of the Central Statistical Office (CSO) show that in this country the per capita household income is actually $1,176.02. That is effectively under the poverty line. There is in fact, a polarization of economic growth where the petrochemical sector accounts for 42.9 per cent of the GDP, almost half of the GDP of the country when it was 28.3 per cent in 2001. You are witnessing a classic case of over dependence on the petroleum sector in this country.

In the UNC, we emphasized preservation of stable macroeconomics; low inflation; diversifying the economic base of the country; increasing the skills of the population and not focussing on a safety net for permanency, but to spring people into entrepreneurship. What this Government is interested in is not a safety net for the people who work in CEPEP and URP, but a safety hammock.

Although the Minister boasted about free tertiary education; medication for chronic diseases and assistance for persons, we still see people lying on the ground at San Fernando General Hospital. Just yesterday, a lady died while waiting for an operation. The UNC was interested in growth and development. Without development growth is not sustainable. Given that high GDP the Prime Minister boasted about, we have to ask: Can the normal average working-class man afford to buy a house? Can the normal maid, servant or taxi driver afford to buy three meals for the day? Can the normal grandmother or grandfather of an extended home afford to go to the health institutions and get reliable medical care? Can the normal average taxpaying citizen trust the justice system? Plenty money; plenty poverty.

High government revenues continue to be expected over the short-term. Therein again, lies the problem. According to experts, our estimated proven reserves will take off by 2021. What would happen when the bottom falls out the oil market? At that time, the IMF would have to come back to do structural adjustment. What has the IMF recommended? They have recommended increased savings from the energy windfall and enhanced flexibility from the nominal exchange rate which is tantamount to a devaluation. They have cautioned against wage hikes which may be prompted by inflation to maintain the standard of living. This is against the background of the characteristics of our economy. We must strike a balance between the social development of our people and our capital development programmes. This is the function of government. Perhaps 18th Century Americans define the function of government the best. The US declaration of Independence states,

"We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed, by their Creator, with certain unalienable Rights, that among those are Life, Liberty, and the pursuit of Happiness.

That to secure these rights, Governments are instituted among Men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed,"

Contrary to what has been said here today, there is a total collapse of the agricultural sector. No one can fool anybody in this country. People who had backyard gardens and large holdings have now given them up because of a lack of focus, incentive and Government support. We must not forget that petroleum is governed by externally determined prices, in a historically volatile market. We would be vulnerable to severe economic shocks when the energy prices fall. The neglect of our agricultural sector is a sin for which we would pay dearly. When you do not focus on agriculture and import food, you would have less foreign exchange outflow because you use it to purchase food.

The inflation rate has risen steadily under this Government. In the purchasing power and real value of our dollar there has been a general price increase of 21.6 per cent from 2001 to 2005. These figures come from the Central Bank and the Central Statistical Office. Food prices doubled over this period and the Government tried to decrease inflation, by absorbing liquidity using Treasury Bonds and Bills, but this did nothing about the price of food. It continued to impoverish people.

What about the unemployment figure, this record low in unemployment? I quote from a management guru to tell you the real unemployment figure. [*Interruption*] Do you want the name of the management guru? Patrick Manning. In his budget response of 2000, the hon. Prime Minister, Patrick Manning when in Opposition said:

"Our businessmen listen to the fairy tales of the Minister, but they know that they cannot get foreign exchange in the banks. They have a true picture of how many job positions they have filled. They know the difference between the URP and real job creation."

Lately, the Prime Minister said that the unemployment figure is 5 per cent. These are the number of workers in the following:

Group	**Figure**
URP	50,000
CEPEP	7,000
MILAT	360
MYPART	240
Community Service Programme	500

There are HYPE, YTEPP and MuST and other make-work palliatives that this Government has come up with. The Central Bank has estimated that there are 11,600 new jobs in the construction sector. We have temporary jobs. In these jobs the workers have no rights; trade unions; sick leave; maternity leave; vacation leave; casual leave; no basic working conditions and no fixed COLA. Five per cent unemployment rate? What does it mean to the population? While not creating real employment, these programmes are creating a drain on the Treasury. If the energy sector "fall down all fall down". That is the reality. Poverty, as has been said before, is increasing in this country. Poverty in a time of plenty is evil. What does the World Bank Development Report speak to on poverty?

Sen. Dumas: Mr. Vice-President, on a point of order. This is irrelevant to the Bill.

Mr. Vice-President: Senator, you are straying quite a bit. You have been given some leeway and I think that you should come back to the Bill in question.

Sen. Dr. G. Ramadhar-Singh: I quoted extensively from the Minister and that is why I went in those directions.

I turn to the area of housing. In clause 18, where we spoke about the Stamp Duty Act, Chap. 76:01, the First Schedule provides for the conveyance of property which is valued at $450,000 or less and includes a dwelling house to be used for residential purposes to be exempt from stamp duty. This sounds very nice. I am interested in how a Minister or an MP who deals with people on a regular day-to-day basis or a community activist, will understand that this measure does nothing for the poor man. I know many young professionals who cannot take advantage of this. For them to build a reasonable house; have children and expand, they need at least $600,000. It is a measure nobody can take advantage of because of the high construction prices fuelled by inflation.

Sen. Sahadeo: The first amount of $450,000 is exempt. It means that stamp duty would be paid from that to that. His point is valid. We have continued to look at the ceiling which we are optimistic that prices would hold. At this time, the increase means that there is a reduced cost in terms of stamp duty and you only pay stamp duty on the residue between $450,000 and $600,000.

Sen. Dr. G. Ramadhar-Singh: The reality is that the cost of a proper house for these individuals would be about $600,000, so this is of no effect. In a house for $600,000 the attorney's fee which includes stamp duty; legal charges and

others is $9,000. The bank charges $6,000 and valuation and other costs, $1,500. They cannot access this remedy that the Government is providing because they cannot get a proper house for $450,000. The legislation is of no effect.

I cannot understand the Minister who boasted that with an income of $8,000 you can get a house. I thought that when they were developing housing policy they were trying to reach those people who are landless, homeless and needed to move from an extended situation. I do not believe that these people can meet this $8,000 income level. We are not reaching out to the poor. The Prime Minister bemoaned that fact in the budget statement. He wanted to reach the single mothers who have an average income of $2,500 to $3,000. Where is the allocation for these people? We heard about those subsidies. There is the boast about rent-to-own. Where are the rent-to-own properties? I filed a question on that. I am from South Trinidad and I want to know if someone wants to get a property and his or her income is between $2,500 and $3,000, where can he or she access that property? How many houses are available? We will get the answer to this question. I propose that we have a full debate on Caroni (1975) Limited, so that the truth would come out and if those workers are happy—

Mr. Vice-President: Senator, go back to the Bill.

Sen. Dr. G. Ramadhar-Singh: My final question is that if the Government is doing so much for housing, why is it on June 27 we would have a human chain in Bagatelle? Why have persons been displaced? The committee in Bagatelle said that they intend to block work via a human barricade on Wednesday. More than 4,300 residents are to be affected; 85 per cent refuse to move and 50 per cent of the working residents survive on minimum wage. This community has existed for 40 years and this committee has threatened to rally the support of over 200,000 persons. It is said that the people who have to deal with the housing ministry are told *cave canem*; beware of the dog. This is the treatment being meted out to the people of Bagatelle who have to resort to a human barricade.

This pension that has been the baseline for all public servants; the hard-working prison officers; fire officers who in this time of terrorism, in terms of accidents and emergencies are on the front line all over the world. All over the world they are becoming more and important. That figure works out to be $39 a day. With the aggressive inflation; the price of food that we are experiencing and the money value, it would be woefully inadequate for those persons. We are bandying figures and not dealing with the people issues.

When you look at food prices where the Minister of Consumer Affairs threatened a war to stem rising food prices and recently, they gave up and started warning you about ethanol and international trends.

9.00 pm.

In fact, Minister Enill said climate change also negatively impacted on food prices, and what the Ministry of Consumer Affairs is doing when one really reads and follows, it is monitoring food prices. Out of the many surveys that they do, anything that they can find on this particular day—in this case, it is a basket of fruit based on data.

In December 2006, Minister Kangaloo said a basket containing 28 fruits and vegetables would have cost $46.79. Over a six-month period Minister Kangaloo said the same basket of fruits and vegetables has dropped by $23.00 in June 2007. We are monitoring the situation and putting things in place. I think they are right, they are putting the inflation in place; they are putting the increase in food prices in place.

Mr. Vice-President, there seems to be a thinking on that side that they are dealing with agriculture. They really think, somehow or the other, that agriculture is being addressed in this country, but the figures do not show that at all. In fact, when you look at the GDP, the annual change in GDP in 2001, 1.5; 2002, 11.2; 2003, minus 9.4; 2004, 10; 2005, minus 9.7. There has been a steady decline in the agriculture sector; there has been no support from this Government. In fact, they have contributed to the demise of agriculture and are now monitoring the effects of food prices.

Sen. Dumas: Mr. Vice-President, it is quite interesting to have this discourse on agriculture but, it is not relevant to anything in the Bill.

Mr. Vice-President: Senator, continue please, and could you hasten back to the Bill as I advised you.

Sen. Dr. G. Ramadhar-Singh: Mr. Vice-President, if you look at clause 20, which would amend the Customs Act, Chap. 78:01, sections 154, 213 and 248, there have been increased penalties which also provide for trial and indictment. And we expect this because, as I said, the fire officers have now gone on the front line because of a world that is threatened by terrorists and, also, you would find that the customs officers would be involved in eliminating terror as well, by the introduction of guns, ammunition and so on in the country as a first line prevention, as a front line in protecting our borders and so forth. And, of course,

the point has been made by the US Ambassador who told the officers—this is from the US Embassy—in one of his speeches, at the Special Anti-crime Unit of Trinidad and Tobago (SAUTT), he stated:

> "As border protection officers, you serve on the front line of a global war against the interrelated problems of terrorism, drug trafficking, firearms trafficking and illegal migration."

Mr. Vice-President, I want you to understand why I bring this up. I want to impress upon Senators the importance of the Customs Department in this country. While this initiative might be applaudable in a step forward, there are many other things that need to be done. The Ambassador continues:

> "There are those who have gently chided my government for devoting perhaps too much of its energy and resources to the global war on terror, supposedly at the expense of the fight against narcotics and arms trafficking in this part of the world. May I suggest that this criticism, although understandable, is entirely baseless?"

I think we are quite aware of that gentle chiding.

However, we have to look at the conditions of the Customs and Excise workers because, when one looks at section 263, the inserting of four new subsections would enhance the operational effectiveness of the Customs and Excise Division. So part of the legislation is trying to enhance operational effectiveness of the Customs and Excise Division, and when you speak to the officers, when you just do not come and read new subsections (4), (5), (6) and you really try to see what the legislation will do, you become very disheartened as a citizen of this country. You become very depressed and you begin to wonder if we really will ever reach the First World status, if we are really serious about Vision 2020. The workers, of course, are faced with backlog because of the recent strike of the Port Authority workers. There is a shortage of customs officers that have not been dealt with for quite a while.

Certain areas of the Port, as some of my colleagues have also told me, require safety equipment and specialized protective gears because of the nature of the Port and those operational effectiveness of the customs, and they have not been given. They are short-staffed—this is the worker's point of view—overworked and persons are retiring without being replaced. There has been an attempt by the Service Commission to fill the vacancies but the Ministry is trying to fill the vacancies. In fact, basically, there is some kind of politics being played with the human resource requirement of that section. Sadly, there are rat infestations,

mosquito invasion, poor sanitation on the whole and the proximity to the National Flour Mills which attracts pigeons and there are excreta everywhere; dehumanizing conditions and workers continue to complain about a sad state of affairs in the work place. Vision 2020!

Mr. Vice-President, the businessmen's point of view is that there is always absenteeism; they are aware that they are short-staffed, late coming by the officers, snail paced operation, almost as if it is begging for a greasing between the cog of the wheels so that they could speed up congestion of the Port itself; the long delays in taking time to offload. There are only 12 bales in the Ports that exist and the businessmen also complain about something called 'crabs' which is container, itinerary and billing where they lose money if they do not empty their containers in a certain space of time. Although this piece of legislation will try to effect some change, there are problems which beset the customs officers, and I explained to you in the beginning the importance of these officers. As border protection officers, they serve on the front line in the global war on terrorism, drug trafficking, firearms trafficking and illegal migration, yet, they do not have the resources, environment and the tools to do their work under this Government that is striving for 2020 vision.

Mr. Vice-President, the first piece of this legislation spoke of the change in the Bill as it deals with the Tobago House of Assembly, and increasing the powers of the administrative officer equivalent to the permanent secretary by a certain amount. And, it deals with making an amendment to the Central Tenders Board Act of 1961. When we see a piecemeal approach to the amendment of the Central Tenders Board Ordinance, we question what has happened to the Prime Minister's Budget Statement in 2005 when he said:

> "In order to increase a rate of implementation of our expanded investment programme, we will outsource 15 special-purpose state enterprises to deliver an accelerated implementation of certain approved Government projects in selected ministries. These 15 special purposes vehicles will undertake development projects in the areas of education, community development, national infrastructure, rural development, the development of sporting infrastructure, tourism and urban development."

He went on to talk about the procedures—

Sen. Montano: Mr. Vice-President, it is getting late and half the Independent Senators have gone home and this has absolutely nothing to do with the Bill. Give us a break!

Mr. Vice-President: Senator, you are really straying again. I know that you want to use up as much time as possible, but please stay with the Bill and do that.

Sen. Dr. G. Ramadhar-Singh: Mr. Vice-President, I thought you were following me. I was talking about the Central Tenders Board Ordinance, and I was coming to what the Prime Minister spoke about, these special purpose state enterprises, the procedure relates to funding, remuneration packages for the executive and procurement and accounting standards that were to be adopted and, where he indicated that the Central Tenders Board Ordinance and its various amendments, that the platform–

Sen. Montano: Mr. Vice-President, the Senator has still gone off. It has nothing to do with the clause in this Bill. This deals with the Chief Administrator of the Tobago House of Assembly.

Mr. Vice-President: Sen. Mark, please. Sen. Dr. Ramadhar-Singh, you said you were going to talk about the provisions as they affect the Tobago House of Assembly. You have said nothing about that. You are taking a long while getting there and this is why you are going astray.

Sen. Dr. G. Ramadhar-Singh: They are related matters and I will tell you briefly although I cannot go through my trend of thought. Basically, they are interrelated matters. The Tobago House of Assembly, although it has much more powers than—it has a greater devolution of powers than our regional corporations, it is, in fact, local government. Our local government institutions in Trinidad and Tobago are starved of resources. These agencies are the Community Improvement Services Limited which reports to the Ministry of Planning and Development, the Sports Company of Trinidad and Tobago which reports to the Ministry of Sport and Youth Affairs, the Estate Management and Business Development Company which reports to the Ministry of Finance, the National Commission for Self-Help which reports to the Ministry of Community Development, Culture and Gender Affairs. What these agencies are doing is starving our regional corporations of resources and, while the regional corporations—

Sen. Montano: The regional corporations are not even mentioned in this Bill. Where is the Senator going? Tie it in if you can.

Mr. Vice-President: Sen. Dr. Ramadhar-Singh, again I am appealing to you to get to the gist of the Bill. You have gone to regional corporations and you are talking about the THA. Which is it? And this is why Members are going to complain about the lack of relevance. Could you please stay within the context of the Bill?

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. W. Mark*]

Question put and agreed to.

Sen. Dr. G. Ramadhar-Singh: Mr. Vice-President, I want to basically make the point that concerns had been raised earlier about the spending of the THA. I was going to add some value to that. I was also making the point that the regional corporations in this country, by the formation of these organizations that do not report to the Central Tenders Board, while the local government corporations have to report to the Central Tenders Board, they are being starved of resources.

Mr. Vice-President, we are seeing growth but no development. The social indicators are not there. There are people who cannot afford houses, who cannot afford to buy food; they are not accessing reasonable health care while we have this great GDP, while so much money is flowing into the coffers of this country. We need to look at the social development of our people and the Government needs to shoulder a greater degree of social responsibility. Government is all about people, it is all about the child that sweeps, cooks, cleans and cannot afford to go to school. Every young person who is forced onto others to help the family to put bread on the table, every single mother, who does not want to sell drugs or themselves, every patient in long lines.

It should not be anti-labour, and anti-worker and anti-poor. It must not close down businesses, put people who are willing to work long hours out on the street, it must not make poor people cry, and tears flow across the land. Government should eliminate, not create poverty. We cannot be creating a larger number of poor because as a volatile oil and gas market; for Aristotle said it is a bad thing that many being rich should become poor, for men of ruined fortunes are sure to stir up revolution.

If we do not listen to the voice of Cindy Gibbs-Nicholas, the revolution will come when it will. We can affect its character if we are temperate. We can determine its direction if we are willing to listen, but no doubt, change will come, the tyranny will end. Thank you.

The Minister of Science, Technology and Tertiary Education (Sen. The Hon. Mustapha Abdul-Hamid): Mr. Vice-President, I want to begin my contribution on pointing to what has become a very unfortunate and disturbing trend in the contribution made by Sen. Wade Mark.

Mr. Vice-President, it is not the first time we are hearing Sen. Mark in his contribution refer to the hon. Minister of Labour, Sen. The Hon. Danny Montano as a "white" man in this Senate. In fact, reading from the *Hansard* he yelled: "Who is in charge of the Senate? Is it this "white" man?

Mr. Vice-President, racism occurs when one uses words which are intended to conjure in the minds of listeners, suspicion for others and are intended to conjure in the minds of others a negative attitude towards other people. Persons may not share your phenol typical characteristics.

Mr. Vice-President, by any standards, when I listened to Sen. Wade Mark, that statement was vile, crass, it was despicable and, indeed, most racist.

Sen. Mark: Mr. Vice-President, I want him to withdraw all those remarks. I did not make any statement while I was speaking. I was in my seat. I was not on my leg so I think it is important that—

Mr. Vice-President: The statement that the Minister is talking about is one that was very audible and is one that was recorded by *Hansard,* and, therefore, it has formed part of the proceedings that took place here today.

Sen. Mark: May I seek clarification?

Mr. Vice-President: Yes, you may.

Sen. Mark: So are you ruling that once a statement is made by any Member of this Senate, even though the person was not on his leg, it is crosstalk, we can now debate it? I want to know what you are doing today, so, at least I will take it up from here.

Mr. Vice-President: I am not ruling that there is to be a debate on it. That is what you asked. I am saying that it could be mentioned, the Minister has mentioned it, I do not know whether he has anything else to say on it, but there is not a debate on it.

Sen. The Hon. M. Abdul-Hamid: Thank you very much, Mr. Vice-President. I am reading from *Hansard.* I was very careful to ask for the *Hansard* report which I have in my hand and I am reading. Sen. Mark said: "Who is in charge of this Senate?" "Is it this 'white' man?"

Mr. Vice-President, I am speaking to this issue because this is not the first time that we have heard such comments coming from this Senator. On past occasions he has referred to this—

Sen. Mark: Mr. Vice-President, is he debating this matter because you have to rule on this?

Sen. The Hon. M. Abdul-Hamid: You are ashamed. [*Crosstalk*]

Sen. Mark: I am not ashamed of anything. I call him a terrorist.

Mr. Vice-President: Sen. Mark! Sen. Mark! I have already said the Minister could speak about it just like if you would be civil and you hear a remark, you could talk about it afterwards. But there is not going to be a full debate on it. You are asking whether I am going to permit a debate on it. That is a different thing.

Sen. The Hon. M. Abdul-Hamid: Thank you, Mr. Vice-President. This is important, this is serious. We have a Member of the Senate making a racist remark and he has done so before. He has referred to the hon. Minister in the past—

Mr. Vice-President: Sen. Mark, I have permitted the Minister to mention it in his contribution and I could assure you as I said, if you behave in a civil manner and the Minister did not yell at you and you just kept asking and asking and yelling across the floor. He stopped, he waited; he could talk about it. I will permit that. The Minister is making a point and I am waiting to know where exactly he is going. Let me get that straight.

Sen. The Hon. M. Abdul-Hamid: Mr. Vice-President, as a Senator in this honourable House, and as Senators, we ought to hold ourselves to the highest standards in the public domain. [*Desk thumping*] We are examples to the population. There is live broadcast; people are looking on, people are hearing and it will be irresponsible of me to speak in this Senate and not issue a categorical condemnation for that kind of behaviour, Mr. Vice-President. [*Desk thumping*] That behaviour must be condemned.

Sen. Mark: He cannot condemn me. He is out of order.

Mr. Vice-President: Sen. Mark! Sen. Mark! The Minister is quite in order to express that view. Sen. Mark, I am certain—I see you with the Standing Orders and if you check, you will find that the language used here should not be unbecoming or bring the House into disrepute. Please allow the Minister to finish his point.

Sen. The Hon. M. Abdul-Hamid: Thank you again, Mr. Vice-President. This Senate must take a position on this matter. The Senate must take a position that acknowledges and recognizes that this behaviour is unbecoming of a Senator.

It is unbecoming of a person who presents himself to the population as a leader. It is despicable, vile, crass and racist behaviour which ought not to be accepted in this Senate or in the public domain by any citizen of this country, Mr. Vice-President.

This is not the first time and the Senator has done this before, in addition to which—[*Crosstal*k]

Mr. Vice-President: Sen. Mark, it does not make sense throwing gasoline into fire. [*Crosstalk*] Sen. Mark! Sen. Mark, I am instructing you to withdraw that statement. Sen. Mark!

I will like to tell you, Mr. Minister, I have taken note of your concern. I will like to go through the *Hansard* record myself, and I will like to also discuss the matter with the President who was in the Chair at the time, and we will report back to this Senate.

Sen. The Hon. M. Abdul-Hamid: Mr. Vice-President, that ought not to go unpunished but I will leave it there, and hope that the population would have taken good note. Even if he escapes unscathed here that the population will deal with him. [*Crosstalk*] The "king" is offended. But he puts his tail between his leg and runs like a puppy when you put him under pressure.

Sen. Mark: Tell the gentleman to withdraw those remarks.

Mr. Vice-President: Sen. Mark, will you please—this is what I was talking about when I said if we deal with this in a civilized way. If you had nothing to say then you would not initiate a response. I asked you not to interrupt, you continued. I am saying to you, please allow the Minister to go on; that is what he wants to do. I instructed him to do that and he said he is doing that. Allow him to do that.

Sen. The Hon. M. Abdul-Hamid: In the contributions made by a number of Senators, the same Sen. Mark in particular, he referred to the role of the legislator in dealing with moral issues and anybody who studied Sociology would recognize that there are different organizations within a society which would have different roles to play as they relate to moral issues. The family, for example, and he spoke about a son and so forth. There is indeed a role for the family in communicating, socializing its members into a way of life with certain norms and certain values. There is a role for schools. There is a role for NGOs, the media but, there is also a role for the legislator.

The legislator has a role to play in that we who form part of the Parliament, our role as legislators, is to analyse the society, interpret the needs of the society, interpret the directions in which the society would like to move and to formulate laws on the basis of what the population may see and what the leaders as well may see as being best for the country.

9.30 p.m.

So there is a role for legislators as we address moral issues and all societies have laws generally aligned to what the moral principles of the society might be. As we move from society to society, we will find laws corresponding with the general moral tenets of that particular society.

He said if he had a son, and he removed any role for the law, placing the entire responsibility for the moral upbringing and standards for his son on the family. I am saying that might be a little unrealistic and myopic because what happens in the real world is that different institutions within the society have a role to play. Among these institutions, I have identified the family, the schools, the media, NGOs, the political leadership and the legislature.

Mr. Vice-President, I can give a number of examples, if I had a son, of what my role would be. If I had a son and my son were to grow up to be a politician and become a minister, and were to become a minister of public administration, for example, and, being a minister of public administration, it gives you responsibility for public buildings. If this minister, my hypothetical son, the same hypothetical son he spoke about, were to use his authority as a minister to secure for himself a government building and were to then—

Sen. Mark: On a point of order.

Sen. The Hon. M. Abdul-Hamid: Mr. Vice-President, I have not spoken about anybody.

Mr. Vice-President: What is your point of order?

Sen. Mark: The Senator, under Standing Order No. 35(5) is referring to Wade Mark as a minister of public administration. [*Interruption*] He said if he had a son. Mr. Vice-President, I am telling you that the gentleman is referring to me, Wade Mark. I did not refer to him. He said if he had a son who was a minister of public administration. He does not have a son so I would like you to rule that he is imputing improper motives under Standing Order 35(5). He cannot say he has a son who is a minister of public administration. [*Interruption*]

Mr. Vice-President: Senators, please! Sen. Mark, you just said he does not have a son. When you made your contribution, I clearly remember you said you did not have a son.

Sen. Mark: [*Inaudible*]

Mr. Vice-President: I am saying that his hypothetical son was a minister and all that—

Sen. Mark: No, no, no!

Mr. Vice-President: Sen. Mark, I am on my feet.

Sen. Mark: [*Inaudible*]

Mr. Vice-President: Sen. Mark, please! I am listening to the Minister.

Sen. Mark: He has gone too far.

Mr. Vice-President: I will decide when he has gone too far and I am sure you have noticed that I did that just now.

Sen. Mark: Mr. Vice-President, I want to ask you, the Senator has said, if he had a son, who was a minister of public administration and who used his office as minister of public administration to obtain a public building, he is referring to me, when I was a minister. I never did that; that is why I am saying he is imputing improper motives to me. [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Vice-President: Sen. Mark! Please, Senators!

Sen. Mark, I am not seeing the direct reference you are making. Obviously you know something I do not. I ask the Minister to make his son anything else but the minister of public administration. [*Laughter*]

Sen. Dr. Saith: Mr. Vice-President, I am very grateful that Sen. Mark took it to mean him rather than me. [*Laughter*]

Sen. The Hon. M. Abdul-Hamid: Mr. Vice-President, let us imagine that my hypothetical son who was minister of public administration is fired, so he is no longer minister of public administration. So this hypothetic son of mine, who has a government building in his care—it is part of his responsibility—we are talking about moral behaviour and the role of the law as opposed to the role of the family; my role as a parent. His argument was that the role was for the parent. My argument is that there is a role for the parent, but there is also a role for the law, so we, as legislators, know what intervention to make in certain circumstances.

Let us imagine that this government building is converted to a brothel—

Hon. Senators: Oo-oo-oo-oo-oo!

Sen. The Hon. M. Abdul-Hamid: Let us imagine that. That is my son. [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. Mark: Mr. Vice-President, now tell me the relevance of that. Let us disown the son. [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Vice-President: Senators!

Sen. Mark: [*Inaudible*]

Mr. Vice-President: Sen Mark!

Sen. Mark: [*Inaudible*]

Mr. Vice-President: Sen Mark!

Sen. Mark: [*Inaudible*]

Mr. Vice-President: Sen Mark!

Sen. The Hon. M. Abdul-Hamid: I "ain't fraid" that.

Sen. Mark: You "ain't fraid" that? [*Inaudible*]

Mr. Vice-President: Sen Mark! Hon. Minister, I am asking you to curtail the references if you can and let us get on with the matter.

Sen. The Hon. M. Abdul-Hamid: Mr. Vice-President, I have four examples to give today. People always talk about files, I have four hypothetical children I must speak about.

Now this issue where my hypothetical son—[*Interruption*] I am responding to a statement made by Sen. Mark. Sen. Mark said that his hypothetical son had a gambling problem and that his hypothetical son had maxed out his parents' credit card.

Sen. Mark: [*Inaudible*]

Mr. Vice-President: Sen. Mark, please! Could you please let us know how your son gambled or whatever. [*Laughter*]

Sen. The Hon. M. Abdul-Hamid: Mr. Vice-President, the issue is a wider issue of morality and legislation and they spoke to the country not being a Christian fundamentalist country. Mr. Vice-President, I am expressing a view—

Mr. Vice-President: Sen. Mark, I know you enjoy the lateness, but let us try to leave here a little earlier than they left in the other place.

Sen. The Hon. M. Abdul-Hamid: Mr. Vice-President, they like to give, but they cannot take.

Mr. Vice-President: Sen. Mark, I suspect that if you had allowed the Minister just to go ahead, he might have been done by now.

Sen. Mark: If he links it to the Bill, we will understand. He is not linking it to the Bill. [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Vice-President: All right. I rise again. This is exactly what was defended when someone questioned what Sen. Dr. Ramadhar-Singh was saying and it was clearly defended that he was responding to a contribution from prior and that is what a debate is about. So, Sen. Mark, I feel that the quicker we allow the Minister to go through his references—[*Crosstalk*]

Sen. The Hon. M. Abdul-Hamid: Mr. Vice-President, this is becoming overbearing because they got to speak. I am speaking and I have had to sit on at least eight occasions. That is not fair to me. I am making my point and they are interrupting my point. I am responding to what Senators have said. Many people have spoken. I have a lot to respond to. I am attempting to make my contribution and I am being constantly interrupted. I do not appreciate that, Mr. Vice-President. I will ask that hon. Senators allow me to say my piece. I thank you very much for your protection.

I go back to this brothel that was established by my hypothetical son. What is the role of the parent? I have a role to play. He said he would call his son. I would call my son and talk to him, but there is a role for the legislators as well. The law has to intervene because when people do damage to other people, there is such a thing as the law. There is right and wrong as determined by the legislators [*Desk thumping*] and a line has to be drawn somewhere, and in this society legislators have drawn the line on prostitution.

[MADAM PRESIDENT *in the Chair*]

Sen. Mark: He should be in jail; he is a terrorist. He was involved in a coup.

Sen. The Hon. M. Abdul-Hamid: There are a number of behaviours that have been categorized as crime on the basis of an adjudication made by both Houses of Parliament.

Sen. Montano: Madam President, on a point of order. He is referring to my colleague loudly as a terrorist. You warned him about that already—

Madam President: I have not sat down properly yet.

Sen. Montano: I know, but he is referring to my colleague loudly as a terrorist. You warned him about that area.

Madam President: I heard that as I walked in. Sen. Mark, I have said to you, if you make that remark again, I am going to have to ask you to leave the Senate.

Sen. Mark: Madam President, before you came in—

Madam President: I was listening to it on the television.

Sen. Mark: We are dealing with relevance.

Madam President: As far as I understand he is rebutting what was said and that is what a debate is. [*Desk thumping*] If I recall, when you made your contribution, you made some reference to your hypothetical son having done so and so.

Sen. Mark: I related it to the Bill.

Madam President: Until I can hear what the Minister is saying to see if there is a connection to the Bill, then I cannot make a judgment, so I will ask that we give him a chance to see if he comes to the Bill. If he does not come to the Bill, then I will pull him up.

Sen. The Hon. M. Abdul-Hamid: Madam President, when Senators make remarks in the Senate, they open the debate and I have the leeway to respond to what they have said. They may connect something to a Bill, but once they make certain statements, it is the privilege of Senators to respond to what they have said. We know what they do. I am responding to the issue that Sen. Mark raised in respect of the role of parents. He made a point that the legislators had no role to play as it relates to gambling and to a number of moral issues. My point is that there are moral issues that must be addressed by legislation. To do so would be to convert the country to a Christian fundamentalist or some other description they used.

I am using exactly the same metaphor to demonstrate exactly the opposite of what he said. In some situations, there is the role for legislators. You were not there for that first son that I had, Madam President, but let me talk about a second son that I have. [*Interruption*] I have plenty children, you know.

Let us imagine that I had a second hypothetical son and he was employed at one of the agencies in Trinidad and Tobago; let us say the NTA. He got his job perhaps on the basis of political considerations. Let us imagine him enjoying his job and he felt comfortable. He may have had a good relationship with the CEO

and so on and he decided at some point that he was bold and brave enough and he engaged in some kind of cheque fraud that he might have issued to one of his friends. On the basis of that, he would have done an immoral act, having engaged in the act of fraud, attempting to use his political connection for cover and then he is dismissed from the company. Later, he perhaps finds himself enjoying some other kind of high office. There is a role for me as a parent. What are they afraid of?

Sen. Mark: Relevance. 35(1). [*Inaudible*]

Madam President: Sen Mark, I am going to rule now! As far as I understand, the relevance is that he is replying to your hypothetical case.

Sen. Mark: [*Inaudible*]

Madam President: You were not, you know. You went on with that. I really need to hear what the Minister has to say.

Sen. The Hon. M. Abdul-Hamid: Madam President, I am getting the impression that Sen. Mark is afraid of me; I do not understand that.

Sen. Mark: [*Inaudible*]

Sen. The Hon. M. Abdul-Hamid: Madam President, the king has been cut down. How unfortunate!

Madam President: Talk to me!

Sen. The Hon. M. Abdul-Hamid: Madam President, what is the role of the parent in such a circumstance and what is the role of the law? Legislation has a role to play.

If I had a third son, who studies for years—takes about nine years to get his first degree and goes on to become a vet, for example—and then opens a veterinary clinic in his home in a residential area. That is not a proper thing to do. There is discomfort to the neighbours; the smells and a number of things. There is a role for his parents to advise that this ought not to be; but there is role for the law as well and the law must intervene and ensure that kind of behaviour is stopped.

Sen. Mark: Madam President, Standing Order No. 105(1)—relevance. He is imputing improper motives.

Madam President: As I said, when you were talking and someone moved that you were imputing improper motives, I said then, and I will say now, he has called no names, he has made no reference to anyone in here; it is a hypothetical case like yours was. He is trying to show the connection between morality and

law, which was a big topic of discussion when we talked about the casinos. I think it is related to the whole issue of the casinos. Please continue! I do not see irrelevance here.

Sen. The Hon. M. Abdul-Hamid: I have one more son, Madam President. I really have six, but I am leaving the other two for another time. I am just dealing with my fourth son now.

Let us imagine I had a son, a nice, good looking son.

Sen. Mark: I have a son called Abdul, who was part of a coup in 1990.

Sen. The Hon. M. Abdul-Hamid: Madam President, I would love for that Senator to make those statements outside of the Senate. It will be a bonanza for me the day he decides to make that statement outside the Parliament. He always says it under the cover of parliamentary privilege.

Madam President: Come back to the debate!

Sen. The Hon. M. Abdul-Hamid: Madam President, my fourth son, let us imagine, grew up to be a politician and finds somehow that he is not getting adequate coverage on the television stations. How does he respond to that? He may respond by entering into improper relationships with members of the media and in so doing engage members of the media in unethical, unconscionable kinds of reporting, so much so that every time the 7 o'clock news comes on, we have this Senator—

Sen. Mark: [*Inaudible*]

Madam President: [*Pounds gavel*]

Sen. Mark: [*Inaudible*]

Madam President: I am really not interested in who is exposed; I am looking at the Minister. I do not want to know. I do not want to know whoever you are calling John. I do not want to know his business. Please continue!

Sen. The Hon. M. Abdul-Hamid: This hypothetical son of mine then proceeds to encourage, urge and prod members of the media so that every time the news comes on at 7 o'clock, I see my son on the TV's lead story. [*Laughter*] If my son goes to Carnival, the reporters find him wherever he is in the Carnival; if my son goes to cricket, somehow this reporter finds my son at cricket. If my son goes to a walkabout, he is found.

Madam President, there is an important and serious point to be made. The point is that there is something unethical in my son providing inducements to members of the media to ensure that he gets political mileage. There is a moral issue, but there is also a legal issue. All my hypothetical children must understand—

Sen. Mark: [*Inaudible*]

Madam President: [*Pounds gavel loudly*] I cannot hear; I am listening to the Minister.

Sen. The Hon. M. Abdul-Hamid: All my hypothetical children must understand that when they open their mouths and they feel they have files, that there are file cabinets all over the country. All my hypothetical children must understand that they must learn to behave; that there are ethical and moral issues, but there is a role for the law as well.

Let me leave—

Sen. Mark: [*Inaudible*]

Sen. The Hon. M. Abdul-Hamid: What are they afraid of, Madam President?

Sen. Montano: [*Pounds desk*] Enough! For God's sake keep quiet!

Madam President: Minister Montano! That was uncalled for.

Sen. Montano: My apologies, but may I say it is absurd. Let us have some order in the place!

Madam President: Please! Let us continue!

Sen. The Hon. M. Abdul-Hamid: Madam President, I turn my attention to the comments made by the new Senator. May I say my own words of congratulations to her? She was quite smooth for a first time. [*Interruption*]

Madam President: Sen. Mark and Sen. Dr. Gopeesingh!

Sen. The Hon. M. Abdul-Hamid: She said a few things to which I would like to respond. She spoke about the gaming industry and referred to them as caring about the poor and cited a few acts of goodwill they may have done. When I listened to her I saw her innocence and I saw her naiveté. She ought not to be misled. The captains of the gaming industry care only about money. They have no concern for the poor whatsoever. She should really disabuse her mind of that kind of interpretation.

The gaming industry is an industry that is primarily concerned about making profit. If we look at some industries that are questionable, for example, the illegal drug industry, what has become a characteristic of many of these drug lords is that within their community they may sponsor a basketball court, put lights and provide some form of entertainment for young people, claiming that they are doing good but, in fact, the destruction that they are bringing to the community far outweighs any good they might bring.

One ought not to look at gambling or such kind of activity or persons associated with that and see them performing what might appear to be an act of goodwill and conclude that they care about anybody other than themselves. Usually all these interventions are strategically intended to create an impression of themselves when in fact they have different motives.

Madam President, in this gambling industry—some of it was mentioned before—sometimes people with wealth can engage in certain behaviours and the consequences for them might not necessarily be as severe as those for poorer people who engage in exactly the same behaviour. A gentleman who earns $15,000 per month and gambles $5,000 out of that still has $10,000 on which to survive. His children can still eat and go to school. He can still pay the mortgage and so on. For somebody who earns $4,000 or $3,000 per month and gambles $3,000 per month, to these poor families it is the rice money, the pampers money, the dhal money, the lentil peas money, the black-eyed peas money; that is the money that is going into gambling. So the people who suffer the most as a consequence of the practice of gambling are those least able to afford, so the consequences for the poorer person are far more severe. So it astonishes me that a Senator can come to the Senate and say that poor people are surviving on gambling. It is incredible and unbelievable. This is their job.

The Senator said that there are no opportunities; what could they do; and looked down on the MuST and other programmes that we have. I am extremely proud of our programmes. Just to give an indication, we did a survey among some of our MuST graduates to get some of their views because the Senator asked: Should people learn to mix concrete? What is wrong with mixing concrete; can somebody tell me? An engineer is of no use without a mason. An engineer is of no use without a tile layer or a welder. In this world in which we live, skills are increasing in value. If you try to build a house and you get someone to build your kitchen cupboards, you will recognize that the woodworking gentleman, the carpenter, makes more money than you, because that is the value of skills in this economy.

Madam President, there is nothing to be ashamed of. That is a profession; it is a vocation of which anybody could be proud. The level of skills is being recognized all over the world. The level of skills for someone to be an efficient mason, what we call a Level 2, Level 3 mason, is now being assessed and certified and they are being integrated into the economy in a way that earns them the respect and the salaries we know that they deserve.

10.00 p.m.

Our MuST Programme—she spoke of a lack of opportunity, the Senator spoke about a lack of opportunity—we love it; we really do. It has done this country so much good.

Any trainee—we do not care. Our philosophy has been no one shall be left behind. We do not care if you are up in a tree or under a bed, bring yourself and come, it matters not that with which you come. Bring yourself and come.

If you are interested in the MuST Programme, there is MuST construction, tourism and hospitality. If you are in the construction sector, we can assign you to a training instructor and you would get instructions from a qualified training instructor. Sixteen trainees are assigned to this instructor. We take you on to a construction site, where you work alongside experienced workers and you learn the various skills, over a six-month period.

The Senator said that there is a lack of opportunity. We provide the trainees with all that they need. We provide them with the clothing they need, a hard hat, safety goggles, steel tip boots, a hammer, saw, measuring tape; all the tools that they need. On top of that, we provide a $60 a day stipend and insurance, in the event that they get injured. I am sure that deal is not available in any casino. This is at the cost of the people of the Government of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago. That is an opportunity that we have created, since 2004.

There is tourism and hospitality. If you are interested in the tourism and hospitality sector, we will partner with the hotels and restaurants where you can go and learn how to work. You can become an assistant chef or a chef, if you start in the kitchen. You can learn how to work at the front desk. You can learn to maintain rooms, maintain landscaping, maintain the compound, whatever it is. There is a wide range of skills available. Again, the same principle applies. You get all that you need and you get a stipend of $60 per day.

At Level 2 of MuST, it is a nine-month training programme, where you train and move from semi-skilled to skilled and there is a $90 per day stipend.

Since 2004, this Government of this country has been able to train over 10,000 persons in the Multi-sector Skills Training Programme. It is there and available. We have to go out and knock on doors and ask people: "Are you interested in the MuST Programme? Come." We have been doing that. We have been inviting people. We have gone so far as to go into the communities and invite them to come and participate in the programme. The programme is there for all.

Sometimes you might find a situation where there is a youth football tournament and we go and set up booths near to it, because we feel there are young people in the area. We register them to come and participate in the programme. We are in outreach mode.

If any of these casino workers might have two O levels or a few O levels, as the case might be or A levels, whatever they have, we have a programme for them. If they are not interested in construction, tourism and hospitality, we have the On-the-Job Training Programme. We recognize that you can be trained, you may not have on-the-job experience and you may not be able to get a job—that used to be the case when unemployment was 11 per cent—simply because you did not have experience. We saw that there was room and opportunity for the Government to make an intervention. The intervention the Government made was that we would create the job training opportunities, where you would learn on the job. We would find a job for you. Today in the On-the-Job Training Programme, if you come forward with O levels, we provide you with a $1,600 a month stipend; with A levels, the stipend is $2,500. If you have a degree, the stipend is $4,000 and you get your opportunity and job training experience for 12 months. You are given a job opportunity in the public or private sector for up to one year, where you gain the experience and learn what it takes to survive on the job.

There are retraining programmes; a wide range of skills. We train people—[*Interruption*]

Madam 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. Dr. L. Saith*]

Question put and agreed to.

Sen. The Hon. M. Abdul-Hamid: Thank you, Madam President and thanks to Senators. In addition to that, we have a retraining programme. The retraining programme has a wide range of skills. You can do landscaping, curtains and

draperies, cake baking and decorating, tailoring, barbering and heavy equipment operation. We teach people how to drive tractors and backhoes. Right now we have 100 persons learning to operate heavy machinery. As we speak—because we recognize the construction sector, it is very costly to the Government but we are spending the money on the people; investing in our people.

For the past five years, as I have said, we have had a wide range of programmes. It is a lovely programme because it is a mobile programme. You can go into different communities. We went into Talparo and did a tailoring course. We went into different areas and taught people a wide range of skills. It is not that they must go into construction, tourism and hospitality. We would provide training in different areas.

We have established a relationship with NEDCO. As people learn skills, all these casino workers can come and get skills training and then make an approach to NEDCO, where they can access a loan. Perhaps, they may not have been able to access a loan from the conventional banking sector, but they can approach NEDCO, where they would have access and we would work with them to help them build their business; small business as it might be.

Each programme we have also carries with it a life skills component because we recognize that people come from different areas. They may not have all the life skills that they need: how to work out problems, intra-personal and inter-personal issues, how to be parents, how to relate to your friends and deal with some of the social challenges that you might have and how to budget your money. It goes so far as to include some basic skills. Even hygiene is included. We teach people. We understand that some of our citizens may have come through, get to a certain age and are deficient in a number of areas. We do dispute resolution and conflict resolution; all of which are intended to produce a better citizen. As we provide them with the skills to allow them to earn, we are providing them also with life skills to allow them to lead a better life and to better manage their lives.

Normally, I do not like when Senators question the opportunities that are available. Mention was made of CDAP. They always come and create a gloomy atmosphere, but the population knows otherwise. CDAP offers medication for 11 chronic ailments. There are thousands of citizens out there who are benefiting from CDAP. Today, if you have diabetes or hypertension and you suffer from these chronic aliments, you can access medication free of charge. Today, in this country, over 250,000 citizens have been able to benefit from CDAP; something of which we are extremely proud. There is so much that this Government has been doing to improve the quality of life of our citizens. We aim to continue.

I have one point on the poverty line. Years ago people used to say that persons are living on US $2 per day. They assess that on the basis of what obtains in rural Africa, India, or Honduras, as the case might be, where all that you live on is the US $2 per day. In a country like Trinidad and Tobago, there are a number of services that are provided by the State, which are not calculated as you determine the income of individuals. If someone's income might be $1,500 per month, it does not take into account free tertiary education, free education, health care, transportation cost subsidized by the Government and housing and housing subsides. There are a number of variables which are not taken into account and they really remain absent from the calculation of the quality of life of an individual. That is something that some of our researchers, statisticians and academics have to interact with in order to be able to make that intervention to determine what is, indeed, the correct position.

There is one last thing on education which I want to mention. In 1988—they are talking about people from Laventille, Enterprise and Caledonia—the government of which some of them were a part, introduced, for the first time in the history of Trinidad and Tobago, a system of fees at the tertiary level. Even when the price of oil went to US $9 a barrel in 1986, this Government, the then PNM government, did not interfere with the tuition fees. They did not introduce any tuition fees at the university. They maintained a position that gave education a high priority, because if we argue that education is the vehicle for upward mobility, the doors of the vehicle must be open to all.

When, in 1988, fees were charged for the first time, we found ourselves in a situation where the citizens of Laventille—where this Senator sits today, alongside some of the people who made those kinds of decisions—were locked out of the university. The citizens of Enterprise were locked out of the university. The citizens of Caroni were locked out of the university. Only those who had the means to pay, were allowed access into the university. To do that, would inflict a serious blow on the equitable development of the country.

It took this Government, a PNM government, in 2006, once more, with a philosophical position that no one must be left behind, to adopt a position of free tertiary education, once more in the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago. This Government has invested in the young people of this country, so much so that we have been able to move the participation rate of tertiary education from 12 per cent to 33 per cent; doubling capacity and tripling capacity in some cases.

In addition to that free tuition, we have also introduced the Higher Education Loan Programme. Any one of those citizens who might be employed at a casino, who is complaining about the fear of being unemployed, can go back to school if

they want to. The Government would pay your tuition, not only at public institutions, at private institutions as well. If you have no A levels, you can still access the degree programme at one of the private institutions. The University of Trinidad and Tobago and UWI are making adjustments in their matriculation requirement to allow persons to come in.

At the Higher Education Loan Programme, if you do not have money to meet your transportation cost, your accommodation, books or personal maintenance, the Government will grant you a soft loan where you pay no interest and while you are studying, you will not be required to make payments. After you have graduated, six months, the loan becomes repayable and even then we still give you a 4 per cent discounted interest rate. All of that is intended to create opportunities for our people.

The Trinidad and Tobago that they look and see is not the Trinidad and Tobago that the population sees. It is not the Trinidad and Tobago that the 60,000 people who are enrolled in tertiary institutions, who have benefited from free tertiary education programmes, see. It is not the 10,000 who have participated and benefited from the MuST Programme. That is not the Trinidad and Tobago that they see. It is not the 6,000 who participated in the retaining. It is not the 30,000 who participated in the On-the-Job Training Programme. It is not the 150,000 young people who have benefited from the various programmes of the Government of Trinidad and Tobago.

We know that opportunities in Trinidad and Tobago abound. The unemployment rate is 5 per cent. Opportunities abound. Regardless of what they say, we look forward to—they spoke about it—an election with eager anticipation, confident that the people of Trinidad and Tobago will see a bright and prosperous Trinidad and Tobago and will see a Trinidad and Tobago of which they can be proud and do what is the only right thing, which is to return this Government to office.

Madam President, I thank you.

Sen. Parvatee Anmolsingh-Mahabir: Thank you, Madam President, for allowing me the opportunity to make a short contribution on the Bill before us, the Finance Bill, 2007.

Allow me to thank Ministers Kangaloo and Sahadeo for their further clarification with regard to the Senior Citizens' Grant because I, too, like some of the Senators, had some serious reservations about clause 11, but I have been enlightened. Thank you.

I must state also that in clause 12, the increase of the disability assistance is a move in the right direction and would assist, in no small way, those who are physically challenged in our midst, but more assistance is required. Madam President, you would be aware that some of those physically-challenged citizens need all the help that they can get.

I understand that Sen. The Hon. Abdul-Hamid went at great lengths and great pains to inform us that the dislocated workers in the gaming industry would have full access to alternative training, so that they can continue to earn a livelihood. I believe that a human face has now been put on that issue.

I want to refer to clause 19 of this Bill, the Miscellaneous Taxes Act, which deals with the Green Fund Advisory Committee. You may recall that the Second Report of the Joint Select Committee Appointed to enquire into and report on Government Ministries with responsibility for areas as listed in, Part One and on Statutory Authorities and State Enterprises falling under those Ministries was laid in the Senate and in the House of Representatives in May, 2007.

This report was based on an enquiry into the Ministry of Public Utilities and the Environment and its agencies. Chapter 3 of this report deals with the Green Fund. I am requesting that the findings and recommendations therein be given serious consideration by the Green Fund Advisory Committee mentioned in clause 19 of this Bill.

This Fund now stands at just over $1 billion and I am sure our citizens would want to be assured that the Fund would be used for the purpose for which it was established by the Finance Act of 2000.

Our environment is under siege by manmade and natural disasters and we need to take remedial measures to address these problems.

Sen. Phillip and Sen. Bro. Khan pointed out some of these problems that are facing us today and I do hope the Minister will take our suggestions on board.

I thank you.

Sen. Dr. Tim Gopeesingh: Madam President, if we use the hypothetical language and I have a son who joins a fundamentalist religious organization and has a brother-in-law in that fundamentalist religious organization, and my son is instructed by his brother-in-law to go and take part in an insurrection and instructs him to go to the airport, my son might be a little reluctant, I believe. Then the security forces reach at the airport before my son. “My son 'fraid to go there”. If my son “'fraid”, I believe he might run to the hills of Laventille. When he is

detected there, I believe, he might go into Patna Village and live in some drains and cylinders for two weeks and after the insurrection, my son come out. He now "geh" brave. We are talking about legislation and morality. My son's brother-in-law "get ah" big son in an organization, running the country. My son's brother-in-law sits as advisor to a big man in a big country and my son goes and begs a friend of mine for a job and my friend refuse him. What my son going to do?

Sen. Dr. Mc Kenzie: Come home.

Sen. Dr. T. Gopeesingh: He gone and ask his brother-in-law to give him a big job in "ah" Cabinet and the brother-in-law get "ah" big job for him in "ah" Cabinet. If my son now begin to take information from the Cabinet and gives his brother-in-law, "yuh" know what I feel will happen? I feel that is very sad. I would be disappointed with my son.

Then, when I see my son decide to go and build a house perched up on a mountain, costing nearly $5 million, then my son buys a car. He was a teacher before. My son is a teacher. He buys a car worth nearly $1 million. You know, I think I am a father, and I will not spare the rod to spoil the child. I going to report that son to the police. I going to report that son to the Integrity Commission.

And If I had a second son—I wish I had plenty sons, I wanted 11 children, to have a cricket team.

Madam President: I am waiting for you, like you were asking the Minister to tie it up with the Bill. I am waiting for you to tie it up to the Bill. But I want to ask a question here: How is it everybody has sons and no daughters?

Sen. Mark: That is a good point.

Sen. Dr. T. Gopeesingh: Madam President, it seems that the daughters are well behaved and the sons are badly behaved.

If my second son now decides to be as bad as my first son and my second decides—he was a lecturer at the university—he had enough of it and somebody offer him a job to come in "ah" Parliament and my son say: "Well all right, I will come." Any of my son—[*Interruption*]

Madam President: You are coming close to home.

Sen. Dr. T. Gopeesingh: Yeah. No, no. My son decide that he going to begin to use his office now to benefit himself and "ah" little radio station and a company give his company $3.4 million, I would want to know what that son is doing.

Madam President: Tie it up with the Bill now.

Sen. Dr. T. Gopeesingh: Then another company gave him another $1 million and my son says: "I not involved in that company, that company is a blind trust". I would be real disappointed with my son. I believe I would scold my son and probably take him to the Integrity Commission. That is it.

I will stop at two sons. We can continue with other sons at another time.

This Finance Bill asks us to sanction amendments on 22 different Acts. Approximately 10 of these Acts revolve around one simple issue which I am about to mention. What is this big hullabaloo about the amendment of 10 areas speaking about pension? How much money is being discussed in these 10 areas that are being amended? It is a mere $100 here and $150 there. All that we are discussing is increasing pensions by $100 or $150. Many of these clauses, approximately 10, really deal with changing the pension by approximately $100 or $150. Many of these clauses talk about different variations between a salary of $1,000 or $12,000 or $24,000 per year. They will get an increased allowance of $150. The real situation is what significant difference is that making to the lives of the people with $100 here and $100 there.

Forty-eight per cent of this population is working for less than $3,000 and 34 per cent of the population is working for less than $2,000 per month. It is well acknowledged, by your administration, that someone needs to have at least $1,700 per month to live on food alone. One of your Ministers mentioned that, and it was reported in the newspaper, to survive on food alone, you need at least $1,700.

We are quibbling about a pension of $1,050 and $50 here and $100 there and the real fact is that even though these senior citizens are getting pensions of $1,050 or $1,100, they are still under a lot of stress to survive.

Sen. Sahadeo: It is $1,350.

Sen. Dr. T. Gopeesingh: Whether it is, $1,350, $1,250 or $1,150, it is still below the survival, as acknowledged by one of the Ministers in their administration. We are really discussing nothing. We should be talking about moving this pension to something that is substantial and not less than $2,000 per month. We are fiddling with issues here today and amending 10 different Acts, when we know that is not going to make people comfortable.

That is the first fundamental issue I wanted to deal with. I want to deal with the Bill clause by clause and to indicate that the first area that we want to discuss is the question of clause 5, the Gambling and Betting Act. It is said that the Government is totally against the operation of casinos and all casino-type

establishments. That is what Minister Enill mentioned. He said that studies have shown the link between gaming activities and the erosion of societies. I do not think that there is any empirical data that he can utilize to substantiate that statement. That statement was made by the hon. Minister in his introduction.

Why leave that as has been mentioned and why remove the casino and the aspect of gaming and leave the Lotto, Quick Pick and horse racing? Again, we want to reemphasize that is double standards. It is fundamentally wrong, the thinking is illogical, that you want to remove casinos when you are making the statement that there is a link between gaming activities and the erosion of societies and you want to leave all the other areas of gambling untouched. If you have a fundamental sweep, you must make a fundamental sweep and not do it for one area and not the others.

My colleagues have touched on the question or have said it a few times. Your administration wants to convert the pension to a grant, but you want to have the ability to remove it altogether. Why can you—[*Interruption*]

Madam President: Are you speaking to the Bench, or to me?

Sen. Dr. T. Gopeesingh: To you, Madam President. I always want to speak with you, but I mentioned their administration. What would be important is, if they want this Bill to be passed and for us to accept that, they must remove the areas of decrease or abolishing the special grant. We would not support any type of grant where you want to reduce it or abolish it altogether. Many of our colleagues have spoken about a universal pension that should be put on.

There are many citizens in Trinidad and Tobago who retired in the 1980s and early 1990s, and in those days salaries were low. They are taking home pensions less than $1,000; $700 or $800. They are senior members of the society. Today, they are finding it extremely difficult to survive, as a result of those outdated pensions. Even though you add whatever amount of money to make up the $1,350, as the Minister indicated, that is still very insufficient for people to live on at the moment. It is morally wrong and we should not subject any type of citizen who has worked his or her life in Trinidad and Tobago and gave their service over a number of years, to be "scrunting" in the latter parts of their years. This should be looked at critically and this administration should ensure that they revise the pensions on a number of these citizens who had their pensions dating back from the 1980s and early 1990s.

It will not cost the country anything. When they say $2.1 million will be utilized for pensions and grants, if we had a system—do not forget people are contributing national insurance premiums on a monthly basis which go to the NIB.

The NIB has approximately $15 billion at its disposal. If the NIB were to utilize this money effectively and efficiently and invest it, they would be able to get $1.5 billion or $2 billion per year, where they can pay our citizens without touching the Consolidated Fund. Why can we not utilize the money that everybody pays on a weekly basis, to the NIB? They could utilize the $15 billion in good investment and generate enough funding, so that the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago will benefit from the investments of the NIB. We do not have to take any money from the central funding. It is very important.

We know that there are many countries that are lagging behind in pension reform and we are one of those countries. There are countries that are lagging behind by 20 years. I think we are lagging behind by 30 years.

There are people who contribute to pensions day in and day out, at certain workplaces and at the end of it all, some of these companies go bust, there is no issue of transferability of pension from one company to another and these people are left without pension, even though they have contributed 5 per cent of their salaries month to month, over a period of years, and they are getting nothing for it.

What about those people who are, outside of the range of $24,050? Because they have worked in certain areas and they are getting a pension from their company of $2,000 per month, which they have earned over a number of years, why is it not right for the State also to give these people a pension, once they have reached 65? It is not because they are getting $24,000 from a pension they derived having worked with their employers. They should be entitled to a pension from the State and it should be a right of the State to give pension to these people, no matter what they are working for. It should be a fundamental right. I have reached 65, I have worked in Trinidad and Tobago, I have given myself up to the country, I have reached the age of retirement and the State should take care of me, to a certain extent. What I earned from other pensions is what I gave in and earned previously, but the State has a responsibility.

Hon. Senator: Do you want a pension?

Sen. Dr. T. Gopeesingh: Not as yet. I have my own pension. [*Interruption*] No, Madam President, once you are in politics you become a pauper. You know that.

The hon. Minister said that the Government is committed to caring for all citizens of Trinidad and Tobago, particularly the most vulnerable—we do not see any evidence of that, by giving pensions of $1,050 or $1,200—including our senior citizens.

He spoke of the conditions, including access to free medical care and drugs. I do not want this Government to try to fool people that they are giving them free medical care and drugs. The people are entitled to free medical care and drugs. It is an entitlement. You want the people to be paying for medical care and drugs? They are making it appear as though they are giving them some degree of service—I am giving you free medical care and drugs. It is a fundamental right of every citizen to get adequate health care. Do not make it appear as though you are doing something good for the people. I can talk for hours on the health care system, which we would not go into today.

Volumes 1, 2, and 3 of the Gafoor Report have made damning condemnations of the health sector. In fact, the Minister of Health should resign on this and this Government should move out, just because of those condemnations in the Gafoor Report. I do not think it—How could you all sit comfortably and see what this report has said about your administration in health and then begin to say anything about giving free medical care? It is the worst type of medical care that any administration has given to its citizens in Trinidad and Tobago at any time in the history of Trinidad and Tobago. People are sleeping on floors, defecating on the wards, and taking beds out of the hospital, bringing beds into the hospital, there are cockroaches and rats in the kitchen, people falling through the laboratories, 23 babies died from enterobacter bacteria and we go on and on. It is a nightmare in the health sector, so do not try to fool the people, hon. Minister and say that you are caring for all the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago, including access to free medical care and drugs.

Another myth and fallacy they have tried to bring on to this population is the question of CDAP. Every administration used to be purchasing pharmaceuticals to give to the patients free. The patients are entitled to free medication. It is the UNC that started giving drugs to patients with hypertension and diabetes. It is not the PNM Government that started CDAP. We started CDAP. They expanded the number of drugs that they are giving.

What is fundamentally wrong is that the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago should be able to receive their pharmaceuticals at their communities and health centres where they live, provided that doctors, nurses, and pharmacists should be there. There should be an adequate supply of pharmaceuticals at the 105 health centres. Then people will not have to go to private pharmacies, under CDAP and say that the Government is bringing CDAP free to the people. The people were supposed to have been receiving free pharmaceuticals in the first place. Why are you sending them out from their communities and near to their health centre to pharmacies for CDAP?

The issue on CDAP is that these pharmaceuticals are making patients worse. They are not working. Patients with diabetes and hypertension are getting worse. The glaucoma and arthritis are getting worse. They are bringing ZClass pharmaceuticals into the country because it is cheap; handing it down to the population and many people are turning their backs on the pharmaceuticals, because these things are making them sicker. That is enough I would say, as far as this issue is concerned.

Then we go on to speak on clause 12 which amends section 11A(3) of the Public Assistance Act, Chap 32:03, to increase the disability assistance grant from $800 to $900. A person who is disabled is only getting $800 and you have the temerity to say that you are increasing by $100 to $900. The hon. Minister said that there are 16,000 persons benefiting from this grant. If you add $100, how much would the country be giving to these people? It is $1.6 million.

This administration has spent $200 billion, one-fifth of $1 trillion over the last five and one-half years. You want to give people with disabilities $100 more. How could disabled persons go to get the disability grant? How do they move around to beg for $900? What can $900 do for disabled persons, when they have to get somebody to look after them? This is shameful for you to try to pass legislation and ask us to amend something to increase something by $100. That is untenable.

The other question in disability—Madam President will know this—is that the whole decision of who is a disabled person proves to be a nightmare. Then somebody has to write up that this person is 100 per cent disabled or 70 per cent disabled. For the handicapped persons to get that type of letter is a nightmare. They go from place to place. They cannot get the letter and they are frustrated at the end of it. This is why there are only 16,000 people benefiting from the low thing of $900. [*Interruption*] If that happens that is morally wrong. Nobody should be charging any poor patient any money for that type of thing. There should be a system whereby they can go and get the grant very easily. It should not be $900. It should be more than a pension of $1,300.

The Minister says that he wants us to amend clause 16(1), section 10(9) and (10) of the Income Tax Act. The provisions deal with deductions in tertiary education expenses. He said that the amendment contained in the Bill corrects this error, so as to achieve the intention of limiting the claim for tertiary education expenses to foreign institutions other than regional public institutions. Why not regional institutions? Why are people who are educating their children in the Caribbean region not benefiting from this provision? Even though certain

governments pay to upkeep certain universities and institutions in the Caribbean, the parents still have to pay for their children in upkeep allowance, boarding allowance and food. This is in the Caribbean, in the region. Why should only people who are sending their children out of the region benefit from it? Why should all children who are within the region, their families or parents, who are supporting them, not benefit from this process? It should not be for extraregional only, but it must also include the region.

This Government is speaking about tertiary education. The Minister said in his preamble that the Government continued its programme of pursuing policies designed towards improving the quality of life of the people of Trinidad and Tobago. He said that to this end, the Government was able to achieve the goal of offering free tertiary education for all citizens.

This administration is unable to provide the necessary secondary education for the young children. A senior advisor to the Minister of Education has landed a contract for development of an asset register and computerized maintenance management system for the Ministry of Education. That is for the Ministry of Education, for all schools.

A circular was sent—they are talking about doing something for tertiary education when they cannot do it for secondary education—to all schools, informing all principals of schools in a letter dated February 27, 2007, by the Permanent Secretary indicating:

> "This circular memorandum serves to introduce representatives of the consulting firm Global Competitive Strategies Limited."

The Ministry of Education has contracted Global Strategies Limited—I want the hon. Minister to listen to this—to:

> "1. Develop a detailed asset register for each school; and
>
> 2. Implement a computerized maintenance management system that can be accessed via the Internet.
>
> This project involves:
>
> 1. The collection of physical information on school buildings, car parks, recreation grounds, all other facilities; and
>
> 2. The physical inventory by room of the school furniture, computers and other electronic equipment, office equipment, lab and other equipment.
>
> Please verify the identification of the representatives of Global Competitive Strategies Limited as they enter the school and extend the necessary courtesies and assistance to them as required."

Do you know who is Global Competitive Strategies Limited? Global Competitive Strategies Limited is a company belonging to Mr. Kenrick Harrison Burgess, who is a civil engineer and his wife, who is a teacher. Mr. Burgess is special advisor to the hon. Minister of Education in the Ministry of Education. We want to ask the hon. Minister—[*Interruption*]

Sen. Manning: On a point of order. Madam President, that information is not true. Mr. Burgess is not a special advisor to the Minister of Education.

Sen. Dr. T. Gopeesingh: We want the hon. Minister to indicate to this Senate what is his position in the Ministry of Education? That is one answer.

The second question is what tendering procedure was used to give Global Competitive Strategies Limited that contract?

Sen. Manning: Put it in a question.

Sen. Dr. T. Gopeesingh: We understand that there was no tendering process and that runs into millions and millions of dollars. This contract will go on for years because there are approximately 700 schools that have to be looked at. This contract was given to Global Competitive Strategies Limited, owned by Mr. Burgess and his wife who has majority shares. His wife is Margaret Deslima Burgess. When the company was formed she was a teacher; now she is an attorney-at-law. We have been able to get the information from year to year, under the Companies Register, to indicate who the owners of Global Competitive Strategies Limited are.

We are talking about tertiary education and here it is, right under the nose of the Minister of Education, you have contracts being given. This is the same Mr. Burgess who wrote the IADB report to condemn the Biche High School. That is the same Mr. Burgess who did it.

Sen. Mark: Pay back time, corruption.

Sen. Dr. T. Gopeesingh: That is the same Mr. Burgess who sits with the hon. Minister of Education, threatening the denominational boards to sign the memorandum of understanding in the Concordat. Here it is you have somebody sitting with the hon. Minister of Education, making threats to the denominational boards that they must sign the memorandum of understanding, but receiving millions and millions of dollars on contract.

Sen. Jeremie SC: Madam President, to clarify the record. I sit on those meetings with the denominational boards and I never heard Mr. Burgess speak. I think he sits in the meetings, but I have never heard him speak, so he makes no threats.

Sen. Dr. T. Gopeesingh: We understand from reliable sources. I have been told by a senior member of a denominational board that, in fact, there are threats made to the denominational boards, as far as signing the memorandum of understanding.

We want to find out from the hon. Minister today, what is his role in the Ministry of Education, whether there was any tendering for this contract and how he got the contract? They have a lot to answer on that.

Madam President: Come back to the Bill now.

Sen. Dr. T. Gopeesingh: Massive corruption. I am on the Bill, because the Minister referred to that in clause 16(1). He referred to the claim for tertiary education expenses to foreign institutions other than regional public institutions. He said that regional public institutions benefit under the GATE Programme.

We are hearing about GATE, GATE and GATE. Do you know that this country is confused? Students who want to have tertiary education do not know which institutions are providing GATE, up to what percentage you get, whether UWI post graduate programmes give GATE or which educational institutions students can go to and get GATE. Why does their administration not put out some strong information such as, these are the institutions under GATE, these are the programmes under GATE where you can register and have your tuition fees paid? There are a number of institutions where students have to pay 50 per cent and they say that GATE is free for everyone. In the MBA programme at the Institute of Business, students pay $50,000 and the Government pays $50,000. There is lack of clarity in the whole issue of GATE.

Clause 16(1)(d) repeals section 10B of the Income Tax Act, which makes provision for a human resource developmental allowance. A similar provision in the Corporation Tax Act was repealed in the Finance Act, 2006. That deals with the human resource development allowance that a number of companies have been getting over a period of time.

I want to proffer that, instead of giving tax allowances for human resource development, which is sometimes abused—everything comes under human resource development. If someone goes on a foreign trip because the company sent them to do business, they may put that travel as human resource development. What it should be doing is giving the tax incentive for training within the organization and for employment.

A number of these organizations and businesses should be given tax incentives to allow apprentices, not apprentices in the normal sense of the word, but people who can come into the businesses and work there and be employed for a part of the time, in training, and the Government gives an incentive allowance for those type of workers in these businesses, rather than giving the allowance for human resource development. It is something for you all to consider when you do your next budget. Because at this moment—that is your election budget.

Then there is the question of—the hon. Minister in the Ministry of Finance has to clear up—the $60,000 allowance. They speak about wear and tear, education and personal allowance. Where does wear and tear fit in? Does this $60,000 include the wear and tear, the education allowance and the personal allowance? This is not clear in this piece of legislation. We want to know what the $60,000 includes. Does it include all? Is that the maximum that you can benefit from?

Clause 16(1)(g) states that the amendment would prohibit the set off of any losses against employment or professional income.

A number of my colleagues in my profession, also in nursing and other professions go for update courses. It will affect many of us in Parliament. They leave their employment for a while and go to programmes where they can update themselves and all expenses that are incurred, as a result of it, none of it is tax-allowable. Madam President, you know that. A number of professionals are not allowed to claim for the expenses incurred in advancing your own training and development. Something is fundamentally wrong there, because they have been clamouring for it for a long time. They have had no voices on this, but it is something that all professionals would like to see included in any tax allowance, so that what is expended in the development process, once it is legitimate—they go on courses for their own personal development—there should be some allowance made for it.

Section 16(1)(h) speaks about life insurance polices and the 5 per cent tax on the surrender value. There are other policies, besides the life insurance policies, which need to be looked at. The number one is the health insurance policies.

People are taken advantage of with health insurance policies. A normal person working in the public service pays their money to health insurance plans and when it is time to claim from these insurance companies, they get the biggest rigmarole and runaround and it is minuscule payment that they will receive from their health insurance policies.

It affects thousands and thousands of lives. When someone falls ill—this Government knows that they cannot provide the type of care for any citizen because patients go into a hospital and die and are afraid to go into public institutions and they want to go to private institutions—they do not get the type of health care in public institutions.

When they rely on the health policies and they find that their bill comes up to $25,000 or $30,000, these health insurance companies give them $6,000 or $7,000. They have to spend the rest of two years paying back the loans for medical care. Medical care is expensive privately.

When we speak about insurance policies, taxation and allowances, kindly look at the whole question of allowances for health policies. Health policies are critically important, at this time, because all the people of Trinidad and Tobago are suffering because of bad health care. Everybody is trying to take out a health insurance policy.

Clause 17, new section 16 provides for a tax deduction for improved property development companies. Such companies are entitled to a deduction equal to 15 per cent of the capital expenditure on the construction of commercial or industrial buildings. This is what the Minister indicated.

Accordingly, the deduction would only be granted where construction commenced before December 31, 2005 and is completed by December 31, 2007. Is this piece of legislation being brought to facilitate friends, families and party supporters, so that they can benefit from this allowance? It is 15 per cent of any construction. Some of these constructions now run into $20 million and $30 million, so 15 per cent of $30 million is equivalent to $4.5 million. What is even worse is that every time we come to Parliament we are asked to enact some type of legislation which would be retroactive.

Any law student will tell you that the law books worldwide—the Judiciary frowns upon retroactive legislation and laws. Why is it that every time this Government comes, it is always some retroactive legislation to benefit some friends, party supporters and party hacks? It is wrong. That is not hotel incentive; that is retroactive.

11.00 p.m.

Madam President, I come now to the Green Fund Advisory Committee which is clause 19. Section 64 of the Miscellaneous Taxes Act says:

> "The purpose of the fund is to financially assist organizations and community groups that are primarily engaged in activities related to the remediation, reforestation and conservation of the environment."

The Green Fund was established in 2001, and the fund has been sitting idle, and as election begins to draw near, suddenly the Government has awakened to the need for a Green Fund. By virtue of clause 65(2) the Minister is authorized to disburse funds for approved projects.

Section 68 says:

> "The Minister with responsibility for the environment shall, within four months from the end of a financial year, submit to Parliament a report on the management, of the activities financed by the Green Fund."

Madam President, we are aware that there has never been a report submitted to date; no accountability for the money spent. None! This Parliament enacted a requirement for accountability for the use of the citizens' fund, and we never had the courtesy of a report on this Green Fund from 2001 but, suddenly, in an election year, we are hearing about bringing the Green Fund to assist organizations financially. Is this going to be another NEDCO? Is this going to be another CEPEP where you give out funds? This fund is also $900 million. Is this going to be another CEPEP with $1.2 billion and another NEDCO where money is being given out for loans on a regular basis? Who are they going to account to?

Madam 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. W. Mark*]

Question put and agreed to.

Sen. Dr. T. Gopeesingh: Thank you colleagues. Madam President, the point is that we are not in favour of this matter moving further until we begin to get reports in Parliament about this Green Fund. We are not prepared to support anything like this, because we know what the consequences are in terms of accountability and transparency. Madam President, the Government will then come and say that they have removed this from the Freedom of Information Act like what they did with NEDCO. So, nobody would be able to get any information as to what is happening with the money, and $900 million would be given to friends, families and party hacks.

What is the Government's policy on the environment? Does the Government have a policy on the environment? The Government is destroying forested areas and you are putting smelters. You are allowing the hills to burn and you are talking about afforestation before you ensure that the hills do not burn. There are

people putting up homes high on the hills and cutting down the hills thus allowing desilting. Where is the Town and Country Planning as far as this matter is concerned? That is why Sen. Mark brought up the whole question of the twin towers in Shoreland. Where is the environmental policy on it? Madam President, this is unacceptable, in terms of seeing that the Government wants to bring a Green Fund in terms of reforestation and so forth.

Madam President, Minister Enill indicated and this was his quote—I wish the Minster would hear this: He said that there are several countries that have benefited from oil and other commodity booms, remained immersed in economic difficulties and with uncertain economic prospects. It seems as though this country is heading down that precipitous decline that he spoke about. As a country, we are on the pathway to economy difficulties by virtue of what is happening in the energy sector.

Madam President, the largest state-owned oil company, Petrotrin, which is supposed to be generating considerable wealth for our nation is failing to do so. What is the Minister talking about when he says that this country is getting to economic development? The 2004 report plan to upgrade cited several major safety hazards for workers and a serious breach in tendering procedures. The breach in tendering resulted in the company and, consequently, taxpayers losing over $100 million at Petrotrin.

A performance investigation report conducted by an independent team of eight industry experts was commissioned by Petrotrin's Executive Chairman, Mr. Malcolm Jones, in February 2004 to probe cost overruns and the delay in the plant upgrade. The Minister talked about an economic boom due to the energy sector, and this job took place from October 2003 to February 2004. It was conducted by a south-based contractor Cudjoe Construction and Industry Services Limited (CCISL).

According to the contract between CCISL and Petrotrin, the job was originally supposed to last 42 days at a cost of $22 million. This is the economic development in the energy sector—this report deems CCISL completely inadequate to handle the job, and noted that because of the company's lack of expertise, the project was completed in 102 days at a cost of $126 million, a whopping $104 million overrun.

Madam President, we understand that the hon. Minister in the Ministry of Finance, Sen. The Hon. Christine Sahadeo was interviewed by the Integrity Commission on this matter. The Minister in the Ministry of Finance did an internal audit. I believe that was Minister Conrad Enill. Where are the findings of that audit if we are to benefit from oil?

Two years later, nothing has been said and done about this matter. We understand the close friendship between the hon. Prime Minister and his best friend, the senior official of Petrotrin, Mr. Malcolm Jones. Remember he said:

"No better friend do I have than him." Why has there been no ministerial action by Sen. The Hon. Christine Sahadeo? Why has there been no action by Sen. The Hon. Conrad Enill? Why has there been no action by Prime Minister Manning? Why has there been no action by the Integrity Commission in all of this? There is a deafening silence on this matter in that Petrotrin/Cudjoe Report which cost this country over $100 million more. Why no police action has been taken on this matter? This administration has a lot to answer as far as this matter is concerned.

I just want to go on a bit and talk about what Sen. The Hon. Christine Sahadeo said. She said that this Bill is to improve the benefits to citizens, and they are now expanding the base by 20,000 more citizens. If you are expanding the base by 20,000 more citizens, do you think that is anything significant for the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago, because the limit has moved from 12,000 a year to 24,000? The people deserve that. If you increase the base by 20,000 at $1,000 per month—that is about $20 million—what is the big thing about that? For the year it would be $240 million. [*Interruption*] Well, that is important but give them more. You boasted that you have expanded the base by 20,000. I want you to answer the question I just asked. I wish that you will answer that question and the hon. Minister of Education will also answer the question that I asked. If you do not want to get up to speak, then you could ask Minister Enill to answer the question on your behalf.

Madam President, do you know what is very sad? They speak about this all the time. The hon. Minister talked about Caroni (1975) Limited, and do you know that the Caroni (1975) Limited's plan is not funded? There is a fellow who worked for 47 years in Caroni (1975) Limited in a senior position and, today, do you know what his pension is? His pension is $138 per month. They were promised $2,000 per month. They have contributed 5 per cent of their salaries for years, and this is what they are getting. You have a lot of explanation to give. All Caroni (1975) Limited workers should be given a minimal pension of $1,100 that they are talking about.

The Minister talked about the training programmes for Caroni (1975) Limited workers, but she is not able to say how many are employed. She said that they made a special arrangement so that those who are employed could have come in late when the plots were given out. She talked about 6,000 plots being given out from 20,000 plots that have been completed already. Sen. Wade Mark and the joint select committee could tell you that most of these plots were not given to former Caroni (1975) Limited workers. In fact, many of them are saying that they do not have any legal title to any of this land. It is very unfortunate that the

Minister could come to Parliament today and keep trying to blow her own trumpet about Caroni (1975) Limited this and Caroni (1975) Limited that, when the people are really suffering.

They talked about employment and those persons in central Trinidad have a distinct capacity for survival. They have found employment for themselves. The Government has not facilitated employment for them. So, do not believe that by virtue of your training—you could train persons now in ad infinitum, but find the jobs for them. You have not been able to find the jobs for them.

We have a parliamentary secretary who was a Member of the PNM in the 1960s, and he is receiving a pension of $500. If this economy collapses, we wonder what is going to happen with all these public servants who rely on their pensions. The State will not be able to pay their pensions. When Argentina's economy fell, people went to the square and hung themselves because they could not survive. This might happen in Trinidad and Tobago under this regime—punishing the people and spending one-fifth of a trillion dollars in five years, and one cannot do anything about it.

The hon. Minister talked about improving the quality of life and the well being of citizens of Trinidad and Tobago and, what is happening? The crime rate is going up. There are 144 murders to date. Today there have been five murders in 24 hours. When we speak about improving the quality of life and well-being of citizens of Trinidad and Tobago, we performed. We improved the quality of lives of the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago.

The United National Congress would like to extend to the family of young Hodge, whose ruins were found in the fire today. We want to extend our deepest sympathy to his family who is in bereavement at this time.

Madam President, I have raised some questions, particularly for the hon. Minister of Education to answer, as far as Global Competitive Strategies Limited is concerned and Mr. Burgess. We want to know what tendering process took place and how much is his contract; how many millions of dollars.

I want the hon. Ministers in the Ministry of Finance to explain why they have not been able to do anything about this Petrotrin/Cudjoe Report, because they are talking about the energy sector moving forward. If you have massive corruption right here in the health sector under your eyes, and for two years you have not been able to do anything, Madam President, it is a sad state for this administration.

I can go on and ask about LABIDCO where the Commissioner of Police was supposed to do work there since 2002; five years ago. We know that nothing has been done about that and nothing will be done by this administration. It implicates four senior members of this present administration.

Madam President, we find it difficult to support this Bill, because this Bill does not do anything for the poor people. It really does not do anything substantial and, in fact, what this Bill wants to do is to transfer the pension to a grant. They want to be able to remove this grant or decrease this grant, and for that alone we cannot support this Bill.

Madam President, thank you very much. [*Desk thumping*]

The Minister of Community Development, Culture and Gender Affairs (Sen. The Hon. Joan Yuille-Williams): Madam President, I know it is late; happily for me, my colleague Sen. Mustapha Abdul-Hamid did mention some of the things that I would have liked to speak about this evening. I think I would be failing in my responsibility if I did not answer a few of the comments that I heard and to speak to my new friend Sen. Cindy Gibbs-Nicholas, who joined us this evening.

Before I do so, would you permit me to introduce my hypothetical son as well? [*Laughter*] I want to make five statements about my hypothetical son, and I need your permission at the beginning. I also want to get the opportunity to make two statements about my hypothetical son's best friend. Do I have your permission?

Madam President: Yes.

Sen. The Hon. J. Yuille-Williams: I have a hypothetical son, and do you know why I want to talk about my son? In this Parliament, from where I sit, I have been the victim of slander and, therefore, it is nice to talk about your son in this Parliament. You see, I understand why that has been happening. I have a hypothetical son who once lived at Flag Staff, government property, and he was still receiving allowances whilst there.

I have a son who had three cars at a certain office. I investigated those three cars. I wonder how he could have three cars in a system which permitted one at a time.

Sen. Mark: Who is that son? I have a daughter who was staying at Hilton Hotel.

Sen. The Hon. J. Yuille-Williams: I have a son who, when I access the legitimate privileges afforded to a Senator who lives in San Fernando, and which is also extended to my colleagues who live in Tobago—tonight we would probably have to access the legitimate privileges. Strange enough, my son visits me or snoops around 6 o'clock in the morning. If I am walking I can see my son on the premises; not having the same privileges, but my son gets around there at the privileges of the Hilton. [*Laughter*] Then my son reports to the Parliament about the fact that I can access the privileges. He even went further to have the Integrity Commission investigate, so much so that I got a letter from the Integrity Commission which says that they found nothing wrong with my accessing privileges afforded to me as a Member of this House.

Sen. Mark: Who is that son? I have a daughter—

Sen. The Hon. J. Yuille-Williams: I suppose sometimes Members of Parliament do not allow other Members to speak so that the noise would drown out what you are saying, and the public will not hear about my son.

Sen. Mark: We want to know about your daughter.

Sen. The Hon. J. Yuille-Williams: I have a son who has a best friend who is very photogenic, high moral values and good family life, so much so that I feel that I am going to use some of those beautiful photographs of family life, very shortly, on all the walls of one of the places that I work. [*Interruption*]

I also have a son who has a profession—I just want to end with this one—who went to the Mount Hope Hospital recently, and asked for the files of my colleague, Mrs. Camille Robinson-Regis. The files were only taken away by a senior member, as the junior member was about to hand it over. When I spoke to my hypothetical son's friend, he said he had a reason for so doing. I wanted to introduce my friend, and the research continues on both. It is 11.20 p.m. so, therefore, let me move on.

In the Parliament tonight, I want to respond to the new Senator, Sen. Cindy Gibbs-Nicholas. Before I do that, I listened to Sen. Dr. Jennifer Kernahan, and I still cannot understand two things about her. Whenever she speaks, she tries to humiliate a certain class of workers. [*Desk thumping*] This is nothing more than humiliating. [*Desk thumping*] This is a class of workers who are doing a decent job and a very honest job—NIS and health insurance are paid and everything is done for them—and they try to make this country look good. They have done training in landscaping and they have now expanded their business—young entrepreneurs—and they have gone further. Why do you stay in this Parliament

and say things to those hundreds of persons who work with CEPEP or URP in a humiliating way? I am going to tell you how humiliating this is. I do not believe that sometimes Sen. Dr. Kernahan remembers, because I hear her say: Why do they want to dress well? It means to say, in thinking, you forget that is not the important thing. Those same persons work honestly so that they can take their money and use it to dress. Do not humiliate the workers; do not do it. There is certain dignity in labour.

Madam President, for example, Sen. Dr. Kernahan is an agriculturist and she knows the land. Because they do the work to improve the environment that you talk about so much, you would criticize the work that they do.

Sen. Dr. Kernahan: You put them at the side of the road to work.

Sen. The Hon. J. Yuille-Williams: You hear it. We put them at the side of the road to work. You would hear people coming in to this country and talking about the cleanliness. Where did the landscapers come from? They are the same persons who have been trained and are doing an honest profession, and those same persons have businesses, and some of them have added others to it. Do not criticize them and do not humiliate them.

Madam President: Minister, just give me an opportunity please. Sen. Mark and Sen. Dr. Kernahan, you all had a chance. You were allowed to say what you had to say, and you criticized who you had to criticize. Would you let the Minister make her contribution now, please? Go ahead Minister.

Sen. Dr. Saith: Especially Sen. Dr. Kernahan.

Sen. The Hon. J. Yuille-Williams: Do you know what has surprised me? Yes, the sugar industry is closed, and I am hearing everybody saying: why are we moving these persons off the land. Just think about what you are saying. [*Interruption*] You know exactly what I am saying. At the same time, you have persons working the land in different ways. If you look at what I am talking about you are going to understand what I am saying. All I am asking you to do is not to humiliate anyone. There is dignity in labour and uphold it. [*Desk thumping*] Do not humiliate them.

Madam President, I listened to Sen. Gibbs-Nicholas and I want to compliment her for her focus. [*Desk thumping*] I have been listening to her for a long time. She has a group of persons that she wants to lead. One of the things that I know is that so far she has been able to resist, to some extent, that political kind of focus influence on her. Even though this evening she sits there as a UNC Senator, I do not think so far that she has been led in that way.

Sen. Mark: That is her right.

Madam President: Please, Sen. Mark.

Sen. The Hon. J. Yuille-Williams: She said thanks for the opportunity to be in the Parliament to make her statement. She sits there and she was able to tell us—

Sen. Mark: Are you withdrawing your amendment? Sorry.

Madam President: I am tired of sorry, because it means nothing.

Hon. Senators: Put him out.

Madam President: Continue, Minister.

Sen. The Hon. J. Yuille-Williams: I suppose that when they do not want to hear what you are saying, they try to disturb you so that the national community would not hear you when they make those noises. At the end she said: "Citizens just do not know who to vote for." That in itself is a statement which means that even though she sits there, she is still focused and you have not been able to engulf her. [*Desk thumping*] I want to compliment her because you have a cause, and do not let the politics move you. Keep your focus. You should feel very hurt when she said that she just does not know who to vote for.

More importantly, I listened to her when she talked about the offer of training for her workers. I am not saying that she does not have a cause and she does not wish to speak for her persons. Training was offered, and as far as I know, they have not accepted the training. I want to say that whether you stay in the job—whether the industry closes or not—it is always good to accept training. Do not turn it down.

I have a young nephew who worked at Caroni (1975) Limited. I begged him to go and take his O levels, and he said that he would do that for me. His mother died. He did his O levels and he went to work at Caroni (1975) Limited as a clerk. I could not get him to go any further. Now, Caroni (1975) Limited has closed its doors, and he has accepted the training to do a certificate in management at the School of Business and Continuing Studies, and he has moved on and he is completing a degree in Business Management at the university. [*Desk thumping*] He got his land—the spot for his house and his agricultural holdings—but, more important to me, it was almost as if he was forced to use that training to move on. You cannot believe that it is the same person. I want to tell you that whatever happens, accept the training.

Sen. Dr. Tim Gopeesingh went and sat next to the hon. Senator for support. I know she did not need that kind of support. That is not the kind of support that she wanted. She did not want that kind of physical support, because she is a strong woman. That same person who sat next to you is a medical doctor.

Sen. Abdul-Hamid: A sick medical doctor. [*Laughter*]

Madam President: Minister, you really should not be using that would—you would have to withdraw that word.

Sen. Abdul-Hamid: Yes.

Sen. Dr. Gopeesingh: You cannot step in my shoes.

Madam President: He has withdrawn the word. Continue.

Sen. The Hon. J. Yuille-Williams: He is a medical doctor with many years experience. He was the chairman of one of the Regional Health Authorities. That same doctor went recently to UWI and did his Masters in Management. He went and did further training. He is still a doctor. I do not know what he is doing with the management training, but he recognized the importance of training. I want you to just take a note of that. As far as I am concerned, you were not encouraged to take your group for further training, but he did. I do not know why he did not pass that on to you. The support that he should give you is advice. Do not turn down the training that the Government is offering you. Do not turn it down. [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. Gibbs-Nicholas: No training was offered.

Sen. The Hon. J. Yuille-Williams: I am just saying this, not as an opponent, but as someone who I feel I want to identify with her call. Look at the kind of statements that you make and be careful. In your contribution you said: "What programmes do you have? Programmes to mix concrete or to rear rabbits or to put up fish farms in Laventille?" Let us look at that statement. Those are serious issues. I would go beyond mixing concrete as masonry. If we do not learn to mix the concrete and move further in this same construction industry which is booming, the Chinese will always be here with us. I am not saying to leave what you are doing. That is not my problem, but regardless of where you are, you must have that training always in reserve for when and if you need to use it, because you may want to move on your own. Mixing concrete is part of the construction industry, and there are certain levels where you can move on.

The rearing of rabbits that some persons have gone into takes us back to the time when animal rearing was a very profitable industry. So, the rearing of rabbits is just an example of a big industry out there. Sen. Glenn Ramadhar-Singh could tell us about that industry that could come out from the rearing of animals. In fact, we are not rearing enough rabbits, and persons who can find themselves in that industry would have a very bright future.

What is wrong with the fish farms in Laventille? Presently, people are saying that there is nothing in Laventille and people have to come out. What about if we did not have that experiment where we could have fish farms in Laventille? I do not know. What about that? It means that is a new industry and people could develop in that area. I am not looking at these things lightly. You used those examples and I am just saying that they are serious examples of industries that can survive in Trinidad and Tobago. Anytime a challenge like what you have now comes up, you would be prepared to move on. What you have in the industry is a challenge, and the nervousness is whether you are prepared. If those challenges come to pass, how prepared are you? Wherever we work there are challenges; none is secured. We always have to be prepared, and training will help us to be prepared.

I looked at some of the training that you said you have in the industry now; waitressing is one and that goes into the whole hotel industry and the tourism industry. Why do you not demand some training along the line of the hotel industry or the tourism industry for those same persons who are doing waitressing? I am not telling them to walk off the job. Training was offered to you—if you said that it was not, I am going to ensure that this happens. They could either still work where they are working or they could move on or go into their own businesses. We have to go beyond this. What you have is the vision ahead, so let your people be prepared. Bartending is a big industry and then you said machine operator, business administration and auditing. When I looked at some of the skills that you have here, I do not know how many auditors came here this evening. I believe some of the other levels may have been there. I do not know how many managers were sitting there, but those persons have advanced training. What I am saying is that you need to give your persons further training, and regardless of what happens I just want to ask you this evening to accept the training.

Within the Ministry, we found that from the Gender Affairs Division, we had to put in special training for our women to be able to get them to compete in today's workplace. We had to do it. I am hoping that the time will come when that

special training is not necessary. The challenge and the nervousness that we get is because we are really not prepared—we are not able to move from one into the other. That is part of it.

I looked at Ayanna who is a maintenance worker and she has a health problem which could be solved. I do not see any difficulty in getting help for Ayanna. She is a maintenance worker and she is nervous of losing her job. Ayanna needs further training in the maintenance industry. A number of young ladies came to us, and they did training in the maintenance industry. We were able to get equipment for them and now they have moved on. I am just showing that even though Ayanna is there as a maintenance worker, she can take training to move on in that area and open her own business at some point in time. The salary will not move much from where it is right now.

The other person is Arabella who works for a small salary. She went to Mrs. Kamla Persad-Bissessar. When I saw that, I asked myself: What advice was she given when she went there? Do you know why I asked that question? Sometimes when members of the public go to Members of the Opposition—with due respect to you all—there is a reluctance to tell those persons what are the services and the things that the Government is offering and, therefore, these persons are hindered from moving on. So, here is Arabella who went to Mrs. Persad-Bissessar. I am wondering what advice she was given. [*Interruption*] Presently, in Siparia, there is a flyer going out from the Opposition, and listed on that flyer is all the things that the Government did for Siparia. [*Desk thumping*] All the things that we are doing is on that flyer—water, the community centres, lights and roads. The Opposition stated all the things that the Government had done, but they did not say it in those terms. It tells you that regardless of what constituency that you are in—whether it is an Opposition represented constituency or a Government represented constituency—this Government did not discriminate. [*Desk thumping*] The services are provided for all. [*Desk thumping*] I was proud of that flyer.

Madam President, I am going to bring the flyer to the Parliament the next time and circulate it. We are proud of it. It shows that the Government is helping in all areas and, therefore, someone like Arabella could have been told exactly what could be done. In terms of this matter, I feel that something could be done. In the ministry, we would be able to help. I am going to tell you shortly some of the skills that we can help with. So, if it becomes necessary that you have to leave, you would be well prepared to move, but not necessarily only if you have to leave, but you can also move on your own or move out into something else.

Sen. Gibbs-Nicholas: Thank you. I just want to correct you on two points. The main purpose here today is that the union and the workers have not had an opportunity to talk about what our positions are. No training was offered to the workers. I do not know why you keep saying that they need training. These are persons that are well-trained in their profession. A bartender comes in with a bartender certificate, and they are also offered further training in addition to that. So, they must be trained to acquire the position.

Sen. The Hon. J. Yuille-Williams: With respect to the first point, I am quite sure that if an agreement was made to have the workers trained—[*Interruption*] and since your workforce is mainly female, I am going to make a special effort to investigate to see what could be offered to you. The training may not necessarily be the programmes that we would have within the ministry, but it could be any programme that you feel that you would like to have to help you out in that direction—further training in this or anything else. I want to give you that assurance on behalf of the Government that if we had a bargain that training would be done and that was stated, and I am sure that you will hear from me on that matter.

I am happy about further training, because the example I made with Sen. Dr. Tim Gopeesingh is that he went further even though he has a very secured job. I am saying that you can always go further, and the Government will also afford you that training. I feel that just talking to you that you have realized your position as a leader, and that is why you are here. All that I can do is to ask you to accept what is being offered by the Government of Trinidad and Tobago. On this side, we will ensure that the services and the opportunities that we said that we are going to provide—whether the industry stays or it goes—would be given to you.

I want to compliment you for your leadership. There is also the opportunity within the Ministry for you to be a part of the Women's Leadership Institute where, again, you could get training in leadership, because we are looking for women who are leaders wherever they are—

Sen. Mark: You are bribing the girl.

Sen. The Hon. J. Yuille-Williams:—and, therefore, the opportunity for leadership is there. When I speak to Sen. Cindy Gibbs-Nicholas—

Madam President: Sen. Mark, it is too late an hour for you to be behaving like this.

Sen. The Hon. J. Yuille-Williams: When I speak to Sen. Gibbs-Nicholas at this time of the night, I am not only speaking to Sen. Gibbs-Nicholas, but I am using the opportunity to educate the general public of what the Government has to offer. I am hoping to do a job that I am being paid to do. [*Desk thumping*] I am not only talking to her as a woman, but to other women. So, when I invite her to join our Women Leadership Institute, I am asking all other women to do it. [*Interruption*] The Senator is free to come and join.

I want to let the Parliament know that from the Gender Affairs Division, I am happy to know that in two weeks' time the Gender Policy would go to Cabinet, and it would cover a number of areas which were of concern even before. As I said before, we have the non-traditional skills programme within the ministry. I am saying the non-traditional skills, because when I see things like mixing concrete, this is a non-traditional skill. This is a skill that the men had long ago, and women were not introduced to it—gender stereotyping men—because this was not for them. We have been doing extremely well with the non-traditional skills.

I want to tell everyone today that when you look at the construction industry, you are going to see a large number of women there as a result of the training programmes that we have been offering through that programme—masonry, tiling and electrical. We have the best persons in tiling. Sen. Mark would love to hear that. We do very well in tiling. We have a number of companies established. If ever you want their services you could access the ministry, and we would let you know of the companies that are available to you in that particular area.

Recently, I said that we have moved to a new area which is sound recording. That has been a skill mainly for men, and now we have females doing this. When last have you seen a recording where females are attending to PA systems or doing any of those things in recording companies? It had not been there, and we have moved to those areas with the technology. Our first group has now graduated. We are very proud, because we have allowed them to move.

In addition to this, we are still giving them the business skills. I think the Senator would like to know that. Whatever skill you have—whether it is waitressing, bartending, you need that business skill or that business component in it, because you do not always want to stay within an organization, but you also need to get out on our own.

I want to tell Sen. Anmolsingh-Mahabir that the Financial Literacy Programme is well on its way. Yesterday morning we were in San Fernando. There are 40 members from the Ministry in that programme. This is our second meeting. We were in Port of

Spain first and we will be going to Tobago. We felt that it is important for all citizens to be involved in the whole business of this Financial Literacy Programme. I want to compliment the Central Bank and all the other agencies.

The Ministry of Community Development, Culture and Gender Affairs is one of the leading Ministries. If you want to know why, this is because we are supposed to be dealing with the average person out there in the communities. All our field officers are very much involved in that excellent programme. This is going to help us very much with respect to how we balance our books and how we do our savings, even at the household level where budgeting comes in. That is going to be very important to us. I am very happy that has happened.

With respect to the export centres—we recognized the fact that a large number of women went into the gaming industry, because there were not many areas where the women could have fitted into, and that is why the majority of the persons in that industry are females. What we are doing is finding other skills that these women could have, and we have the export centres where a large number of women are being trained now in the craft industry, and they are doing extremely well. They have graduated last week and some of them are moving into their own cottage industry. We are going to bring that Export Training Company back on stream, so that the work that is being produced at these export centres would go straight to the Export Training Company, so those persons who are in the programme do not have to look for the markets, but we will look for the market for them.

We have also emphasized the security for buying equipment and so forth for the individual persons who came off the programme. The Government would stand security for the participants when they leave the programme. Sometimes when you leave the programme you are willing to start, but you just do not know where to start. So, the Government is now standing the security for all the funding agencies, plus we would be looking into quality control and so on.

I think there would be some kind of turnaround with the employment of women, so that the generation to come and even those who are here now, fewer women would be dependent on a smaller number of industries. They would be able to participate as full members of the workforce.

I listened to Sen. Glenn Ramadhar-Singh where he talked about poverty. I think you were asking that persons come into the areas to bring the Senior Citizens' Grant and so forth. We are working with that problem; the generic social worker. A generic social worker would be in each community who would be looking after a few families. That person would know all about the families.

Presently, we have multiple types of workers—health, social, this and that. There are a number of different persons interfacing with families. The generic social worker is that person who will go into the community and get to know all about the family. That person will link the family to the needs wherever they are. That person would be attached to a family and will be looking after your health and social needs as the case may be. We have been working on that for quite sometime. It has not been the easiest of programmes to get off the ground, but we are working to have that generic social worker. In the meantime, the social workers who exist today do visit homes and communities. Even the community development officers go out and do the same thing. That is not only for those who are disadvantaged, but it is also to help the senior citizens. I was very happy when I heard what some of the Senators have said about the senior citizens. This Government really cares about the senior citizens and you have heard it in several ways.

I want to emphasize, again, one of our latest areas—I think I have hinted it before—in which our Geriatric Adolescent Partnership Programme (GAPP) persons who have formed a care-giving service. We have those caregivers being trained at an advanced level. I said recently that we have now added a new component of specialized training with dialysis and diabetes. There are so many kidney patients out there, and we felt that our caregivers were not able to handle them. There is an equipment that is being used at home, and a number of them have been able to get the machines at their home—this was given to them by the hospital. This is legitimate—and we have those caregivers going to the hospital and they are now able to help with the dialysis of those patients. These are the same GAPP caregivers. That is at no extra cost to the family. As long as the family is disadvantaged or as long as the family exercises a certain level of poverty, you can get a caregiver free of charge and paid for by the Government. In cases where the family can afford to pay and would like to access a caregiver, then the caregiver will go at the family's home. This is one of the good services that we have had. A number of persons have been extremely happy with what is happening in terms of that programme.

I see Sen. Prof. Ramchand has left, but I want to congratulate the Minister of Finance for his assistance that he is giving in terms of the sponsorship in the area of video and recording. I know that we have started this new film company. On Thursday and Friday, we are having a culture ministers conference, and Cuba is coming with their project which is a travelling film showcase. What they are trying to develop as a Caricom project and to encourage is the development of film making in the Caribbean. We are not very strong in that and we have so much material.

Every year, there are so many new productions in Best Village, and we have been trying to videotape these productions. So, now that we have Channel 4, we could show what was done before. You will see Sen. Dr. Mc Kenzie coming up ever so often in all forms on it. We have not been able to make films using some of the materials that we have. We have some very good actors out there. There is this film company that has started, and it is so good for us, because we have the travelling film showcase that is regional and, therefore, with the incentive that they are giving here, we should be able to develop another film industry for our cultural people. I want to compliment the Minister of Finance for the incentive for the development of the film industry.

I want to talk to the Minister concerning what Sen. Prof. Ken Ramchand is saying in terms of writers. We have been doing a lot of things with respect to the production of books. A lot of good books are coming out of this country. We have done many books, but we have not had the incentive for the production and, probably, from a cultural point of view, we will want to do it.

Yesterday I had the pleasure of having someone come into the Ministry who had a book on natural medicine and herbs. One could see the extent of his research. It has been approved by an American University, but his problem was the production, to produce that book. He could not get a company or anybody here who was willing to undertake it and do the work. Probably, if there was some incentive, they may have done it knowing that they would get some kind of rebate. I want to agree with Sen. Prof. Ramchand that is one area, in terms of the development of the culture that we could look at.

Animation is another area. We are now becoming pretty strong in animation which is an adjunct to the film industry. I am hoping that what we have here in terms of the incentive will also cover the animation. This is a time when we are looking at the Performing Art Centres; the development of the cultural centres; the UWI and the work that we are doing there; and the Performing Arts Academy or that faculty at UTT. As you are aware, UTT is almost like a niche market. The courses that are being offered there are not being done in any part of the Caribbean.

I would just like to tell Sen. Gibbs-Nicholas that probably some of the things that they may want to do may not be done anywhere else, and if there is enough of them who want to do something—I am quite sure that how we approach the Minister and UTT—we might be able to get some of that into the faculty. So, there is a lot of hope and this Government has done quite a bit in terms of doing that.

I do not think anybody should say anything in terms of how caring the Government is. We are well on top of things, and we know exactly what is needed. We could adjust the programmes that we have to suit the clients that we have. I always say and I will say it again that sometimes do not even ask what programmes the Government has, but just say what do you want, and as long we find that it is something in an area in Trinidad and Tobago that will help you, the Government is quite willing to facilitate.

Madam President, thanks for the opportunity and for allowing me to make those few remarks. I want to welcome the new Senator and to let her know that I will certainly take the opportunity to be with her and to work with the group that she has. I want to wish her well in her leadership and to tell her, even though I have listened to you and see good characteristics of leadership, it is well worth joining the Women Leadership Institute where you would meet other women leaders as we try to move forward.

Thank you very much. [*Desk thumping*]

The Minister in the Ministry of Finance (Sen. The Hon. Conrad Enill): Madam President, let me thank all the Senators who have contributed. We started today and I am sure that we are going to finish tomorrow. I would have loved to do this today, but it does not seem possible, given the number of things that I have to respond to. Madam President, let me just deal with those matters that I consider to be urgent, important and relevant to the discussion.

The first thing that I want to deal with is this issue about private members' clubs. In the 2007 budget statement which was presented in Parliament, this Government said that it had a difficulty with casino-type gambling, and that it wanted to deal with the question of private members' clubs and the activities that are involved in casino gambling.

Now, when the budget was presented, a group calling itself the Association of Members' Clubs came to that Government and said: "Listen, if you want to do what was contemplated, that would shut the industry down and thousands of persons would be out of jobs." The Prime Minister said, at the time, that no such thing was contemplated and, therefore, what we would do is to engage in discussion and ensure that we have transitional arrangements in place.

Since then, during the period November 20 to February 09, 2007, a number of meetings were held with officials from the Ministry of Finance, members of the Association of Members' Clubs and, in some instances, myself dealing with a number of things. Some of the issues we talked about were as follows: the differentiation

between casino gambling and private members' clubs; the issue of slot machines being illegal versus video lottery terminals (VTLs) being legal. It was indicated that the VLTs were being imported and then converted via a device called a "hopper" into slot machines. We talked about the Ministry of Finance looking at these issues and getting the various positions. We also talked about the police in the context of this discussion and the Customs and Excise Division and so forth.

12.00 midnight

Then we got to the question about legal issues relevant to the operations of private members' clubs and we discussed about 26 issues relative to this particular issue. Then some recommendations came forward from the group, among them being, amend the Gambling and Betting Act to ensure that the specified conditions for conducting gambling are relevant to private dwelling houses and members' clubs only and that gambling conducted by a common gaming house remains an offence; look at some penalties; look at some gaming taxes and a number of other types of technical issues.

In moving this discussion forward during the course of the life of this activity and for example, reporting to me on Thursday, January 18, the group said to me that in general discussions AMC indicated that they were making progress in addressing the concerns of the Government regarding gambling. The AMC stated that they were having difficulties getting all the private members' clubs to join the AMC and operate as one unit. Plan of action, basically to create a team comprising both the AMC and the Government to gather information on the industry for further discussion, because one of the issues we had in this whole discussion is that the numbers moved from 2,000 to 5,000 to 7,000 to 30,000 to 100,000 to 200,000 as the people affected. When I go to the agencies who basically could give me this information, they gave me a different number.

The plan of action was to create a team comprising of both AMC and Government to gather information on the industry. The Government had compiled all the information for the shut down scenario and the AMC had to provide the regulated scenario. We were saying, that is our intention; they were saying, hold your hand a bit, we think that we could give you a regulated scenario. We agreed then that they would provide us with a breakdown of the industry, that is to say the employee numbers, the skills sets, the salary ranges, et cetera, so we could understand it. This was on January 18, 2007.

On February 09, 2007 we met again. They had reported that they needed 12 more weeks to put together their proposals. Again, they were emphasizing the proposal is geared towards saving the industry from closure; brought some consultants; they had a plan of action and so forth.

At that meeting they had 12 points that they discussed; there were seven pesons present. All this time these discussions were taking place with the owners of this particular industry. On June 04, 2007, the AMC wrote me saying as follows:

> "We the members of the Association of Members' Clubs read on today's *Newsday*, page 5, that the Government will today introduce in Parliament the Finance Bill, 2007 to amend the 1963 Gambling and Betting Act. If this report is true we do indeed express our grave concerns, since in our meetings with you, as indicated, you were prepared to await a report from us with regard to a proposal before taking any such step. We had on that occasion confirmed our desire to be fully regulated and to be compliant with any such regulation. This report, which we have in draft, should be submitted to you by the end of next week and we had hoped to have discussion with you on same.
>
> We are concerned that the introduction of this new legislation to ban slot machines will have an immediate and severe financial impact on all of us in the industry resulting in adverse consequences for many of us, our employees and our service providers.
>
> Minister, we understood that you would give us a hearing on our proposal and we were working towards submitting a comprehensive report and proposal in that regard.
>
> We are gravely disappointed that you have not given us this opportunity before taking the Bill to Parliament. We do request an urgent meeting with you.
>
> cc. Prime Minister"

I did in fact have a meeting with them. They indicated to me that when the legislation was looked at in the context of the Gambling Act, it did in fact do what they had suggested. On June 11, I basically responded to them saying that:

> "I am in receipt of your correspondence and wish to advise that the Government of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago proposes to honour its agreement to continue the dialogue with the industry.
>
> In this regard therefore, the legislation before the Parliament will be amended to include a provision, which will ensure that this amendment is not made law until the requisite consultations are completed."

I did one more thing in this regard. We copied this correspondence to a gentleman call Mr. Andy Reise, President of the Union of Members' Clubs and Lottery Workers, because this group has also written to the Prime Minister saying as follows:

> "We, the Union of Members' Clubs and Lottery Workers have noted that the hon. Prime Minister and the Minister of Finance in his 2006/2007 budget presentation indicated his intention to phase out members' clubs and online gambling with immediate effect.
>
> Following the budget presentation the Union requested that the hon. Prime Minister and Minister in the Ministry of Finance take time to recognize that his intent would actually place more than 7,000 employees, 71.4 per cent of whom are single mothers from impoverished areas, on the unemployment list.
>
> As a direct result of the Union's request, the hon. Prime Minister and Minister of Finance decided to withhold further action agreeing instead to hold off until the employees of these members clubs were retrained and retooled to take up employment in other Government proposed employment facilities."

This is the Union writing to the Prime Minister. It goes on to say:

> "The hon. Prime Minister personally spoke to the workers and assured them that the phase out and retraining programmes would be put in place and negotiations will be ongoing with the AMC. The Union now observed that the hon. Minister has reneged on his assurance to withhold any further action and has now drawn upon his original intention to ban members' club gambling on the parliamentary agenda as an amendment to the Finance Act, which will have the effect on section 13 of the Gambling and Betting Act, Chap. 11:19. This action in the face of not having retrained nor retooled a single employee of the 7,000 plus workforce.
>
> As a consequence of this dishonourable and subversive action of the Minister the UNCLW will now embark on a series of actions. The Union will highlight the plight of the employees to the national community on June 17 at the Labour Day parade under the NATUC banners and will report the incident to the ILO, as the workers feel they have been treated inhumanely.
>
> The Union wishes to emphasize its contempt of the deception employed by the Government who perceives that it is less sinful to place 7,000 direct employees and

their dependents on the unemployment list, rather than to permit gambling to those who could afford to and simultaneously wish to do so.

We urge that you grant us an audience at your earliest convenience."

s/Alicia Wellington

Executive Secretary

F/ Andy Krease."

You have a situation here where you have employees who belong to a business and you are dealing with the owners of the businesses because they have a view that is different to the Government policy and they are working towards a determination as to what should happen with their businesses. All of a sudden you have a group representing the workers of that place saying that we now have to meet with you to discuss closing down the industry or some kind of activity.

The difficulty here is, at what time that was happening. The group that is in the process of providing the Government with the alternative that the Government has asked for, on the basis of the framework for the oversight of the gaming industry in Trinidad and Tobago, said to me, well listen, we got a copy of a report here. The report has not yet been finalized, so therefore we cannot formally give it to you. So that you see we are serious about this matter we will give it to you; so we got the report. On page 17 of the report, I looked at some case studies—I would not read through it because it is late in the night, so I would just read one. I just want to put it on the record because a Government has to be clear in whatever its policies are, in terms of what it is doing. Case two is what the report talks about:

"Referral.

Client: A 23-year old male was referred by the HR office of his firm through the EAP for the financial counselling and deterioration job performance.

Present Problem: Client has requested advances on salary twice during the last six months. There were also complaints from staff members of his frequent borrowing.

Family Background: Client grew up with his grandmother and two aunts; his mother lives elsewhere and visited him at the family home from time to time."

By the way, this is the report that the owners of this industry is commissioning, which I have a copy of. It goes on to say:

> "He is engaged to a 25-year old woman, who one month ago had their first child. They presently do not live together.
>
> Financial Background: The client is a permanent employee with three years service. His salary is $5,900 per month. His present recurrent expenditure is $6,500 per month, which includes four loan payments totaling $4,200 monthly.
>
> Gambling History: He started off gambling as a means of entertainment during which time he would usually win playing Black Jack. Over the last year he has been borrowing to keep up with his financial obligations, in addition to his repayment of loans of $4,200. He owes his grandmother $5,000; his two aunts, $3,000; coworker, $1,000 and his manager $900.
>
> Findings: Client fits the definition of problem gambling; he has the following signs: work performance issues; borrowing from persons at work; pay advance request; gambling to pay debts."

This is just one of the cases that I am aware of and in the discussions we have been having there is another part of this business that is creating behaviour of individuals who have found themselves strapped into situations and do not know how to get out of it. And what basically happens is that they trade information; they trade security details and they put a number of people at risk, and I will not say anything else on this matter at this point in time.

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

Suffice it to say, Mr. Vice-President, that the issue is therefore, not a straight issue of simply dealing with the question of finding jobs for those affected, because I can find today, now as I speak, 3,214 jobs as of six months ago and when I did budget consultations yesterday, that number would have increased by about 50 per cent in the normal private sector who are members of the Chamber of Industry and Commerce, the American Chamber of Commerce, the Trinidad and Tobago Manufacturers' Association, the organizations that at this point in time, are asking me where can I get a Chinee, because there are two issues.

The first issue is that now we have a situation where we are seeing that attitude to work, value and all of the things we have been talking about for a long time but have not been able to achieve are becoming extremely important.

Somebody today talked about the question about Customs and Excise. You know it is interesting, because sometimes they talk out of both sides of their mouths, as my grandmother would say.

On the one hand when we seek to put up a building to house the same customs officers, who for the last 20 years have been living in rat holes all over the town, the Government is spending all the resources on infrastructure; that is a bad thing. But you cannot get service of any kind unless you take care of your people. The challenge that I have is that I do not know when those buildings would be completed, because the Waterfront project on the left-hand side started one year later and will finish on November 20, this year on schedule, within budget; I am going to go to the opening, and my buildings—do not talk about the ones Sen. Dr. Saith has that are three years overdue, done by local contractors.

Sen. Joseph: "Doh" talk about my police stations.

Sen. The Hon. C. Enill: Not your police stations. We do not have a clue, at this point in time as we speak, when we will get those buildings. We just do not know, because the view of some of our people is that it is not important to deliver what is important. [*Interruption*] No, because it is—anyhow I "ain't" going there.

[MADAM PRESIDENT *in the Chair*]

Madam President, I just wanted to put this whole private members' club gaming activity in its context. Now there are those who say remove the legislation. The real problem with the legislation has to do with the definition issue and the enforcement requirements for customs and excise. What we sought to do is to remove the ambiguity that has existed in the law, so that—and I think Sen. Gibbs-Nicholas talked about it—we have a situation where there is an order now, some 300 machines, that if I do not fix this basically there will be no basis on which they can come into the country. So you have 300 one way; 500 a next way and I am aware of another 700 coming into place.

What is happening is that even as we speak about this particular sector and even as we talk about the issues that are relevant to the sector, there is a group who believe that they can continue with impunity to do what they have to do. Madam President, it cannot be that in the face of the information that we have, that is affecting so many of our vulnerable citizens, that we would simply as a Government sit back and say, well you know, let us give them choices. Guess what? They are not getting choices. The Government's job is to make sure that it protects all of its people and it will do so and you if you pay a price for that, then so be it. Because at the end of the day we have to be careful with how we manage our people.

Sen. Montano: Two wrongs cannot make a right.

Sen. The Hon. C. Enill: Two wrongs cannot make a right. I just want to deal with a couple other issues, one of which is the question of pension. The Government has found itself in a situation before, in which the quantum of money that you paid to an individual who did not work for you; who you are giving a stipend because they have no other income, was not much. When you started to get to the numbers we are getting now, there are individuals who are confusing the pension liability of the 80,000 employees that the Government has to provide for, with the grant for those individuals who do not have any income and must be paid something by the State.

We are making the distinction between our liability to the 80,000 employees and that is pension and that is going to be part of the pension issue, where for example, I believe that we have to get to the stage where we set up that pension plan as a normal pension plan, or you fund it and make sure that the investment programme on the funded assets could provide you with the pension benefit that you are looking for. There are two ways you could do it. You could either do it through a defined contribution plan or a defined benefit plan.

These are issues that we have to deal with. We have not dealt with it at all. The liability, I think right now, on the basis of what I know, could be somewhere in the vicinity of $12,000 billion; that is the liability.

Sen. Dr. Gopeesingh: For public servants?

Sen. The Hon. C. Enill: Yes, Sir. Therefore what is going to have to happen is that over the next few years you are going to have to find a way to generate something to fund that liability, because, as we speak now, what we have is pay-as-you-go; that cannot be sustainable. Therefore, the grant is a different discussion about pension liabilities and we are not changing pension liabilities. We are basically dealing with that as our relationship with our employee base. We are going to deal with that as a pension, but we cannot deal with that in the same way in which an individual who we are providing a benefit for, because they have no other benefit, could be considered as a pension. It is not; it is a grant.

Sen. Dr. Gopeesingh: NIB suppose to take care of that.

Sen. The Hon. C. Enill: NIB is not going to take care of you if you have not contributed anything. How is NIB going to take care of you; where is the money coming from? NIB is a contribution plan; you get on NIB's list if you have worked; that is it. Even as we talk about NIB, if you look at the demographics, the

age profile of the NIB, the NIB is going to be in trouble. Because the rate of claims that is coming on over the next 15 years, as a result of the ageing population, is going to absorb so many claims expenses that we do not have the assets right now to match that liability; we just do not.

Therefore, we do have the challenge and it really does not matter who deals with it; there is a challenge. It is the same challenge that you have now with any pension. Right now we are doing something that no government has done for a very long time. We are in fact, almost ready to deal with the daily-paid workers pension.

Sen. Dr. Gopeesingh: How many people?

Sen. The Hon. C. Enill: About 20,000 people. Just earlier on this week we were trying to work out the issue to determine what the final benefits will be and how we would try to structure that, again to do the same thing, to ensure that those who did not have a benefit before, can now in fact enjoy the benefit.

But understand something, when we start to talk about these numbers and we start to add them up, we do not have the revenues for it, because in a real sense, our basic cost structure over time, and you know, I love it when you say that the Government has gotten this amount of money and you do not know what they have done with it.

Well, 80,000 employees, five years ago, is now costing you twice what it was. One of the things you have to be careful about if you intend to get into government, is that you have to start dealing with the reality of governance rather than with the propaganda of politics. The reality is this, for whatever you might want to think and whatever you might say, we live today in an environment that is basically high energy priced. We basically, in a lot of instances, get a lot of our goods and services in that environment.

Therefore, while we have the revenues on one hand, we also have all the input cost into production and that of itself, will increase your prices. The way the Government treats with that in Trinidad and Tobago, is that we continue to maintain a subsidy at the pump so that the general population does not get hit by the impact of those higher prices coming internally. But there are factors externally that are impacting on the price of the goods and therefore what the population would get. You need to understand that, because if you do not and you pursue some of the policies that you are talking about, you will become one of those administrations that will bankrupt the country. Because the cumulative effect of your policy positions will create an unsustainable position for you; it is simply about that.

Madam President, as it relates to the Green Fund issue; there has been a lot of discussion on it. The fact of the matter is that when we tried to implement the legislation as it was proposed then, we were not allowed to by the Ministry of Finance. They basically said that this did not have the safeguards that we wanted in it and therefore it cannot go anywhere; we had to go back to the drawing board; we had to go through, change the legislation; do quite a number of things and we believe that today, we have a transparent process by which we can in fact deal with the concerns that Members had as it related to the reafforestation agenda.

Just two more things, there is no—as far as I am aware—PNM association with the decision by the Government to accede to the requests of the Board of Inland Revenue to put in place the 15 per cent benefit on construction. The reason for that is, property development companies dealing with middle income houses structured their economic model on this benefit. What they pointed out to us was that if we removed it from them, the ability to sell the houses for that particular community in which they were developing it would go through the roof, because this is how they were able to meet that particular development demand based on this particular condition. [*Interruption*] No, this is in the property development.

Therefore, what we decided to do was to give them a window to finish completion by the end of this year. Once they are finished by the end of this year, we would maintain the benefit. Remember, we announced this two years ago, just like that, because we changed the tax situation and this particular benefit is something that they want to maintain indefinitely; we said no; we would just deal with it in the context of houses that were under construction.

Sen. Dr. Gopeesingh: That was in the budget two years ago?

Sen. The Hon. C. Enill: Yes. Madam President, on another occasion I think we should really have a discussion about pension benefits, retirement and so on; now is not the time to deal with that, but I think it is a very important discussion that we must have, especially in circumstances where it is easy to predict what you need to live 20 years down the road, if you understand inflation rates, interest rates assumption, time value of money, accumulation of wealth, then it is easy to learn. But it cannot be and I think the Prime Minister was very correct when he said this, that you work for 40 years, then at the end of the 40 years the basic retirement plan that you have is to work till you die; it just cannot be. And too many of our people have that as a way of life, as a way of living. They basically say, well, you know, somebody will see about me when I get down there and unfortunately that somebody happens to be the Government. The cost of doing that is becoming more and more unsustainable. Because if we have to use revenue

to do some of the things that Sen. Mary King talked about, it means that we are going to have to invest it away from some of those projects into new projects which are basically going to create for us a particular kind of difficulty.

Therefore Madam President, in the early hours of today, I believe that those were the important issues that came out of the general discussion and therefore on that basis, I beg to move.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill accordingly read a second time.

The Minister in the Ministry of Finance (Sen. The Hon. Conrad Enill): Madam 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, That the Bill be read the third time.

12.30 a.m.

The Senate divided: Ayes 19 Noes 6

AYES

Saith, Hon. Dr. L.

Yuille-Williams, Hon. J.

Jeremie SC, Hon. J.

Joseph, Hon. M.

Montano, Hon. D.

Enill, Hon. C.

Piggott, Hon. A.

Manning, Hon. H.

Chin Lee, Hon. H.

Dumas, Hon. R.

Titus, R.

Abdul-Hamid, Hon. M.

Kangaloo, Hon. C.

Sahadeo, Hon. C.

Ramroop, Hon. S.

Mc Kenzie, Dr. E.

King, Mrs. M.

Anmolsingh-Mahabir, Mrs. P.

Khan, Bro. NSA

NOES

Mark, W.

Gopeesingh, Dr. T.

Kernahan, Dr. J.

Ramadhar-Singh, Dr. G.

Phillip, R.

Gibbs-Nicholas, Mrs. C.

Question agreed to.

Bill reported, without amendment, read the third time and passed.

ADJOURNMENT

The Minister of Public Administration and Information and Minister of Energy and Energy Industries (Sen. The Hon. Dr. Lenny Saith): Madam President, before I move the adjournment, let me thank the staff of the Parliament who once again have had to endure very long hours as a result of all wanting to talk, so, I want to thank them. I want to also say, Madam President, that I hope this is the last debate we hear about sons, because after hearing about sons, I am very pleased to know that I only have daughters. [*Laughter*]

Madam President, I beg to move that the Senate do now adjourn to Tuesday, July 03, 2007, at 1.30 p.m. at which time, according to the arrangements made, we will do Private Members Business. I also want to put the Senate on notice that we do have a heavy agenda and given the rate at which we are dealing with matters that it is likely that I would have a sitting on Wednesday as well, to do the

amendment to the Motor Vehicles and Road Traffic Act, which is the Breathalyzer Act, and on the completion of that on that day we would do the amendment to the Legal Profession Act, and we will continue to have sittings so that we clear the agenda. I think most people would like to go on vacation late July/August, so I think we are going to have some, not only long sittings but regular sittings.

Madam President: Yes, I too, was going to say that having heard so many hypothetical sons this evening, I do not intend to listen to anymore hypothetical sons again at any other sitting. [*Laughter*]

Question put and agreed to.

Senate adjourned accordingly.

Adjourned at 12.36 a.m.