

Leave of Absence

Tuesday, October 07, 2008

SENATE

Tuesday, October 07, 2008

The Senate met at 10.00 a.m.

PRAYERS

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

LEAVE OF ABSENCE

Mr. Vice- President: Hon. Senators, we have two Senators who will be taking the oath, but we will stand that down for later in the proceedings.

PAPERS LAID

1. Annual audited financial statements of Trinidad and Tobago National Petroleum Marketing Company Limited and its subsidiaries for the year ended March 31, 2008. [*The Minister in the Ministry of Finance (Sen. The Hon. Mariano Browne)*]
2. Memorandum of understanding between the Government of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago and Sunway Holdings Incorporated Berhad for Cooperation in Infrastructural Development and related training. [*The Minister of Trade and Industry and Minister in the Office of the Prime Minister (Sen. The Hon. Dr. Lenny Saith)*]

APPROPRIATION BILL

(BUDGET)

[Second Day]

Order read for resuming adjourned debate on question [October 06, 2008]:

That the Bill be now read a second time.

Question again proposed.

The Minister of Local Government (Sen. The Hon. Hazel Manning): Mr. Vice-President, thank you very much. It gives me great pleasure to join this debate on the Appropriation Bill for fiscal year 2009. I wish to place on record my sincerest congratulations to the Minister in the Ministry of Finance, Sen. The Hon. Mariano Browne for his crisp and clear presentation of his maiden budget statement in this Senate. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Vice-President, not wanting to be accused of being gender biased, I also want to place on record my sincerest congratulations to the hon. Karen Nunez-Tesheira, Minister of Finance, for the historic presentation of her maiden budget statement in the House of Representatives. [*Desk thumping*]

Appropriation Bill (Budget)
[SEN. THE HON. H. MANNING]

Tuesday, October 07, 2008

Both statements spoke to the essentials of fiscal year 2008/2009 and the commitment of the People's National Movement to equal opportunity in general and, in particular, gender equality. It also spoke to the Vision 2020 programme that is being rolled out since the year 2002, and which will continue as we journey to the year 2020 to developed country status.

I would spend some time responding to Senators on the other side who spoke about education; Sen. Sharma and Sen. Ramkhelawan. They spoke about the need to provide quality assurance in the education system as we reform and journey to our Vision 2020. As Senators are aware, Trinidad and Tobago achieved universal education at the primary and at the secondary level. Our aim is now to achieve universal education at the early childhood level. We are achieving this goal by changing the legislation; by developing an all-embracing curriculum; by training teaches; and also by the construction of buildings. In this particular instance, the construction of Early Childhood Care Centres; adjusting to the new curriculum.

The goal may seem ambitious, but it is vital that we take this approach. Our early childhood centres were found in living rooms, garages, under homes and in barracks and we have to do better than that. We are talking about developed country status; we are talking about a long approach for a long term development of our human resources. We have achieved universal primary education and universal secondary education, and it is now our responsibility to place quality into those systems by continuously improving the curriculum; by keeping the curriculum relevant and at the cutting edge of technology. Our aim is to develop young citizens who can take their place on the world stage, and who can contribute to the development of Trinidad and Tobago and the Caribbean region.

Beginning in the year 1993, an education task force recommended an all-encompassing approach which included the development of the early childhood sector and the development of the primary and secondary sectors. At that time, the World Bank funded the primary sector. The curriculum was changed; the construction of schools began; and teachers were trained. That process has continued at the Ministry of Education and in our seamless approach, we have approached the IDB to continue the process.

Presently, members of the Ministry of Education are engaging this process by obtaining financial and technical support from the IDB to continue the upgrade of the primary curriculum; to continue the funding for construction of primary schools; and the training of primary school teachers. At this point in time, out of 200 schools identified to be rebuilt, approximately eight schools are in progress. There is construction taking place in St. Mary's in Moruga, St Paul's in

San Fernando, Tranquility in Port of Spain and at Arima West. There are four more schools coming on stream this year, and that process will continue until we look after the 200 primary schools.

Mr. Vice-President, you must remember that there are over 700 primary schools in the system to be repaired. As you well know, over the past three to four years, our teachers have been trained. We have been asking that all our teachers are trained at the tertiary level. It is a compulsory requirement especially for leadership in the primary school system, and it is also compulsory at the early childhood sector. It has been a requirement for quite a while now at the secondary level.

In the meantime, the Government is continuing to upgrade the school plants, not only the primary schools—I forgot to mention Icacos Government Primary School which was opened earlier this year. This is the first in the new type of schools—but at the secondary level, and this will continue until our working environment is comfortable for the teachers. We understand that it is not comfortable outside there, especially in denominational schools that have been built some 100 years ago. Many of them are over 50 years old.

As this journey continues—it is long, it is tedious and it is difficult—we are encouraging principals, parents and teachers to join us in this approach to school based management. We are asking them to work closely with us; to work closely with the contractors on the job; to work closely with the Education Facilities Company in providing the support that is needed.

I want this honourable Senate to know that we are still in early times as we attempt to turn around the education system. I want to appeal to the general community that we need every hand on deck to achieve the success required. [*Desk thumping*] As we keep saying, we cannot manage QRC which is over the fence of the Ministry of Education; we need help to manage Manzanilla Secondary School; we need help to manage Cedros Secondary School; and we need help to manage Toco Secondary School and so our appeal is out there.

I heard the Senator lament about the drop in attendance in class, but being aware of the alienation within the school system, the Government has spent quite some time putting in place a new curriculum. We have expanded the curriculum, and the curriculum no longer has only traditional subjects, but it has non-traditional subjects and, therefore, it embraces all because we all learn differently. The curriculum has made compulsory subjects such as music, visual and performing arts, theatre arts, physical education, vocational and technical education to reach all of us. It also includes the traditional subjects of mathematics,

Appropriation Bill (Budget)
[SEN. THE HON. H. MANNING]

Tuesday, October 07, 2008

English and history. Our teachers must now engage all the students. The deshifting of the school system is going to make this approach very easy. We are in early times yet, as I have said before, but our quality assurance system is kicking in.

Our teacher training at the tertiary level is happening. Every year approximately 400 teachers are funded at Corinth and Valsayn Teachers Colleges, which are now faculties of the University of Trinidad and Tobago. These teachers are being trained for early childhood centres, the pre-primary areas, primary schools and secondary schools.

We have national testing in place to ensure that quality assurance is there. In Standards I, III and V there are national tests to make sure that our children are learning well, and those who are not learning well, we are asking them to repeat. We have been putting in place remedial teachers. We know that we do not have enough, because there is a capacity challenge in this country, but in the meanwhile, the universities are turning out remedial teachers very slowly. We are not waiting until students reach Form V to discover and ascertain whether they can sit exams. We are assessing along the way. Our challenge is a difficult one, but we have hope. We have hope that at the end of the day we will do well and we will achieve the journey and, therefore, the goal of the Ministry of Education right now is stated in its corporate plan and its corporate plan talks of three priorities between the years 2007—2012.

10.15 a.m.

These priorities are to focus on the schools, to change the Ministry and the way they do business and to involve the community as we journey. I know that the Ministry of Education will do well. We are shaping our future, and we are doing it together. Significantly, the theme of the budget presentation is “Shaping our Future Together”. It is consistent with Vision 2020, and it is consistent with the Local Government Reform and Transformation programme.

Our journey began in the year 2002; we have achieved many successful milestones along the way, and we will continue to achieve over the remaining 11 years and continuing beyond the 11 years. We are on a long journey to change, a long journey to substantial growth and fundamental development, a journey of personal growth, impacting on societal growth and societal development.

As we work together to create a state of esteem, good governance and robust democracy, our Vision 2020 statement says it all, and I quote:

"By the year 2020, Trinidad and Tobago will be a united, resilient, productive, innovative and prosperous nation with a disciplined, caring, fun-loving society,

comprising healthy, happy and well-educated people and built on the enduring attributes of self-reliance, respect, equity and integrity." [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Vice-President, Members of this honourable Senate, what a beautiful vision and goal to journey towards. Not one of us on this side, and I am sure not one of those on the other side would deny that the vision excites us, and motivates us towards achieving an improved quality of life for all of us who are citizens of Trinidad and Tobago.

So, I invite Members on the other side of this Senate to join with us and let us shape our future together, as the local government logo calls on us, let us embrace all. We need the assistance of every one of our 1.3 million citizens who live in this country of ours, to achieve the goal of improved quality of life. It cannot be this Government alone doing it for the people.

Indeed, the fiscal package is a commitment by this Government to balance sustainable growth and to balance development. It ensures that all citizens regardless of race, ethnicity, class, colour, creed, religion, gender equity, share in the country's wealth and participate meaningfully in our journey towards developed country status.

Consequently, the Ministry of Local Government operates within a policy framework, with clearly defined programmes, clear vision, clear mission, measurable objectives, and participatory democracy values. The mandate given to the Ministry of Local Government came from Vision 2020—Governance and Institutional Structures for Development, with a sub-committee headed by Dr. Shafeek Sultan-Khan, including Dr. Kirk Meighoo, Gregory Aboud, Ganace Ramdial, Anand Ramlogan, Jennifer Baptiste-Primus, Errol Mahabir, just to name a few, as deep as it is wide, representing all of us.

This sub-committee defines good governance broadly, as a pre-condition for the successful achievement of Vision 2020. They said that there were four elements that we had to cover, the elements of participation, accountability, predictability, and transparency. The sub-committee argued that these basic elements provided the framework of good governance, and institutional effectiveness by developing an integrated approach to development, policy making, legal drafting and institutional development.

Therefore, when we speak of good governance, we speak of the previous years of the PNM's rule from 2002—2008, because good governance began in 2002, and it surely did not exist in 1996—2001, when the UNC was in charge. There was no strategic plan for the development of this country, and therefore,

Appropriation Bill (Budget)
[SEN. THE HON. H. MANNING]

Tuesday, October 07, 2008

their approach to development was ad hoc, not integrated, not focused, and not improving the quality of life of the burgesses of Trinidad and Tobago. It is our national strategic plan also known as our Vision 2020, which for another year will be driving our budget for fiscal year 2009.

Let me start with the first element of participation. When we speak of good governance, we are really speaking about the participatory development process, which entails holding regular discussions with our citizens, engaging them in meaningful consultation on key issues. This is the essence of the vision of the Ministry of Local Government when we are building robust participative democracy, embracing all of our citizens.

This Government has dialogued in every sphere of governmental activity, with all institutional and community stakeholders to involve and engage our people. In the Ministry of Local Government, we have held stakeholder consultations, focus group discussions, community consultations, public and private sector interface, and public consultations.

As you are aware, Mr. Vice-President, we have been engaging the public attention, and seeking its input since the year 2004, when we embarked on our new reform initiative with the publication of a Green Paper on Local Government Reform. We have not been burning tyres and blocking roads, we talk; that is what we have been doing. We have been talking and we have been listening. On that occasion in 2004, the national and regional consultations were held involving more than 1,000 persons from a wide cross-section of over 35 groups, organizations, institutions, NGOs and CBOs, all engaged in a robust democracy.

The Ministry of Local Government reviewed the comments and suggestions arising from the consultations and the Green Paper was laid in this Senate in October 2004.

Sen. Dr. Kernahan: PNM people burning tyres in Calvary this morning.

Sen. The Hon. H. Manning: You have them burning tyres? A draft White Paper was developed in 2006, based on the inputs arising from these consultations, as well as the recommendations from the Local Government Interministerial Transitional Task Force. This White Paper was laid in the House of Representatives on May 26, 2006, and was laid in the Senate on June 06, 2006. After extensive national, regional and community consultations, a decision was taken to procure the services of consultants using the UNDP.

Their task was to identify the appropriate roles and responsibilities of local government bodies, to design a structure and organization for the local government system, to draft primary and secondary legislation that will give effect to the reform proposals. The consultants submitted their reports between November 2006 and early 2008. The recommendations were examined by a team from the Ministry of Local Government, and were discussed extensively by a Cabinet sub-committee.

It was then decided that the way forward was to focus on roles and responsibilities in the first instance before proceeding to identify structure, organization and the consequential legislative framework. We are currently engaging in public consultations on that Green Paper on roles and responsibilities of local government bodies. Apart from a consultation with the staff of the Ministry of Local Government, we have held 13 consultations with municipalities far and wide. Over 9,000 citizens have attended; 60 of them from community groups, organizations and institutions. Complementary meetings have been held with the private sector stakeholders such as the Chamber of Commerce, DOMA, civil society organizations, NGOs, CBOs, media and trade unions. In the case of trade unions, we have been holding monthly meetings with the PSA and with NUGFW.

At this point, discussions are ongoing with the Ministries of Finance, Health, Planning, Housing and the Environment; Public Administration; Community Development, Culture and Gender Affairs; Social Development; Education; Works and Transport; and the Ministry of Sport and Youth Affairs. The impact has been tremendous, more so, as the people of Trinidad get involved in policy development at the regional level and the community level.

Mr. Vice-President, we on this side listen, absorb, learn and we are now planning. In 2008, we established a Local Government and Regional Planning and Development Unit, headed by a manager who is a highly qualified physical planner. To date, that new unit has laid the foundation for the preparation of regional plans. During its few months in existence, the staff has been able to produce a number of items.

First of all, they have been working on the development of a municipal, social and physical database and GIS capacity. They are expanding the capacity; they are putting it in place in the first instance and expanding it. This database will recall all of the present assets existing in the municipalities, all of the local infrastructure, and it will predict the future needs of corporations. The staff will be working to facilitate the development and implementation of the local areas and regional plans. The staff has been working to establish a system of standards for infrastructure that informs local areas and regional development.

Appropriation Bill (Budget)
[SEN. THE HON. H. MANNING]

Tuesday, October 07, 2008

They have also been working to create a policy of local infrastructure provision, management and operations for users. The staff has been working to facilitate the institutional strengthening of municipal corporations to understand and to undertake development planning and control activities.

The goal of this unit is to ensure that we lay the foundation for good governance, as we engage communities to discuss local and regional plans, which will be assessed and approved by the Ministry of Local Government, the Ministry of Planning, Housing and the Environment, then by Cabinet, and then on to Parliament, as we partner with local areas and regions to develop a charter with communities, villages, towns and urban centres.

Hon. Senators, through you, Mr. Vice-President, as we approach the final public consultation and the beginning of community meetings, I want to invite all of you as good citizens, to come out and discuss your community plans. The respective regional corporations will advertise their community roll-out during fiscal year 2009.

I want to move on to the second element that they spoke of, and that second pillar was the pillar of accountability. I want to immediately refute the allegations made by the hon. Sen. Mark, who has continued to impute improper motives against me, and I will do it in his absence. Note that the Senator did not call names.

10.30 a.m.

He expressly stated that he was not casting aspersions. This is the second time that the Senator has made the same allegations. The first time I thought he was making a joke. Talk about cut and paste. He has repeated almost verbatim the *Hansard* of September 03, 2007. I have evidence of which I speak and I am prepared to read it into the *Hansard* and to table a copy of the letter dated September 04, 2007 from the Corporate Secretary/Legal Adviser of the Airports Authority of Trinidad and Tobago. [*Interruption*] I have a letter here from the Airports Authority, Ref. No. 662-9/2007 dated September 04, 2007, addressed to:

“Sen. The Hon. Mrs. Hazel Manning,

Minister of Education,

Ministry of Education,

St. Clair.

Honourable Senator,

Payroll information in respect of employment at the Airports Authority of
Trinidad and Tobago.

Appropriation Bill (Budget)

Tuesday, October 07, 2008

We refer to a request for information with respect to travelling allowances paid to the honourable Senator during your employment at the Airports Authority of Trinidad and Tobago and more specifically during the period November 1995 to March 1996 (the relevant period)—as quoted by the hon. Senator—

“Following a diligent search of our files, we confirm that during the relevant period above there were no payments in respect of travelling allowances to the honourable Senator.”

And I want to repeat it, that during the relevant period above there were no payments in respect of travelling allowances to the hon. Senator.

“Effective April 1996 a commuted travelling allowance in the sum of \$2,000 per month was paid to the honourable Senator until the termination of employment in July 1997.

Should you require any further information you can contact the undersigned at 669 3895.

Yours faithfully

Hayden Newton

Corporate Secretary/Legal Adviser”

Mr. Vice-President, I would like to lay this in the Senate.

Hon. Senator: Very good, very good. [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. The Hon. H. Manning: Mr. Vice-President and Members of this honourable Senate, July 1997 was the first time that the UNC was in power. All kinds of strange things happened at the Airports Authority of Trinidad and Tobago.

During that time they sought to get rid of people of integrity and I was fired in July 1997. Thank God that I am in this Senate and that I can defend myself when attacked. [*Desk thumping*] I pity those who cannot defend themselves from hon. Senators on the other side. I think that it is time for this Parliament to examine the issue of parliamentary privileges. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Vice-President, I rest my case.

During the last eight years the total development funding to the local government head office and the municipal corporations increased threefold. In 2000 it moved from \$58 million to \$113 million in 2005; 2006, \$196 million;

Appropriation Bill (Budget)
[SEN. THE HON. H. MANNING]

Tuesday, October 07, 2008

2007 it moved again; 2008, \$182 million. The funding which was allocated to regional corporations also increased; it moved from \$48 million in 2000 to \$146 million in 2008. Clearly, there has been a significant increase in the quantum of the development programme funding allocated to the municipal corporations over the past eight years.

We intend to account for every cent of the budget at the Ministry of Local Government. Firstly, we have had a director of finance. Our next milestone is in early 2009 when our consultants will begin reporting from every region on the new regional and local area plans. Today we are setting standards. In this area of accountability and sustained attention, resources have been devoted to public sector management, to public service delivery, to state enterprise management and to financial management and reform.

At the Ministry of Local Government we are in the process of undertaking the necessary steps to improve and to modernize our accounting, auditing and reporting systems. We have strengthened our human resource capability and our human resource competence and in this area we have increased the members of our staff. We have hired a financial director; we have hired other subordinate staff.

In terms of operational systems, processes and procedures, the unit has been working really very hard. The unit has computerized its monthly cheque listing with a new automated system. Reconciliations can now be done using the cheque listing. Never before! We have moved from manual to automation. The unit has been working hard to put in place a process map to accounting procedure and the accounting measures that are required to perform each task. The unit has been training its staff professionally and retraining the staff in order to achieve effective management. The unit has been focusing more on comprehensive and management auditing.

The unit has implemented a new procurement system with respect to IRID, our Infrastructure Renewal Improvement and Development programme. This entailed revisiting the criteria for selection and establishing performance standards as well as monitoring, evaluating and reviewing projects that are being executed. We do not have it right yet, but we are working on it. The unit has been establishing new policies, new standards and new performance benchmarks, monitoring, evaluating and reviewing as our operations take place. The implementation and the establishment of these systems will enable us to constantly monitor and review the public sector investment programme, the infrastructure development programme and other development programmes almost in realtime.

For fiscal year 2007/2008, over \$146 million was allocated for development works in the municipal corporations, inclusive of drainage, irrigation, recreational facilities, cemeteries, crematoria, markets, abattoirs, local roads and bridges, local government building programmes and the development of holistic development plans.

As at August 31, 2008 the sum of \$129 million was released to municipal corporations. The sum was apportioned to projects in the following areas:

- drainage and irrigation, \$31 million, 191 drainage projects were undertaken;
- recreational facilities, \$16 million, works were undertaken in 103 facilities;
- cemeteries and crematoria, \$3 million approximately, works to be undertaken in 28 facilities;
- markets and abattoirs, \$9 million approximately, works to be undertaken in 23 facilities;
- local roads and bridges, \$112 million, works to be undertaken in 148 roads, 37,471 metres, 88 bridges, 23 box-drains, 21 culverts, slipper drains, footpaths, retaining walls, landslips, manhole covers, et cetera.

These projects are expected to bring relief and enhance the quality of life and standard of living of thousands of our citizens and burgesses in various municipalities. Moreover, they would also allay the concerns of the residents pertaining to the provision of facilities for young people; their responsiveness to their needs and to their demands, as well as social amenities in their communities, all of which were highlighted as critical concerns in the WAVE 10 of the MORI Caribbean Limited poll for April 2008.

In terms of the IRID programme which engages community contractors to construct community infrastructure, such as retaining walls, box-drains and footpaths, in fiscal year 2007/2008 the allocation to municipal corporations was \$25 million, while the Ministry of Local Government retained \$5 million. As of August 31, 2008 the sum of \$24 million was released to municipal corporations for the undertaking of approximately 214 projects, as well as for payment of previous years' expenditure.

Reports as at August 31, 2008 revealed that approximately 123 or 58 per cent of those projects were completed. The remainder which requires extensive construction is in progress and it is expected to be completed in a short while. Approximately 29 of those 219 projects have not yet started due to challenging issues with the contractors. These issues are being addressed and the projects, we hope, would begin soon.

Appropriation Bill (Budget)
[SEN. THE HON. H. MANNING]

Tuesday, October 07, 2008

Due to the monitoring and evaluation mechanisms that are now in place, corrective actions are being taken as and when they arise. Moreover, the programme also commenced in early May 2008, two months earlier than previous years. We believe that by and large we have begun to receive value for our money. It is not perfect yet, but we are working to set up standards and to maintain standards. We intend to do better as we continue the development of secondary infrastructure to benefit hundreds of thousands of our burgesses and our citizens.

During this fiscal year 2007/2008, four special purpose companies were assigned to the Ministry of Local Government, they are: the Rural Development Company of Trinidad and Tobago Limited; the Palo Seco Agricultural Enterprises Limited; the Community Improvement Services Limited and the East Port of Spain Development Company Limited. The general mandate of these companies is to manage and to implement projects to regenerate communities through economic, social and physical transformation. Examples of development activities are improvement of secondary road networks, drainage, construction of cultural and community centres and sporting facilities.

The allocation to these companies for fiscal year 2007/2008, total approximately \$256 million. To date the companies have been employed in delivering over 285 projects where 440 contracts have been awarded, 436 executed. These projects will improve the quality of life of over 20,000 of our burgesses, resulting in an outcome of well-being and empowerment for us as a people. In fiscal year 2008/2009, \$200 million have been allocated to the four special purpose companies assigned to the Ministry of Local Government, which will be utilized to implement projects to positively impact on the quality of life of another 25,000 citizens of Trinidad and Tobago.

In fiscal year 2008/2009 we will be monitoring and we will be intensifying our efforts to ensure that our accountability and reporting systems enable us to constantly monitor, to constantly evaluate, constantly review performances as well as to achieve value for money spent. We are in the process of hiring engineering firms to assist us in monitoring, in evaluating and reviewing all infrastructure projects undertaken by the ministry, the ministry's corporations and special purpose companies.

As we undertake the reform of the local government system, we will continue to implement output budgeting and improve management systems to promote operational efficiency, to promote accountability and transparency. This will ensure better value for money, that standards are maintained, and that as a people we move to a state of self-respect, a state of growth and personal development.

10.45 a.m.

Mr. Vice-President, this monitoring and evaluation approach is now being adopted by section heads and directors of the Ministry, as monthly meetings are being arranged with relevant units throughout the Ministry and municipal heads. Therefore, we have heads of finance, human resources, engineering, disaster management units, all meeting to monitor and evaluate. For this fiscal year, the Ministry of Local Government has received as I said before, \$200 million for our special purpose companies to implement projects right across the country and we intend, not only to implement our projects, but for the corporations to account for every cent. We intend to spend wisely so that we can achieve value for our money, and we can bring quality standards to every citizen.

I now move to the third pillar and that is the pillar of transparency. Easy access to information is one of the Government's policies which encourages availability and disclosure of information, and therefore in this regard, the Ministry of Local Government has published a local government services directory. We have been publishing regular news features and key local government operations and services; we have been issuing monthly newspaper releases; and we have also established a website to provide information on services.

Mr. Vice-President, the issue of transparency is closely associated with establishing a legal framework, and we are in the process of doing that. We have hired consultants who are now working on a draft Bill, as we analyze the responses from our public consultations. We believe that all citizens and burgesses have a right to know the procedures to accessing justice, for seeking remedies when they have suffered from injustice or maladministration, and therefore, our corporate secretaries have been dealing with these challenges. To date, over 100 such cases have been referred to our corporate secretaries for the dispensing of quick justice and to minimize psychological trauma and anxieties of our people. We have been looking also at the regulatory and enabling legislation for the conduct of business, and therefore, again, our consultants are drafting new legislation to ensure that takes place, that we put in place enabling legislation and not prescriptive legislation.

Mr. Vice-President, putting that in place, we have now moved on to predictability, to the fact that this is the final pillar; to the fact that when we build, we need to get on a stable state. With respect to matters of constitution reform, a round table panel has been meeting on this critical issue, and hopefully when they report, I am sure that there will be something in it for local governance. The institutional framework also plays a critical part in determining the success of

Appropriation Bill (Budget)
[SEN. THE HON. H. MANNING]

Tuesday, October 07, 2008

governance initiatives, and therefore, it is necessary as we get to that stable state, that we have a strategic plan in place, a plan for transformation and when we have transformed for good governance, that we have appropriate coordinating mechanisms in place—

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

Motion made, That the hon. Senator's speaking be extended by 15 minutes.
[Hon. M. Browne]

Question put and agreed to.

Mr. Vice-President: Before you continue Senator, I had stood down earlier the swearing in of two new Senators, so I would like to do that at this time.

LEAVE OF ABSENCE

Mr. Vice- President: Hon. Senators, I have granted leave of absence to Sen. The Hon. Conrad Enill and Sen. The Hon. Arnold Piggott, who are both out of the country.

SENATORS' APPOINTMENT

Mr. Vice-President: Hon. Senators, I have received the following correspondences from His Excellency the Acting President, Sen. The Hon. Danny Montano:

“THE CONSTITUTION OF THE REPUBLIC OF TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO

By His Excellency DANNY MONTANO, LLB, BComm.,
C.A., Acting President and Commander-in-Chief of
the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago.

/s/ Danny Montano
Acting President.

TO: MR. NOEL GAYLE

WHEREAS Senator Arnold Piggott is incapable of performing his duties as a Senator by reason of his absence from Trinidad and Tobago:

NOW, THEREFORE, I, DANNY MONTANO, Acting President as aforesaid, acting in accordance with the advice of the Prime Minister, 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, NOEL GAYLE, to be temporarily

Senators' Appointment

Tuesday, October 07, 2008

a member of the Senate, with effect from 7th October, 2008 and continuing during the absence from Trinidad and Tobago of Senator Arnold Piggott.

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 6th day of October, 2008."

“THE CONSTITUTION OF THE REPUBLIC OF TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO

By His Excellency Danny Montano, LLB., B Comm.,C.A., Acting President and Commander-in-Chief of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago.

/s/ Danny Montano
President.

TO: MS. ANWARIE RAMKISSOON

WHEREAS Senator Conrad Enill is incapable of performing his duties as a Senator by reason of his absence from Trinidad and Tobago:

NOW, THEREFORE, I, DANNY MONTANO, Acting President as aforesaid, acting in accordance with the advice of the Prime Minister, 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, ANWARIE RAMKISSOON, to be temporarily a member of the Senate, with immediate effect and continuing during the absence from Trinidad and Tobago of Senator Conrad Enill.

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 7th day of October, 2008."

OATH OF ALLEGIANCE

Senators Noel Gayle and Anwarie Ramkissoon took and subscribed the Oath of Allegiance as required by law.

Mr. Vice-President: Hon. Senators, and in fact some of the senior Senators, may I just point out Standing Order 42. Probably you could look at your Standing Orders and read it.

**APPROPRIATION BILL
(BUDGET)**

Sen. The Hon. H. Manning: Thank you very much, Mr. Vice-President. I want to start again at the institutional framework while everybody is looking at Standing Order 42, and to say that the institutional arrangements play a critical part in determining the success of any governance initiatives. I started by saying that we need to put in place a strategic plan—and the Ministry is doing that—that is informed by the principles of good governance. We are also saying that appropriate coordinating mechanisms to integrate and rationalize service delivery are also among what we are doing and in the Government agencies in all regions, boroughs and cities.

We are also rationalizing and strengthening institutions and initiatives focusing on areas such as IT, human resource management, financial management, and technical capabilities, et cetera. We are also constantly monitoring and looking at government policies and the compliance of government policies. We are effectively monitoring and looking at evaluations and review of operations; we are also looking at the relevant research and the development studies that will drive what we are doing. We want to be data driven, as regional development plans, physical and social infrastructure, environmental plans are all in place to make sure that what we are doing is done in a really very proper and scientific way, and therefore, we need to be data driven as we move forward. So therefore, in order to attain institutional effectiveness in terms of achieving desired goals, an essential requirement is to establish an effective performance management system.

Mr. Vice-President, that is where we are going. In this regard, appropriate and realistic performance standards and criteria will be established, and compensation and reward would be linked to meeting and surpassing those standards. In this context, local government reform, the Ministry's organizational structure will be reconfigured with that in mind, and will be reconfigured with a professional cadre of workers. In this regard, the structures and the organizations to be established would be influenced by the roles and the responsibilities of the Ministry and the corporations, which will be finalized at the end of the public consultations. Therefore, we have been working with the Ministry of Public Administration and the Public Management Consulting Division of the Ministry of Public Administration to be able to put a system in place.

We have already discovered that there are over 400 vacancies and we are working assiduously with the Public Service Commission to work out what could be done with these vacancies, however, as we reform the local government

system, appropriate changes will be made. We are working with the Service Commissions, the Public Service Association (PSA), NUGFW, the Chief Personnel Officer's Department to streamline, rationalize, to modernize the process, the methods, the procedures pertaining to recruitment, selection and appointment. We are in the process of negotiating training and development, and negotiating employee assistance programmes. We will be establishing monitoring and evaluating teams to ensure that municipal corporations are functioning efficiently, effectively and delivering quality service to our burgesses and our citizens.

Mr. Vice-President, on the critical issue of local government reform, the proposals of roles and responsibilities of local government bodies embodied in our Green Paper 2008 which was published for public comments, would be out there for all responses. The document outlines the over-achieving purpose of the reform which involves specific roles for the Ministry of Local Government and for the management of regional corporations and it spells out the need to focus on three points:

- the provision of the social services;
- the development of opportunities for economic viability; and
- the conservation of the environment and the creation of sustainable communities and the development of resilient communities.

11.00 a.m.

Mr. Vice-President, with the assistance of the consultants of the Grubb Institute of England, attached to the Ministry of Public Administration we have developed a draft integral strategy for the implementation of the local government transformation in Trinidad and Tobago. The document which has been approved by Cabinet outlines the context for local government reform for the next three years. It identifies the core purpose, the vision, the mission and also critically evaluates the main risks including skills and capacity shortages including institutional and process requirements, the need for boundary reviews and the like.

In addition, it also stipulates requirements for managing the programme, the main projects and the support that would be required. Furthermore, to ensure effective management, the work is to be divided into a series of projects with all consisting of a clear brief and work programme, a project team, a project sponsor, a project manager, local government transformation project unit which is championed by one of the project managers and the development of a local government transformation board as oversight.

Sixteen projects have been identified and they are as follows:

- the development of a legislative framework;
- the development of funding mechanisms for recurrent and capital expenditure to guide our local government finance;
- clarifying the roles and the relationship between managerial and political leadership, especially at the corporations;
- developing mechanisms for fostering participatory democracy to encourage and engage citizens and communities;
- developing human resource procedure;
- developing and establishing standards and systems for monitoring, evaluating and reviewing;
- establishing internal and external ICT challenges;
- clarifying roles, responsibilities and the structure of the Ministry of Local Government and in the corporations as we decentralize;
- establishing disaster preparedness and management programmes;
- establishing a regional spatial plan;
- establishing a waste management programme;
- establishing urban management and vending programmes;
- establishing municipal community policing programmes;
- clarifying the roles and responsibilities of the corporations, the ministry vis-à-vis the road and drain authorities;
- establishing an environmental management system inclusive of food hygiene to work very closely with the Ministry of Health and their corporation as a watchdog and coordinator expanding the role of the regional coordinating committees so that corporations can become effective watchdogs.

And so, Mr. Vice-President, it is important to note that some of these projects are not cast in stone, nor are they adorned in marble and, therefore, they could be readily modified. But we have a road map and we know where we are going.

So the Ministry of Local Government, having undertaken this comprehensive overview of the local government projects required for the completion of the local government reform process, the time frame has been given and we believe it will

take us approximately three years for full implementation. Therefore, we are saying that for fiscal 2009, phase one of that programme, we will determine our organizational structure of the local government system, we will produce a White Paper on Local Government Reform, we will produce a local government legislation inclusive of a Bill and policy document to accompany the same and, therefore, get parliamentary approval, hopefully.

We believe that we will be able to determine the boundaries, the implementation of the executive council system, the establishment of appropriate municipal and community policing systems, the capacity building and institutional strengthening, et cetera. We believe we will put in place a waste management programme, a disaster management programme and regional spatial planning. So for fiscal year 2008/2009 approximately \$1.6 billion has been allocated to the Ministry of Local Government inclusive of the municipal corporations.

Mr. Vice-President, Senators and the viewing public at large, I pledge that every effort will be made to ensure that the moneys are well spent on the projects and to ensure that they will redound to the benefit of the citizens and the burgesses within the respective municipalities and in particular, that the money will be used to improve the standard of living and the quality of life of our burgesses.

We will continue to develop appropriate policies, we will ensure that national and international standards and performance benchmarks are in place, as well as intensify our monitoring and evaluating and reviewing efforts to make quick response to citizens as well as to rectify emerging issues. When we speak to local government, we speak to quality, we speak to the involvement of all, we are embracing love; it is a love thing; [*Desk thumping*] it is a commitment to a long journey of development through which we all aspire to arrive at a place that is united, resilient, productive, innovative and prosperous. A place that is disciplined and caring and fun loving, healthy and happy people, and one educated people based on the attributes of self-reliance, respect, equity and integrity.

Mr. Vice-President, when we arrive on or before the year 2020, the people of this country will be beneficiaries of a more efficient management of resources, will be expanding on modern quality service delivery, superior physical infrastructure, healthier and more sanitary communities. There will be safe, secure, peaceful and resilient communities, entrepreneurship and employment generation will be very evident and there will be increased opportunity for community decision making, and overall improvement in the quality of life and the standard of living embracing all of us with love.

Thank you.

Sen. Prof. Ramesh Deosaran: It is a great pleasure, Mr. Vice-President, to stand before you and address this honourable Senate. That pleasure however, is disrupted I believe because how can we take pleasure in reading about a murder rate that pelts its way, way over 400 in such a short space of time?

I believe all citizens—more precisely the Government of the day—have to take this as one of the most serious matters facing this country. If it is the case that in an area of such prosperity with a GDP of over \$140 billion, and an unemployment rate going below 6 per cent, you have such a rate of serious crimes and a galloping rate of murders crippling the country, the signs indeed are very ominous as to what will happen to us if there is a downturn in the economy as a possible consequence of what is happening in the United States of America and in other parts of the world with the commercial and banking sectors.

This is not a matter of being gloomy, it is one that we should take very seriously and I do appreciate the remarks made by the last speaker, the distinguished Minister of Local Government, that we need all hands on deck. But as I have said before and I wish to repeat, all hands on deck do not appear as magic. You need leadership and facilitation from the Government which, with respect to crime and security, seem to be lacking.

I am in this warring stage because yesterday I heard the Minister in the Ministry of Finance in what is really an eloquent presentation and I wish to commend him, but he did speak about a number of projects which I will not enumerate in the interest of time, but as one delicate aspect, the expansion in the hotel industry and the emphasis on business tourism particularly. But without personal safety and national security, all these expansions will be adversely affected, and that is not rocket science, but we are yet to hear and see a proper range of responses from the Government's side to deal with these types of challenges.

I wish to commend the Minister of Finance for a budget speech which obviously, in my view, took a lot of work. I would like to congratulate the technical staff in the Ministry of Finance for producing all these documents. Sometimes we forget, but in addition to the budget statement, there are several other documents which can inform the national community; one in particular being the Social Sector Investment Programme which is really one area which specifically speaks to crime prevention.

The unfortunate thing in the social sector over the years and I am sure the Government knows this, it has not mentioned it, but there seems to be a withdrawal from the types of social sector programmes they had in the last three

or four years into a new kind of coverage because they have not succeeded in preventing crime, especially in preventing crimes in the vulnerable areas of the country on the East-West Corridor. We are not hearing anything about a reformulation of the approach to deal with that residual, very serious challenge. I would speak a bit more about that. But I still want to congratulate the technical staff in the ministry, the Minister in the Ministry of Finance, Sen. The Hon. Mariano Browne and the Minister of Finance herself for the kind of work we see going into the production of these papers.

When I listened to the Minister of Energy and Energy Industries yesterday and even just now the Minister of Local Government, you experience a tinge of optimism, you feel things are going somewhere and especially in the case of the Minister of Energy and Energy Industries, he did make an admission with respect to inflation that things had not worked as well as the Government had expected and, therefore, a new route will be taken.

Whenever the Minister of Local Government speaks as she just spoke—I will be frank about it—relatively speaking, you get the feeling that some things are happening, that there is a track on which movement is taking place, but with respect to the Minister of National Security you get the feeling that it is like a dog trying to bite its own tail, it is going around in circles and circles. Unfortunately, without being disrespectful, you keep hearing the same thing about the end of the day, hold strain, we will get results just now, and I, too, am living in this country—all those spurious remarks are not justifiable, neither are they warranted especially given a budget of \$4 billion to work with.

So whilst you have such good things happening on one track, on this track we are yet, not only to see results, but to witness an attitude that will enable all hands to get on deck as the Minister of Local Government is requesting.

11.15 a.m.

I was a bit saddened when she had to defend herself, especially with the kind of proof that she presented. I know what it is to be wrongfully accused. I have had that experience once or twice. It is not a pleasant experience to be wrongfully accused especially in terms of corruption. I think that yesterday, Sen. Mark did his public duty in pointing out the several apparent irregularities in the Trinidad and Tobago Electricity Commission.

I encourage the Government that in order to build public confidence in itself and to show that it has some serious concern about allegations of corruption that this is quite serious enough for an enquiry. In that case Sen. Mark has done his

Appropriation Bill (Budget)
[SEN. PROF. DEOSARAN]

Tuesday, October 07, 2008

public duty, but with respect to the allegation of corruption against the Minister of Local Government, I think that there is a gap that Sen. Mark should now proceed to fill by producing some proof, otherwise there should be an apology.

I do not say this lightly because the Opposition in the Westminster system is the watchdog of government and the country's interest. It is the most serious check and balance that we have in this system. I will hesitate to obstruct Sen. Mark or any other Senator of the Opposition from doing what is public duty. When it comes to an allegation like that which could cause public embarrassment and for which there is no adequate proof so far, especially if the allegation is countered by documentary proof, I believe that an apology in the spirit of Parliament protocol would be justifiable. [*Desk thumping*] I would say the same thing if it were the case that an Opposition Member was accused similarly. It is the principle that I would like to be re-established. [*Desk thumping*]

It brings me back to a related concern. What we do here in Parliament happily, in a way, builds knowledge about what parliamentarians are doing, that is through the live broadcast of parliamentary proceedings. I have said several times and I reaffirm that the Government ought to be congratulated for taking that step in allowing parliamentary proceedings to be broadcasted live. That is another reason we should be careful. If we have to do it we have to do it, but we should have some care in making allegations because sometimes it is too late to correct. I will hate to see parliamentary privilege diminish. I prefer to see that the rules of engagement are enforced, and there are rules.

You are quite right to refer us to Standing Order 42. It says that whenever you stand we should sit or remain silent. That is part of the protocol that we need to establish. Of course, the system is an adversarial system. It is an arena of conflict, competition for power. Therefore, there would be conflict and there would be watchdog intrusions depending on what the Government is doing. We welcome all that. But in the name of civility and public confidence, there ought to be a line; not imposed by any other person, but on ourselves. [*Desk thumping*]

There should be no need to tell us how we should behave. Make your assertions, confront, but as I said, there is need for self-regulation. I will hate to see that the freedoms that have been fought for so severely over the years from the 12th Century upwards to establish the Parliament which is the place of sovereignty for the population in a democracy, diminish, especially the one dealing with freedom of speech. Just as the freedom is enjoyed, the responsibility that goes with it must also be an obligation.

I take time off from what I had prepared to make that point to remind us that when the Motion for live broadcast was moved, these were the expectations which I will now enunciate and remind the public, with respect to parliamentarians of the Lower House and the Senate, what the substance of the Motion sought to do and these are the obligations to which we should live up, having now the enjoyment of live parliamentary broadcast.

Whereas a healthy democracy depends on a well informed citizenry;

Whereas citizens are entitled to know how Members of Parliament represent them in Parliament;

Whereas there is a need for citizens to have at first hand and, as far as practical, information regarding what transpires in the country's Parliament;

And whereas the information gap between the proceedings in Parliament and citizens awareness needs to be closed as far as practical;

Be it resolved that the Government arrange, with appropriate permission, for full debates on the business of both Houses to be transmitted to the public through the electronic media in an equitable and discreetly edited form on fixed days of the week and with such transmission to begin before the end of the year 2003.

Be it further resolved that a Joint Select Committee of Parliament be appointed to consider and report on this matter so as to facilitate Government action.

There was a debate. I moved the Motion. The matter was on the books for some years. I moved the Motion; the Government and Opposition accepted and so it is now reality. I wish to remind our Senators of what the Motion expected. I had put in the words "discreetly edited".

Dr. Keith Rowley was chairman of the select committee. My colleague Sen. Dana Seetahal was a Member. There was some objection to the words, "discreetly edited" but I put it in to prevent certain things from happening and reaching the public ear. If I remember correctly, the committee in its discretion found that it should not be so and the broadcast should be live. Be that as it may, I feel a bit worried as having been the mover of the Motion that the public is not enjoying what the objectives of the motion seemed to convey. I wish to take the opportunity to remind ourselves as to what we are expected to do.

In reference to the budget I wish to make another point quite briefly. I wish I had more time to elaborate because I know that the Government is concerned since it has stirred up a depth of controversy in the public domain.

The increase in premium gas is 33 per cent. It is \$3 to \$4 and not 25 per cent as some commentators are saying. It has to do with the subsidy of \$2 billion. If I recall the speech by the Minister of Finance, it has to do with traffic congestion. It seemed to have been a pet notion of the Minister of Energy and Energy Industries that the group to hit first is what is called the rich people, middle class, those who drive SUVs. That hit is a misguided one to begin with because the middle class we talk about who drive SUVs and have vehicles that use premium gas are not the traditional middle class who got their wealth through some aristocracy or gift. The middle class in this country is a struggling middle class. The salaried middle class in this country, the nurses—

Sen. Browne: Ministers struggling too.

Sen. Prof. R. Deosaran: That makes it even worse. You are killing yourself. You are stifling yourself. That is what worries me. You should know the problem and seek another route to alleviate yourself from that suffering.

The middle class is not the Marxist type who owns the means of production or the elite. The middle class in this country are nurses, teachers, even doctors and some lawyers. There are exceptions, of course. There are young lawyers, teachers and public servants. The public servants' salaries are way behind what they should be, comparatively speaking. I think that I have made the point. It is a struggling middle class. To target them and say that they could afford it or you are taking the \$200 million from them and using it for your social sector programme is a misguided policy. The assumption is wrong.

The other assumption which is wrong is that that would never ease traffic congestion. It cannot. I think that Sen. Seetahal SC and Sen. Helen Drayton were quite correct. You need alternative ideas. Decentralize your offices. When I hear some Ministers speak, I wonder. I mean, we are not bereft of ideas. Sen. Dr. Saith is a veteran in this matter. I think he was absent when this decision was taken. I doubt that with his experience and sensitivity towards the political climate of the country he would sit and allow something like this to happen.

There is not only a matter here of accounting and \$1. It is the psychology of the electorate. The people in this country feel that this is a country that produces oil and gas. The psychology is like in many other countries where oil and gas are produced. There ought to be some benefit even through the subsidy process. The

population feels terribly violated to know that here you are producing oil and gas and you are being punished because you own an SUV and you struggled up the road to reach a status where you can afford an SUV. You have mortgages; increase in public utilities and everything else that goes with some pressure, diabetes, heart attack and stress, yet you want to target the middle class.

I ask the Government with respect and without going further, given the uneasiness it has created, it has helped to see everything in the budget as being bad, whereas it is not so. People are so agitated and enraged with this increase, that you have added to what you call road rage. Stress! Anti government feeling.

I ask the Government with respect and out of the politics, to look at it as a people issue. The budget has a title, "Shaping Our Future Together". Withdraw that \$1 increase. It is not worth it, or cut it by at least half. It would be helpful. If the Minister of Local Government wants the public to believe what she said about togetherness and a caring, loving Government; if you love the country so much and care so much for this country, this suffering struggling middle class, the thing you should do today at this instance in this budget, as a gesture of goodwill and an expression of compassion for a tired suffering country under the siege of crime, is to remove that additional \$1 or consider cutting it in half. If you do not do it, you would be leaving a residue of rage and antagonism and what my colleague said, anti government feeling. I am not saying that you will lose the next election. I am not going that far. It is no use to win an election and have a very distressed national community.

Let me now refer to page 19 in the budget speech. It deals with crime. It says:

"...notwithstanding the considerable efforts of the Government, the proliferation of the trade in illegal drugs and the erosion of traditional family values have led to a level of criminality which is intolerable, unacceptable and which we all, government, business and law-abiding citizens must continue to address with ever increasing vigour."

The words here are "considerable effort" in terms of bureaucracy. There are homicide units as SAUTT, all different types of units scattered all over the place. What you have done by this fragmentation is to contribute unwittingly to the demoralization of the core policing staff. Sen. Seetahal SC made reference to that yesterday.

11.30 a.m.

It says that in spite of these efforts there is the proliferation of criminal activities. This is as clear an admission as we can have. I commend the

Appropriation Bill (Budget)
[SEN. PROF. DEOSARAN]

Tuesday, October 07, 2008

Government for its honesty, but what is missing is that they do not have the mechanisms, through the Ministry of National Security, for carrying out the request of the Minister of Local Government to get all hands on deck.

That Ministry—and I am sorry that the Minister is not here—operates in too exclusionary a manner whereas what is needed is the opposite. I have had some dealings with matters of this kind. I do not want to get more deeply into it, but it is discouraging to know that for the help he needs, he persists in going upwards to North America.

In the 2003 Budget, the Prime Minister himself made the point that among the root causes of crime are factors such as the breakdown of family life, unemployment, poverty and drug abuse. They keep saying that this is causing crime and at the same time there are billions of dollars being spent trying to solve the problem. So where are we?

We are at a galloping murder rate, over 400; within the top 10 in the world, moving faster to capture the prize of being perhaps close to Jamaica, which has had the reputation of being the murder capital of the world. We do not like these things and this is no longer a single Ministry issue.

I am always amazed, intrigued and perhaps disappointed that in a Cabinet of almost 30 people this is allowed to happen without voices being raised. I am very surprised and disappointed that everybody could allow these things to happen budget after budget, hearing the same thing. Are you all too not tired of hearing the same thing over and over especially when there are Ministers who are trying to move forward with programmes, policies and projects and this crime problem is like a millstone around their necks? If I were a member of a Cabinet like that, the Minister of National Security would really have some questions to answer or do what his conscience should now tell him to do.

It is not an easy job for me to say what I am saying. I am not here like the Bench in front of me, to remove the Government. I am not here to help the Government maintain its power for years and years. That is not my job. My job, like many of us on this Independent Bench, is so seek to make a professional contribution based on the manner in which we were put here, having made some contribution in a special field. That is what we are seeking to do.

You cannot always blame poverty and unemployment and drugs for crime. I will tell you why in a short while. There are push factors towards crime; there are also some factors that pull crime. The ones that pull crime are the ones in which I am interested now, that is, a low detection rate, which means that the criminals

feel they can get off; weak policing, where the criminals also feel they can get off. In other words, the factors that are required for deterrence are not there. They cannot keep on regurgitating the same excuses.

The Cabinet should do better, even if the Ministry cannot do better. The excuses must stop. There was a time when the business community, Stephen Cadiz, everybody, was on the Opposition's throat to join with the Government to bring forward the so-called police Bills. That was done. What are the results? They tell you about family life and the breakdown of values. That is no excuse. You have a police service to protect and serve so you cannot blame family values all the time. That is a sociological phenomenon. That will be taken care of by your other programmes and by the schools, the church—but the police and the Ministry of National Security have their jobs to do.

You cannot sit back and tell us over and over that it is a worldwide problem. That does not help us. What do you mean it is a worldwide problem? The problems of crime in India, China, Japan and Australia are different from here and, therefore, there is a lot of room for a different approach, especially with such things as gangs.

The gangs of Chicago are not the same type of gangs you have here. The formation and the instigation of the gang culture in Chicago are quite different. Sen. Seetahal SC made some reference to that. I was in Chicago; I went around with the police. I visited faith-based programmes in the church to see what they were doing to relieve the public from this threat of gangs. So in bringing an expert from Chicago, you are missing the point of cultural differences and how the gangs in the East-West Corridor are formed. You will, therefore, miss the policy approach, having been left with a lot of money being spent and no solution.

We will hear that results are coming, wait. There is a calypso: Wait, Dorothy, wait! The population is not Dorothy. We can wait no longer. Our international image is being tarnished and it is a case where much better can be done. That is the tragedy about this. It is also not cost beneficial. Look at the amount of money being spent. That is taxpayers' dollars. A government ought to be interested in putting a curb on this or in seeking some alternative arrangement. I am tempted to say that Sen. Mariano Browne might be a good—anyhow.

Then we hear that crime is everybody's business. The minimal condition for everybody in this country is to be law-abiding. Once you are law-abiding, the rest is up to the police, so do not download the excuse on the public and make them feel guilty when the crime rate is up. That is one of the most naive slogans I have heard in years and continue to hear.

Appropriation Bill (Budget)
[SEN. PROF. DEOSARAN]

Tuesday, October 07, 2008

We make it our business because we are law-abiding. Those who are not, the police will take care of them. If we go the extra mile and form neighbourhood watch groups and do other work such as we are doing to help, well that is a bonus, but you cannot make the public feel guilty for your sins of commission. You are blaming everybody else except to consider what section 53 of the Constitution says, that is, Parliament must make laws for the peace and order of the country.

You seem to be missing what section 75 says—that the Cabinet is responsible for the management of the country's affairs. That is why there are other provisions that mandate you to collect taxes. There are provisions that give you power of State, to arrest and prosecute. Nobody else has that power, so how could crime be my business?

It goes further, in section 85, and says that the Minister is responsible for the policy and direction of the agencies that fall under his or her jurisdiction. And that is where the lapse is. That is why I am grieved, and many other citizens, to see this thing going on and on with Mastrofski and \$80 million. Do not tell me to wait like Dorothy. That cannot work any more. If you want all hands on deck, you have to do something else.

I am not all doom and gloom. I am happy to see improvements, to the point where, when I saw police patrols on the road recently, more regularly than before, when I saw that an attempt was being made recently to curb lawlessness on the road, I wrote a letter to Mr. James Philbert, Commissioner of Police, congratulating him and asking him to extend my congratulations to his executive and urging him to keep up the good work so that others lower down in the rank would be inspired to do what he is trying to do. I am not here to denigrate and oppose. I am here to encourage, inspire and assist. The evidence is there.

While I am on that and Sen. Seetahal SC is next to me, we have been trying to make our contributions differently. It is not only about law enforcement; it is about restorative justice too. Somebody close to him should ask the Prime Minister where the mediation centre idea came from. Where did the proposal to establish mediation centres come from in 1994? Sen. Seetahal SC knows. We made that proposal and developed the implementation plan, so when we speak, some of us, it is with a number of credits behind us in terms of coming on deck.

Sen. Seetahal SC is reminding me of a number of other things that we did. There are so many things that we do, but the Minister and the Ministry is an exclusionary agent. He prefers something else up the road. They will come and go and the problems and the neglect of local capital will always be there. That is not

calling all hands on deck. You have to change that approach. I would not talk about the extent to which he is blocking other professionals from developing in this country. I leave that for another time.

I expect senior Ministers and the Prime Minister himself to make sure that whatever the Minister of National Security does, there is no spite and victimization in it because one of these days, one of these days—

I come to a point which has been mentioned over and over—this thing about drugs contributing to crime. The Government, on the advice, of course, of the Minister of National Security, refers to this report. It is a joint report by the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime and the World Bank. The first thing I must say in order to validate myself is that when this report was being prepared, the World Bank people came to see me and asked what I thought about the manuscript and the direction they should go. I sent 16 suggestions for improvement and for directing the research and policy. It was dated October 23, 2006 and was sent to Dr. Andrew Morrison of the World Bank.

You cannot rely on the drug explanation to the extent to which you are relying upon it. That is the issue with which I want to deal. The second recommendation I made to them was to talk about the GDP. I said that the use of the GDP and its relation to crime, homicide, violence, et cetera, to me presented a problem. They were using the GDP as a macro indicator to crime. It could work in other countries; it could not work in Trinidad and Tobago. To cut a long story short, I said that a large proportion of GDP in terms of goods and services—I made that point before; I will make it again—comes from the fear of crime—burglar proof, security guards, watchdogs and all the other paraphernalia that goes with the fear of crime. So that GDP also has a negative component and that is an important point when you are looking at the GDP in terms of prosperity. It is really not prosperity in the classical sense when you look at the murder rate and the serious crime rate.

In the 1980s, when we had a similar situation, Earl Lovelace called prosperity then, during the oil boom, vulgar prosperity. The one we seem to be enjoying now, quite regretfully, is bloody prosperity. There is too much blood in the midst of this prosperity and we cannot continue so.

The other point I made to the World Bank people is that to examine crime at the macro level would not work. I will demonstrate in a few minutes why, by using the statistics from the World Bank report, on which the Minister of National Security relies so much. I said you have to make more micro analyses, especially since crime in terms of gangs, drugs and the use of guns are situationally driven.

11.45 a.m.

They are not national problems. There are some areas in the country where the things are driven much, much more. Therefore, as I have said before, they are culturally rooted. You bringing an outside expert to tell you about the classical explanations from Chicago and Los Angeles, just would not work if you do not understand the demography, the history and the cultural nuances that perpetrate this phenomenon. It is a mistake and the Cabinet must not allow this mistake to go unattended. You have to do something. You cannot sit and do as if you have no voice. You cannot read what is happening? You cannot hear the pleas of the public? Surely, a Cabinet should have a greater sense of responsibility than that.

If you look at the particular graph that suggests a story about drugs and crime in this country, you will see that in 2001—2005, the reports on cocaine seizures were quite flat, but the murder rate started to go up. There was no relationship. The relationship began after 2005/2006. For homicides, it was the same thing. The relationship, to cut a long story short, between drugs, homicides and guns, is not as plausible when you examine the statistics as even the World Bank Report purports to say. But even the World Bank is reserved on the question, and rightly so. Let me quote from page 33. This report, incidentally, was produced in 2007. As I have said before, the Prime Minister was at the conference. I was there. I was on the panel. I dealt with the report. On page 33 it says:

“While the drug trade clearly does not explain all variations in crime rates across countries, it is, of course, an important contributing factor.”

That is the position you have to take. What about the other factors? You have to find those other factors. You have to find those other factors, but it is more than that. There is a section on Trinidad and Tobago on page 136. It is extremely important to hear these things, so that the Government would be enlightened and understand why I say a new approach has to be taken. In the section on Trinidad and Tobago, the World Bank states:

“In Trinidad and Tobago, young men, especially those just out of prison and those with little prospect of employment...”

I do not know how they got that, because the Government says anybody who wants a job can get a job now. This was in 2007.

“these young men are targeted by drug suppliers who control the communities; empowered by the illegal guns that they possess and the profits of the illicit trade. These recruits are approached with a quota of cocaine. Refusing the offer will mean continued hardship and deprivation or even death.”

This is the last line that the Government must look at and not be defensive about it, because this is the sentence that creates the relationship between unemployment, the low unemployment rate and rising crime rate; it contributes to some extent. The last sentence on page 136 reads:

“The situation is further exacerbated by political patronage whereby these communities are the beneficiaries of poverty alleviation projects which are often controlled by the community drug supplier.”

You really have to take a strong stand, because when you examine the figures more closely, as some of us want to do, you see the same point of view expressed on page 153 about the formation of what is called garrison communities and legacy of party politics across the Caribbean. We have to stop this.

When I grew up in San Juan in the 1960s and we had youth organizations, the same thing used to happen. You had to belong to a particular party to get work on what was called the “crash programme”. Some of us who were of a more independent-minded disposition got pressure. Our youth organization could not see employment for our young people, only those organizations that were connected to a particular political party. Anyhow, that is history, as we say. But I thought we should, perhaps, have some light in this modern age, to disconnect ourselves. It is not that this Government is guilty. That is not the point. This has become a practice of party politics; to look for these groups of dispossessed young men and bring them in to help you mobilize. We have to stop that bloody nonsense. It is bloody wrong and it is contributing to bloody prosperity. If you want to be honest—*[Interruption]*

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

Motion made, That the hon. Senator’s speaking time be extended by 15 minutes. [*Sen. D. Seetahal SC*]

Question put and agreed to.

Sen. Prof. R. Deosaran: Thank you, Mr. Vice-President. This is not bad news. I think this should be seen as good news to help reformulate a better approach, or a more strategic approach to dealing with crime. I think the time has really come.

In 1987, there was 22 per cent unemployment rate and a GDP of \$17 billion, but we had a serious crime rate of 16,000. In 2007, you have an unemployment rate of below 6 per cent and a GDP of \$140 billion, but you have a serious crime rate of 19,000 and a murder rate breaking record. How do you explain that? It is a

Appropriation Bill (Budget)
[SEN. PROF. DEOSARAN]

Tuesday, October 07, 2008

phenomenon that needs careful analysis. Do not let the Minister of National Security keep badgering you about CAPA and the consultant, it is time you put your own thinking caps on your heads, as Members of a responsible Cabinet, and ask for some more precise responses, because this thing is going up. It looked as if the lower unemployment rate, in the recent years especially, the higher our murder rate and serious crime rate. It befuddles classical explanations which would tell you that the more employment you have, the lower your crime rate. What is wrong in the economy, in the social relationships, especially if it is connected to demography and geography? What is there that we have not found out yet? No foreign consultant could come and tell you the answers that easily. You have people in the Ministries and different parts of the Government who could do it. You have people in the police service who can do it for you.

It is the same thing with the GDP, but it is a point in the unemployment rate as—this will hurt, I know that. What is noted in the statistics is that as you absorbed more people into CEPEP and URP, at that point in your unemployment policy, that is where the serious crimes and murder began to escalate. That is the reference that the World Bank made. They called the name Laventille and the East-West Corridor. It is not that your unemployment policy is bad, it is where the employment is taking place and on what conditionalities and to whom the employment is given and the battle for what you call turf; not merely only over drugs, but the income that is generated from this form of employment. I am not saying so. I am telling you what the World Bank report refers to. We really have to come out of the black box, as it were, and do so with fresh thinking to save us from an aggravation from this bloody prosperity.

It is a serious matter, because when we come back next year with the budget speech and we hear the same things over and over—all those Ministers who sit in Cabinet, I want to hear what they have to say if the situation does not change for the better. If they think what I am saying is not serious enough to be taken up, you would have to come back here next year, because in casting the blame, everybody is being blamed.

The last Commissioner of Police whom we all know quite well—he is about the best gentleman that I know; I have to confess, he was a student of mine—said that the social scientists are to be blamed. That really struck me when I heard that. I do not want to refer to the clipping. We have done—again I have to protect the reputation of social scientists in this country just as a doctor or a good lawyer would protect her or his fraternity. This is a book called *Community Policing, Practice and Evaluation*. It was given to the police service some years ago. They

began to use it, until the great one from North America came and pushed it aside. The police came and complained to me. They never attended his seminars. They boycotted it, but you would not hear all those things. I do not want to go; because the wrong impression might be given. Anybody who is a serious scholar would find this disturbing. This was done free. But, of course, as the Chinese would say: “Free thing no good. If you pay for it plenty, it good.” The plan was here to bring all hands on deck. That was the major focus of this report; to bring all hands on deck from the grassroots, schools and church level. The strategy was laid out here, but it was like the cornerstone as the *Bible* said, it was cast aside. We do not have the spirit or the inclination. It is just politics; people guarding their turf and exclusionary postures and attitudes. You would not get far with that.

We are in correspondence with the Institute of Criminology at Cambridge University. We have correspondence with the Director, Professor Losel. He is a psychologist, which tells you that criminology is not about law only, it is about motivation, social relations, examining poverty and a number of other things that contribute, both in terms of push and pull factors, to crime. With the psychologist, we are working out some collaboration.

The important point I want to make is that the Institute of Criminology at Cambridge was formed by the Wolfson Foundation in 1960, with a million dollar grant. We do not have that kind of philanthropy in this country. That is why most of us end up at the mercy of some Ministry to beg for a grant to do something for the national community. That puts a lot of us professionals in a rather invidious position, that sometimes we are accused of being in the Government’s back pocket, but we have no alternative if we have to do our professional work. That is why I made the point earlier on that if the Minister or any other Minister abuses his or her power to block professionals from doing their professional work, that should be taken up very seriously by the senior Ministers of Cabinet, or more precisely by the Prime Minister, who should always demonstrate statesmanship over his Cabinet and country and stop that utter nonsense.

12.00 noon

There are six deficiencies in the Government’s crime policies. Firstly, you do not get elected to plan for five years, but you get elected to perform. That is what your manifesto promises. So, this thing about “you will see” and “next year wait and see”, cannot work. It is deceiving the electorate.

Secondly, with a people-oriented service as policing, you do not start from the top as we are having. You have to start from the ground up, you cannot bring parachute policies.

Appropriation Bill (Budget)
[SEN. PROF. DEOSARAN]

Tuesday, October 07, 2008

The third deficiency is that there does not seem to be any sanctions for mal-performance in the whole area of national security. Everybody is going about his or her business as if nothing is happening. I have not seen people being called to account. The only little accounting we had was through the joint select committees. Laying papers and all these documents in Parliament are just part of the accounting procedures. You are making statements. Accounting also has to do with sanctions for irresponsibility and mal-performance, and we are not seeing that aspect of it. [*Desk thumping*] This is not a political point; this is a point of governance. Even the UNC shall abide by that.

The fourth deficiency is that there is too much emphasis on symptoms rather than the contributors and the causes of crime.

The fifth deficiency is that while there is problem escalation, there is solution stagnation. All the legislation is not here yet. Even the legislation with respect to security guards is not here, and that was on the book a long time ago. With respect to all these delays, Sen. Seetahal SC made reference to some of them. I am sure that it is not that she is offensive. She does not have to be. She tries to talk about things that would help the Government pull up its bootstrap.

The last deficiency to me is becoming the most worrisome. The crime policies are becoming too politically driven. Every time the Minister of National Security speaks it is like a quarrel. He is always objecting, and nobody can say anything. That is why I was very impressed with the manner in which Sen. The Hon. Conrad Enill spoke yesterday. Things cannot be always right. There are a number of nuances and fluctuating circumstances that will disrupt a policy, because you are dealing with a population that has competing interests. Similarly, it seems as if the Minister of Local Government recognizes that. How come our beloved Minister of National Security cannot demonstrate that understanding and try to seek all hands on deck rather than appearing to be so politically driven?

Finally, the Hon. Rennie Dumas talked about everybody must get together and this morning the Minister spoke about getting all hands on deck, but let me tell you how we in the Senate tried to structure a way to get all hands on deck. There was a crime Motion moved in this Parliament in 2005. We spoke about the fears of the national community; how much money the Government has spent; we asked the Senate to express its concern; we called on the Government to explain to the Senate why the actions of the relevant agencies have so far consistently failed to produce the desired result. We have asked that in a genuine, friendly and togetherness manner.

Further, the Motion was to let the Senate agree that the Government outline with specific performance, targets and mechanisms for accountability what concrete measures it intends to take to deal effectively with the serious crime situation now facing the country so as to facilitate—this is the line; this is the togetherness line; this is the love line; this is the caring line; this is the holding hands together line; and this is what the budget motto states about together—the pathway to national consensus and civic mobilization.

So, you cannot politicize the issue conveniently. If the Government had accepted this Motion as it was, we would have had a structure through Parliament to mobilize the national community. The Government took the Motion and chopped it up and made it look as if nobody else must come on deck except the Minister and his agents.

Finally, I think there are some quick fixes which we could consider. With respect to the question of license plates, the police are having trouble tracing vehicles, especially those that are stolen and those that are committing crimes. The manufacturing of license plates should now be regularized and standardized by a government agency. What is so difficult about that? Why do you have to get a consultant to tell you that? For 10 years we have been making that point in this Senate.

The standing orders of the police service require all police officers to inspect jewel stores and discount stores to see where the stolen goods are being fenced, as it were, and that is not being done regularly.

With respect to strengthening the Office of the Director of Public Prosecutions, I was grateful for the Attorney General's response in that respect.

With respect to staff performance reports, are you telling me that you are now getting a consultant to see about staff reports in the police service? You are really not serious. These are not rocket science ideas.

Special night courts for speedier trials; street signs for police response and investigation; police patrols and create some laws now against witnesses who go to court and change their stories and have these serious cases collapsing. We must have laws against witnesses who seem to lie. These witnesses who go and change their stories, we must have laws apart from putting other things in place to encourage them.

Mr. Vice-President, I think Ancil Roget, the President of OWTU, made a very interesting comment. He said that you would not get all these things done in the way they are supposed to be done unless you have constitutional reform. I agree, because the Government does not have to listen to me. They could carry on, and

Appropriation Bill (Budget)
[SEN. PROF. DEOSARAN]

Tuesday, October 07, 2008

there is nothing else we could do except to talk and hope that the Government might—the most we can expect is to feel some embarrassment to do what is right. That is the most we can expect. Ancil said that maybe this country needs a revolution, but I am not into that, I was into the more important point he made about constitutional reform.

Ministers cannot sit here as they are sitting today and hear all this. They should be somewhere else as an Executive. They should be selected by the Prime Minister from outside the Parliament—we have said so several times—and let the Parliament come as a representative entity through the electoral system to deal with the public policy as handed down by the Executive or vice versa, but let the Ministers do their work and then make an appearance before the Parliament now and again. Mr. Vice-President, they have too many things to do. Some of them have to see about their constituencies; they have to attend Cabinet meetings; all the sub-committee meetings; and they have to come here and listen to all the debates. We have to change that structure.

If we do not tackle all these fundamental problems, many of which I have mentioned this morning, we would be spinning top in mud when it comes to crime and public policy, and we are going to hear the same story over and over again. We have to make a distinction between competence—you need competence to run a country, and you could get it through the manner in which I have explained. Representation can be seen through the electorate toward Parliament and the two can have what is called a reciprocal arrangement and a mutually beneficial arrangement.

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

[*The Attorney General on her feet*]

Sen. Dr. Saith: No, it is Sen. Rahman to talk. Mr. Vice-President, there is an established order.

Sen. Mark: I am sorry about that, Sen. Dr. Saith. What happened was that when the document was sent to us—it was prepared by Sen. The Hon. Conrad Enill—I did indicate to him behind the Chair that Sen. Rahman had asked to come in the afternoon period. [*Interruption*] That was his proposal. We did not agree, but he made a proposal and we met with him behind the Chair and suggested that to him. Earlier, after Sen. The Hon. Hazel Manning it was supposed to be us, but because of the agreement, we went that way. I just want to apologize for any inconvenience that may have been caused as a result of that.

Mr. Vice-President: Well, we could take the lunch break now and you all could sort it out. Hon. Senators, we will take the lunch break now and we will resume at 1.10 p.m.

12.10 p.m.: *Sitting suspended.*

1.10 p.m.: *Sitting resumed.*

The Attorney General (Sen. The Hon. Bridgid Annisette-George): Mr. Vice-President, I am grateful for this opportunity to join in this debate on the presentation of the budget for fiscal year 2008/2009. I, too, would like to record my commendations to the hon. Minister in the Ministry of Finance for his presentation of a record budget which is consistent with the vision of the Government of Trinidad and Tobago; a People's National Movement led Government, which is committed to making Trinidad and Tobago a developed country on or before the year 2020.

I also want to crave your indulgence to refer to the budget debate in the other place and also praise the hon. Minister of Finance, hon. Karen Nunez-Tesheira, the first female Minister to deliver a budget in Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*]

I want to recall that in or about the month of October 2007 going to Woodford Square one lunchtime to support a particular venture of an NGO. At that time, I paid little regard to the political affiliations of the members of that NGO. I disregarded whether they had any ulterior motive, because I was committed then as I am committed now to their theme which was, "A woman's place was in the house", not the home. [*Desk thumping*] The "house" being referred to in that slogan was really the House of Representatives, but I want to extend it to both Houses of the Parliament of Trinidad and Tobago. I also want to say while I am commending the hon. Minister of Finance, in that regard, from the contributions of the female Senators in this honourable Senate it lends support to the slogan that a woman's place is in the House. [*Desk thumping*]

In doing so, I want to call upon my sisters, both in this hallowed Chamber and outside not to forget their innate characteristics of womanhood. This is in no way intended to denigrate the virtues and the characteristics of my male counterparts. [*Interruption*] I think we all have our strengths and it is the strengths of all of us that make a very wholesome whole.

I want to ask my sisters both within this hallowed Chamber and outside to pay regard to our characteristic of selflessness. In today's modern world, selflessness is seen as a weakness, and we are being called to adopt a darker philosophy of

Appropriation Bill (Budget)
[SEN. THE HON. B. ANNISSETTE-GEORGE]

Tuesday, October 07, 2008

selfishness which is the antonym of selflessness. I want to say that there is no way that selfishness could be a virtue; no way. I want all the females to embrace their selflessness when they look at the fiscal measures in the 2008/2009 budget.

As women, we would have a more panoramic view and we would be concerned about the needs of all of those in our home—and I mean our home of Trinidad and Tobago—if not being fully met, but being partially met. In doing so, I want to address some of the cacophony which has been heard with regard to this budget and the fiscal measures.

1.15 p.m.

As women, what would we be concerned about? We would be concerned about the seniors. They are part of our home and the budget makes provision for free bus passes to continue; for free ferry passes to be added; it has increased the public service pension by \$300 from \$1,650 to \$1,950; it has provided increased grants for seniors who qualify in the various bands by about \$300. We would be concerned about the disabled, and there is an increased disability grant by \$200.

We would also be concerned about those members of our household who are challenged and who cannot properly provide for themselves, and the public assistance grant has been increased for one person by \$200, and where there is more than one person in the household, again, the bands are increased by \$200.

We would be concerned about the education of our children, and the budget provides for that. The GATE and HELP programmes are continued; they provide increased funding for postgraduate students; they provide scholarships for students who have attained first class honours; they have increased the number of scholarships to 257.

As women, as nurturers we would be concerned about the environment, and I am always reminded when I speak about the environment of the words of an Indian sage, and I paraphrase; he said something to the effect that, we did not inherit the earth from our ancestors, but we borrowed it from our children, and this budget also makes provisions for that. There are initiatives to encourage the conversion to CNG fuels and I am heartened by that.

In the budget the Minister proposed the removal of the customs duty and the value added tax on conversion kits to allow gas vehicles to utilize CNG, and the Government is showing its leadership by its commitment—and the hon. Minister in his presentation referred to it—that all public service vehicles will be converted to CNG within the next two years.

We on this side realize that we must creep before we walk, and we are convinced that we are taking steps in the right direction. And what supports this? I looked at *Focus on Trinidad and Tobago Budget 2009* by Ernst & Young, at page 5. The statement with respect to this initiative for supporting the conversion to CNG says:

"It was also visionary for our leadership to announce its intention to invest in clean, renewable energy supplies such as compressed natural gas (CNG), as many forward thinking nations are doing today."

As a woman, I am also concerned about sustainable development, and yes, again that supports my role as a nurturer, and my concern about my children and my children's children yet to come. Again, I find support for it in the Ernst & Young Report, where it says:

"In the circumstances...we again reiterate the critical need for our country to fashion an economy which is more diversified and less dependent on the hydrocarbon sector. In this regard, we were truly heartened by the Government's commitment to target a reduction of the nation's non-energy deficit from 16% of GDP to 10% to 12% by 2011."

Again, as a woman I am concerned about securing my family in a home. What does the budget do in that regard? It reduces the stamp duty so that I could now purchase a home for the sum of \$850,000 without having to pay *ad valorem* stamp duty. That is not an empty promise, it took effect from October 01, 2008, and those of us who read the newspaper would have seen the advertisement. The effect of that is this, that in purchasing a home valued at \$850,000 the purchaser would save some \$32,500, which would have been stamp duty payable before October 01, 2008.

The hon. Sen. Ramkhelawan, in his contribution spoke about the need for savings, and savings on the individual level, and for incentives for savings. The budget provides for that, in that the Government has increased the deductions for contributions to approved deferred annuity plans and national insurance contributions from \$25,000 to \$30,000.

I come to the contentious issue of the rise in the fuel price of premium gasoline, and that affects us all. Sen. Prof. Deosaran spoke about it and so too did Sen. Seetahal, SC. This faces us with a number of options. One option could be to spend more money on fuel and Sen. Prof. Deosaran told us about the effects and the insensitivity of that. Another option would have been to convert to super

Appropriation Bill (Budget)
[SEN. THE HON. B. ANNISSETTE-GEORGE]

Tuesday, October 07, 2008

grade; another option may have been to convert to CNG, or to change my vehicle altogether. None of those options are easy ones at all, but I have seen much in the media with respect to using super grade versus premium grade.

Only this morning on a radio programme hosted by the Academy of Auto Mechanics—and that for me, puts rest to all the conflicting articles that I would have read, views I would have heard—it suggested this, the simple test would be to fill your gas tank with super gasoline, carry it up a hill with the maximum permitted passengers, and if your engine did not "pink"—and I now understand what "pinking" of an engine means. I have been a driver for a long time and you hear about the engine "pinking" and of course you know what they say about us women being mechanics, but I never understood it.

The programme explained that the grade had to do with octane levels—and I hope I made a good student—and that octane levels affect detonation. The difference between premium and super, premium is 95 per cent, super is 92 per cent. Most cars can take 92 per cent, but what the programme said is the test is really to fill up your car with the super, use the maximum permitted passenger load and go up a hill. If your engine did not "pink" you can use super, an easy practical test. They ended the programme with "ol' talk done". Therefore, for all of us caught in the quandary, I would recommend the very simple practical test. I am sure most vehicles would pass that test and for me, the "ol' talk done".

There is another argument that we as women and as nurturers, and in our selflessness must consider, and that is the removal of the fuel subsidy argument. While we may say yes, we are an oil producing country, we are entitled to certain sort of benefits; we also have to look at the cost of that benefit, and the Government has been sensitive in that what it has done by just affecting the premium level, is really a phase to roll back the fuel subsidy aimed at striking a balance, of mitigating the effect an increased price may have caused. So, when I look at the measures in the budget I would say yes, it has done not just for me personally, but it has done that for all of those in my house.

Mr. Vice-President, I would also like to address some other concerns—and Sen. Seetahal SC and Sen. Prof. Deosaran spoke of it—with respect to crime. While I am not, in the position of the Attorney General, responsible for crime, I would like to address some of the measures aimed at enhancing the administration of justice. Firstly, I want to point out that the budget in the development programme provides \$15 million for fiscal year 2008/2009 for the Ministry of the Attorney General.

The measures that my Ministry has used to enhance the administration of justice have been wide-ranging. We have used legislative measures and the Members of this honourable Senate would recall just a few weeks ago we debated and passed the Bail (Amdt.) Act. While some Members may have felt a particular way about it, the Act was really aimed at making some offences non-bailable within a certain period of time, particularly kidnapping for ransom is non-bailable within a period of 60 days, if the trial has not started. Certain violent offences and specified offences become non-bailable if committed with a certain frequency and within a certain time frame.

We also passed the Immigration (Advance Passenger Information) Act earlier this year; it was assented to in July 2008. That Act makes provisions for the transmission of advanced passenger information in respect of persons travelling to Trinidad and Tobago and for other related matters, whether landing via airport or seaport. That is to give us some heads-up with respect to certain types of persons coming into our jurisdiction. We have also passed in June of this year the International Child Abduction Act, which seeks to secure the prompt return of children wrongfully moved to another state.

We are also dealing with other measures and Sen. Prof. Deosaran referred to that also, and those amendment Bills should really be piloted here before the end of this year. There is the Evidence (Amdt.) Bill, 2008—all of these Bills are currently before the Legislative Review Committee of the Cabinet. The Evidence (Amdt.) Bill, 2008, permits the use of prior statements as evidence by the prosecution in circumstances where witnesses have become recalcitrant or forgetful or where they refuse to give oral evidence in a trial. So, Sen. Prof. Deosaran, through you, Mr. Vice-President, that will deal with those cases that have been collapsing.

It also will permit the use of previous inconsistent statements in specified circumstances, because of course there needs to be safeguards, and that is going to be specified in the legislation. The amendment Bill will also allow for the admissibility of video and audio recordings of voluntary statements, which would deal with the phenomena where voluntary statements are challenged in court and results in a protraction of the trial. The amendment will also deal with the abolition of the common law rules for bad character evidence, so one would be able to give evidence of the bad character of either the witness or the accused.

There is also the Criminal Procedure (Amdt.) Bill, and that Bill intends to make provision for trial without jury in circumstances of jury tampering.

1.30 p.m.

It will also provide for assistance to be given by the court to witnesses who are victims of intimidation and it will deal with removal of certain persons from a courtroom where they seek to intimidate the witness and not necessarily in an overt way, but in a covert way.

There is also in the legislative measures a reintroduction of the doctrine of recent complaints in sexual offences. These latter Bills should all be laid in the Parliament before the end of this year.

The Ministry of the Attorney General has also been involved in certain administrative measures to improve and enhance the administration of justice. There has been the Justice of the Peace Reform Project—I would call it—and earlier this year in the month of March, the Ministry of the Attorney General undertook a two-day consultation with over 60 key members and stakeholders of the Justice of the Peace system in Trinidad and Tobago. The consultations were aimed at obtaining feedback from stakeholders on the transformation of the Justice of the Peace system. This was facilitated by a consultant and to date the report on the outcomes of the consultations have been developed and an initial draft was provided to the Justice of the Peace Association of Trinidad and Tobago.

The Ministry of the Attorney General is currently, in conjunction with the consultant who was hired, reviewing the transformation measures. That will be taken regarding the issues raised. Issues raised were as follows: Whether the Justice of the Peace (JP) system is still relevant today given the changes in the legal and technological environment; and whether the assumptions upon which the system was conceived back in the colonial era, whether those assumptions are still valid.

Secondly, the issues raised concern the statutory duties and functions of JPs, the process of appointment, the expenses which JPs bear and which impact on the performance of their duties. All of these are being examined.

Mr. Vice-President, I am pleased to report that the final report of the consultant is expected today. It should have been at the end of the month just passed, but the consultant has asked for an extended period of time. From the initial recommendations which will be made to the steering committee which comprises representatives of the Attorney General's ministry and representatives of the JPs Association, I am pleased to report that the stipend which the JPs receive is being reconsidered to be more reflective of the current expenses which

they naturally incur which are incidental to their function, yet still retaining the basis that a JP is a voluntary function given to noble gentlemen and gentlewomen. The recommendations also would support a complaints mechanism where members of the public would be able to carry complaints as regards any sort of adverse behaviour they may have experienced when dealing with JPs; and also there should be some committee with a mandate to continuously monitor the transformation process.

In the ministry we have also completed an electronic database of all JPs that makes it easier to keep track of their identities and their locations. I am hopeful that by the end of this month the steering committee would have completed its deliberations on the final report of the consultant and that recommendations should go to Cabinet with respect to making a final decision on these issues for the JPs.

Also earlier this year there was a visit to the United Kingdom by a team comprising representatives of the Ministry of the Attorney General, the Director of Public Prosecutions, the Judiciary, a representative from the criminal bar and also a representative of the Legal Aid Department. This team visit was to the United Kingdom for the purposes of examining the criminal justice system and seeing what lessons could be learnt for the purposes of modifying and adapting them for implementing them in Trinidad and Tobago. Following that visit a report was submitted to the Cabinet by members of the delegation with recommendations. The Cabinet agreed that an inter-ministerial committee chaired by the Attorney General and comprising the Ministers of National Security, Social Development and Public Administration, also supported by technical staff, be established to review and implement the recommendations of this report.

Mr. Vice-President, the meetings of the inter-ministerial committee have taken place. Various subgroups were set up to look at various aspects and it is expected by the end of October two subgroups will be reporting on the blueprints of the areas that they have considered.

We are also looking at crime in its transnational aspect and in attempting to improve the administration of justice and to meet the challenges of transnational crime, we have found it necessary to collaborate with other territories and also to train our officers.

In the month of March this year the Ministry of the Attorney General hosted the OAS and REMJA which is a Latin American group of working experts on mutual legal assistance and extradition in a workshop. This was the second workshop which the Ministry of the Attorney General hosted. The first was in the

Appropriation Bill (Budget)
[SEN. THE HON. B. ANNISSETTE-GEORGE]

Tuesday, October 07, 2008

year 2006. This group—which is REMJA, which is the Latin American group—was established to promote legal and judicial cooperation among states in the western hemisphere and further represents the ministry's commitment to reducing transnational criminal activities in this country.

The forum which was held in March addressed updates to the mutual legal assistance framework and clarified the application of processes, standards and rules. The forum also served as a discussion point for a model law for mutual legal assistance. It was attended by 28 persons from Trinidad and Tobago, Canada, USA, St. Vincent and the Grenadines, St. Kitts and Nevis, Paraguay, Panama, Nicaragua, Jamaica, Haiti, Guyana, Ecuador, Chile, Barbados, Bahamas, Antigua and Colombia.

The Ministry also hosted in the month of May a workshop on cybercrime legislation in the Caribbean region. This was done in conjunction with the United States Department of Justice and the Organization of American States. This workshop promoted, firstly, an understanding of the laws required for a national anti-cybercrime framework. Secondly, knowledge of good practice and reforms under way regarding cybercrime legislation in this hemisphere and globally. Thirdly, it promoted steps to be taken towards strengthening cybercrime legislation in participating countries. This workshop was attended by 40 participants.

There was also a capacity building workshop on terrorism and this was held in the month of June of this year. Again, it was hosted in conjunction with the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime and the Inter-American Committee against Terrorism. It provided specialist training for prosecutors, judges and law enforcement officials on various aspects of money laundering and transnational criminal activity. This was attended by 40 persons.

Mr. Vice-President, under the present arrangement, the Ministry of the Attorney General is responsible for new court buildings. The Judiciary is responsible for refurbishing of existing buildings. Under the responsibility of the Ministry of the Attorney General I would like to inform this honourable Senate with respect to the developments concerning the Arima Judicial Complex and the Sangre Grande Magisterial Court. As regards the Arima Judicial Complex: After giving consideration to the volume of litigation and the increased demand for judicial and legal services, the Magistrates' Court Committee which makes recommendations has recommended that it would be more effective and progressive to construct a judicial complex that would house a family court and mediation services, High Court, magisterial courts, modern record facilities and the offices of court administration. This route was taken rather than just an Arima Magistrate's Court.

Early in financial year 2007/2008 the ministry was able to identify a parcel of land for the construction of this complex and after protracted negotiations and mediation, it is now foreseeable that the purchase price can be agreed and it is expected that this property is going to be acquired shortly so that we can advance with respect to the judicial and legal service complex in Arima.

As far as the Sangre Grande Magistrates' Court, after much effort in the search of a suitable site in Sangre Grande—and the hon. Minister of Local Government spoke about all hands being on deck—a parcel of land was identified. This was an offer made by a citizen who heard of the quest to find lands for the Sangre Grande Court and made an offer with respect to her lands in Sangre Grande adjacent to the Sangre Grande Police Station for the construction of the Sangre Grande Magistrates' Court. Currently, the Property and Real Estate Service Division is assisting the ministry in negotiating the purchase price for this property and in the meantime the design brief from the Judiciary is being prepared for this project.

Also as regards enhancing the delivery of legal services, the ministry has taken concrete steps to create a full fledged presence in the City of San Fernando and the purpose of this is to increase accessibility of the ministry's services to our clients in the southern areas. We have too often been accused of being Port of Spain centred and there is going to be established in the South the Ministry of the Attorney General. A property has been identified and as we speak the legal documents are being prepared for it to be located at Sutton Street, San Fernando and this has been acquired at a price of \$8.5 million.

As regards the actual delivery of legal services, the ministry has over the years suffered from a haemorrhage of experienced attorneys in its key departments and despite putting in place measures to recruit staff on contract and negotiating better terms and conditions with the office of the Chief Personnel Officer, the ministry still continues to experience a fast turnover of middle level attorneys. We also have seen that this has affected the Office of the Director of Public Prosecutions and we admit that while we can recruit junior persons, this does not at all make up for the experience that is lost when people in the middle and senior positions leave.

Therefore, with respect to dealing with that haemorrhage, the ministry is putting in place an attorney mentorship programme which is geared towards promoting and fostering relationships between junior and experienced attorneys from the private bar so that fundamental skills and core values of professionalism, essential to the practice of law, can be passed on to the beginner. Particularly too, the office of the CPC has also been affected with the loss of staff and we are

Appropriation Bill (Budget)
[SEN. THE HON. B. ANNISSETTE-GEORGE]

Tuesday, October 07, 2008

putting in place a programme where we have forged a relationship with a foreign entity, and this initiative is under way to develop a pool of legislative drafting experts who would help provide facilities and services to the office of the CPC.

As regards particularly, the office of the Director of Public Prosecutions, I am also happy to advise this honourable Senate that a proposal has been prepared for the restructuring of the Office of the Director of Public Prosecutions which would involve certain specialized units to deal with certain types of offences—the prosecution of certain types of offences. This proposal is in its final stages and I will expect that before year's end it should engage the attention of the Cabinet.

1.45 p.m.

We have also been engaged in the continuous training and licensing of bailiffs. Hon. Members of the Senators may recall that Cabinet appointed a bailiff committee in the year 2006, and this committee has been continuously meeting to fulfil its mandate to train and license bailiffs, create public awareness of their roles and functions, and review the relevant pieces of legislation governing bailiffs. This is no idle talk. For the year, the committee has trained 300 persons, including police officers on various aspects of the law relating to bailiffs. I refer to the *Sunday Guardian*, dated October 05, 2008 at page 16, where an ad has already been published for the annual training for licensed private bailiffs which will be conducted by the bailiffs committee and this will be held from Wednesday, November 05, 2008 to Wednesday, November 12, 2008. The training sessions include topics as legislation relevant to private bailiffs; common law principles relevant to private bailiffs; bailiffs in action; the role of the police service; ethical behaviour in business; and the private bailiff in action.

Mr. Vice-President, work has been ongoing to enhance the administration of justice in Trinidad and Tobago. I would also like to inform this honourable Senate, with respect to the ongoing work by the Law Reform Commission which is aimed at revamping certain areas of the criminal justice system, the Law Reform Commission is currently working on the issue of trial and indictment without a Jury Bill. This is in order to ensure that the delivery of justice is not overturned in the prosecution of certain criminal offences, by eliminating the problems associated with the dynamics of juries and prejudices of jurors.

The commission is examining a framework for trial on indictment without a jury. The commission is looking at bail reform in its entirety, and therefore, in order to increase the fairness of bail granting, the commission is in the process of

examining the law relating to bail, in order to determine whether any changes should be recommended to improve the administration of the system of granting bail. The commission is also looking at juvenile justice, and a number of issues papers are being prepared before this final report can be produced. Consideration is being given in this system that they are looking at, at the introduction of a specialized juvenile court which will conduct its business in accordance with the principles of restorative justice. I am sure Sen. Prof. Deosaran will be happy to hear of that.

The Law Reform Commission is also reviewing the tribunal system and is also looking at expanding the notification requirements for sex offenders. Therefore, they are currently drafting amendments to the Sexual Offences Act, 1986, which deals with the registration of sex offenders and making it more meaningful by expanding the range of information which an offender is required to provide. Earlier this year, we would have heard much talk in the national community with respect to the sexual offenders' register.

Work is also being done on the reform of the law of larceny and this is an extensive research which includes looking at other Commonwealth countries to examine their methods of dealing with theft being perpetrated by the use of technological devices. Work is also being embarked upon with respect to the removal of preliminary enquiries. We would appreciate though, as far as the removal of preliminary enquiries, while there seems to be a general sort of consensus in the national community for the removal of preliminary enquiries, this will call for a great amount of consultation because it removes the backlog from the Magistracy and places it in the High Court.

Mr. Vice-President, I want to give a status report on some of the current projects which were done in fiscal year 2007/2008. I am again very happy to report that the north office of the Director of Public Prosecutions was finally completed around September of last year. The DPP and other departments of the Ministry are now placed in a refurbished building at Winsure Building, which also includes a courtroom which is designed and dedicated to the holding of commissions of enquiry.

The DPP officially moved into the Winsure Building on Richmond Street in November 2007 and the total cost of design and refurbishment of proprietary work was approximately \$14.5 million and the actual cost of furniture and fittings were in the amount of \$3.5 million and this is all consistent with the Cabinet-approved budget of that project of \$18 million.

Appropriation Bill (Budget)
[SEN. THE HON. B. ANNISETTE-GEORGE]

Tuesday, October 07, 2008

We are also involved in the establishment of the Equal Opportunity Commission and tribunal and this project is well on its way. The commission is currently being staffed with a secretary and a driver. Provision is also being made for the accommodation of the Tax Appeal Board which will be housed by next year at the Corner of Queen and Frederick Streets. This is a new modern building and is currently being prepared.

Sen. Mark, who so vociferously advocated the concerns of law students who were not being admitted into the law school, will be happy to note that the Ministry has also undertaken a project of the expansion of the Hugh Wooding Law School. The design brief of this project is now currently under way and it is expected that this new wing—which is a multi-storey wing to house more students—should begin sometime in the fiscal year 2009.

Also, as far as the special criminal court which was initially conceptualized to hear matters coming out of the Bail Act and specialized in dealing with matters of kidnapping, narcotic trafficking and possession of firearms, a four-acre parcel of land has been purchased at Trincity and the design brief is currently being finalized for the special criminal court. I am also happy to note that the Ministry is involved in finding a property in Tobago to house a Tobago office of the Ministry of the Attorney General.

Mr. Vice-President, as I started on the note of women, it would really be remiss of me if I did not mention the Family Court project, and to note in the budget of this year under the Judiciary, the Draft Estimates of the Development Programme has provided \$18 million for the Family Court project. The Family Court is going to be rolled out and the monitoring committee of the Family Court is also currently engaged in looking for premises in the south to house the Family Court, and shortly the Family Court Bill will be laid in this Parliament for debate. Noteworthy in the Family Court Bill would be the creation of the post of the children's attorney in the Ministry of the Attorney General, and the functionary in this position will ensure that children's rights will be protected, as they will be entitled to have representation in proceedings before the courts and in matters that may arise when the Children's Authority becomes operationalized.

Mr. Vice-President, I also want to touch a bit on domestic violence and to point out that the Domestic Violence Committee, which is a working committee established by Cabinet, was reconstituted and that early in the course of this year a manual which was prepared by its predecessor was delivered to the police. I have been advised that this manual is being used by the police in their training to ensure that they are properly sensitized to the scourge of domestic violence. I am

also aware that in its work plan for the fiscal year 2008/2009, the Domestic Violence Committee intends to establish a central data collection registry as it relates to domestic violence in Trinidad and Tobago.

I would like to touch on a number of issues—

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

Motion made, That the hon. Senator's speaking time be extended by 15 minutes. [*Hon. M. Browne*]

Question put and agreed to.

Sen. The Hon. B. Annisette-George: Thank you, Mr. Vice-President, and I would like to register my gratitude to the hon. Senators for the extension of my speaking time.

Mr. Vice-President, the Ministry of the Attorney General has also been involved in building public awareness and is trying to demystify the law by engaging citizens by a public awareness programme. This is a programme of a series of radio infomercials entitled, "Its your right to know", and it deals with a number of issues from time to time that are run in a sort of series to inform the national community. We are also involved in making sure that the back end of our service delivery systems are consistent with the demands placed on us, and we have sought to improve our electronic data storage methods and our procedures and methods for tracking and handling of physical files, and also the business of mapping our processes and our work flows.

Mr. Vice-President, at this time, I would also like to address a number of issues that were raised by other contributions and particularly, I would like to mention the contribution of Sen. Seetahal SC when she referred to the matter of police killings. I want to place on the record that we on this side abhor any unlawful killing whether done at the hands of the police or any other person. While we note with some concern her contribution as regards to the Police Complaints Authority, I want to say that the national community would have seen evidence that the police service is capable of investigating allegations made against their own.

We would have seen a couple of weeks ago that one of their own was held and charged for murder in respect of the murder of a pastor; we would have seen also the trial of a particular officer with respect to a death at, I think that was the "Red Fete", about two or three carnivals ago. So while we note with concern what she

Appropriation Bill (Budget)
[SEN. THE HON. B. ANNISSETTE-GEORGE]

Tuesday, October 07, 2008

has contributed about the Police Complaints Authority, as far as police killings, we have seen that the police service treats with those allegations—[*Interruption*]

Sen. Dr. Nanan: Would the Senator give way? Thank you, Mr. Vice-President, and I thank the Attorney General for giving way. Madam Attorney General, you said that the police can investigate police, but we had put in place with respect to the Police Complaints Authority, an independent body to deal with that, so we would like to know what is happening with that Police Complaints Authority and that particular direction.

Sen. The Hon. B. Annisette-George: Mr. Vice-President, through you, as far as my statement that police can investigate police, I said that particularly in regard to the allegation about the police killings. As far as the Police Complaints Authority, to my knowledge it still exists. I have noted the contribution by the hon. Senator with regard to some of their operational deficiencies and I am certain it has not gone unnoticed. The in-depth workings of the Police Complaints Authority is really under the portfolio of national security, so I am a bit constrained to answer completely your concerns in that regard.

2.00 p.m.

Sen. Dr. Nanan: There was supposed to be a Director and a Deputy Director appointed. Have they been appointed?

Sen. The Hon. B. Annisette-George: I am unable to say if those posts are currently filled.

Mr. Vice-President, I would also like to say as regards the allegations made by Sen. Mark, that it is quite known that this Government is relentless in its pursuit of founded allegations of corruption and we would have seen this with respect to the Piarco Airport scandal. And I would like to report in that regard that the civil case coming out of the construction of that airport; civil case for restitution which involves a conspiracy to defraud the people of Trinidad and Tobago of over US \$100 million through bid rigging, briberies to government Ministers and their cohorts, wire fraud and such acts—which, to me, seems like a James Bond movie—continues and to date, a judgment has been recovered in the sum of US \$1.27 million with interest which equates to a total payment US \$2.1 million. As of June 03, 2008 the obligation of a \$2 million payment recovered from Eduardo Hillman Waller amounts to US \$1.8 million.

As far as another of the defendants, Rodriguez, he has paid US \$40,000 of the US \$80,000 obligation; we are also entitled to recover the sum of US \$17 million

as a result of a judgment against Calmaquip. There are savings to the Government and the people of Trinidad and Tobago in excess of US \$20 million. By virtue of the cancellation of the Airport maintenance contract with Calmaquip, there is a freeze on real estate in the US to secure the ongoing litigation and pending US claims against individuals and entities are valued approximately US \$30 million.

As far as UDeCott is concerned, a commission of enquiry was called for, it has been established and I am certain that by the end of it if criminal action is founded, action will be taken because such is the commitment of this Government.

Mr. Vice-President, in closing I would also like to pay regard to the contribution of Sen. Prof. Deosaran and thank him for putting into context—for me personally and those on this side who are newcomers to this Chamber—the motion which was moved with respect to the introduction of televised broadcast of these proceedings. I am sure it would not have escaped our attention that it seems that the sittings in this Chamber are becoming one of the greatest soap operas because of the drama and certain allegations being made against persons' personalities. [*Interruption*] I did not say that Parliament is a soap opera.

Sen. Dr. Kernahan: Of course, you implied it.

Sen. The Hon. B. Annette-George: Mr. Vice-President, as far as Sen. Mark's contribution with respect to the T&TEC allegations yesterday, I would like him to know that founded allegations in any sphere will not go unnoticed. With that, I want to commend the budget statement by the hon. Minister in the Ministry of Finance to this Chamber and to the national community.

Thank you.

Sen. Mohammed Faisal Rahman: Mr. Vice-President, I sincerely wish that I could have risen today to add my own congratulations to the hon. Ministers in the Ministry of Finance, our own Sen. The Hon. Mariano Browne and the hon. Minister Karen Nunez-Tesheira. It would have been good indeed but I really cannot. There is a saying, which has come to mind after this budget has been presented: If you cannot dazzle them with brilliance, then bamboozle them with used oats. And I think what we have had in this budget is a lot of used oats, rehashed and incomplete programmes presented with a lot of fanfare and pageantry to a population that perhaps is not paying attention to the performance of the Government.

The Government protests when responsible organizations point out its failure rate. Its failure rate in the past gives us an idea of what we can expect in the future.

Appropriation Bill (Budget)
[SEN. RAHMAN]

Tuesday, October 07, 2008

Mr. Vice-President, we have been treated to a system of governance—which I have been trying to find an analogy to how this Government functions—that can only be likened to a very amiable drunk who bumbles around, knocks over things, damages people's property, pats everybody on the back and gives them a cheerful smile and is not aware of the damage it is causing.

I am extremely pleased to have heard Sen. Prof. Deosaran's contribution today. He made my day and I told him so, but I want to say this publicly. He has really given a sterling delivery to benefit the Government and he comes from the Independent Bench, fortunately. There is only one thing he said which I would like to correct in his contribution and this was only made clear to me a few minutes ago because I had left the Chamber for a short while when he was making his contribution.

I understand that he has advised Sen. Mark to apologize in the event that he does not have the evidence to support his accusations. The first thing is that Sen. Mark made no accusations, he asked questions. Since a response has been made to the questions as if they were accusations, the matter is now brought into sharper focus. But I am certain that if there is any question of accusations along the way, Sen. Mark would be very certain to have all the evidence that he needs, but he does not have to apologize.

Mr. Vice-President, every time we assemble here the President and today you, offer a prayer for us to set aside our private interest, our prejudices and personal affections with honesty and courage. Today I want to appeal to all in this Senate, to try to make this prayer reality because Sen. Prof. Deosaran has been wondering aloud: How can Ministers sit in a Cabinet and not raise their voices in issues that are tremendously important to the nation and permit a runaway national security disaster to go unchecked without their intervention.

I learned another little saying from one of my children recently that says in effect: It is difficult to get a man to understand something when his salary depends on his not understanding it. This is a very serious matter and we have a lot of nouveau arrivés, people who have arrived into a status of government through the magnanimity of our very astute Prime Minister who has surrounded himself with young, competent people who have bought his vision and are not possessed of the courage to question in the manner that Sen. Prof. Deosaran has recommended, that they exercise their individual intellect and consciences and brains to be able to stand up and say enough is enough.

Mr. Vice-President, it has been admitted by the Government and very recently by the Minister of Energy and Energy Industries that our petroleum resources are in fact, a gift from God, but too often we hear from the Government side that it is the prudent and caring Government that has produced the prosperity. The reality is that the economy and resources that we have, which admittedly by all is by divine grace have been very badly underutilized by the Government and whatever success that may appear to be filtering down to the country is despite the efforts of the Government to do what it seeks to do. We have been blessed but this blessing can well become a curse.

Lloyd Best used to always say that we should pretend we do not have petroleum resources. At least, that is what I understood him to say and that we should work towards developing our other economic areas. It is only now that I am beginning to understand. I did not agree with him that we should disregard it, because I always felt that we should monetize it and put it to good use, but what we are facing today is a terrible reality. The Ryder Scott Report says that we have 15 more years of gas, I heard Minister Enill last night saying that we have 64 years, and I have never heard that officially before. But 64 years is a bare lifetime. If we are not aware of how short 64 years are, we better start to take notice because at the accelerated rate of consumption that we are embarking upon with our petroleum and gas reserves bringing in the industries that are going to burn up our gas reserves at an accelerated rate at discounted and subsidized prices—By the way, we do not want to subsidize our people, but we are prepared to subsidize the foreign industries that are going to use up our resources and destroy our environment and all this has to do with the management I am talking about regarding the budget.

Sen. Dr. Charles: Possible reserves.

Sen. M. F. Rahman: Yes, even if the 15 years is proven reserves, far more for the 64 years. The 64 years is a possible reserve. What we are doing is setting out to burn it up faster and then we are going to be saddled with industries with no fuel to run and then we are going to find ourselves without bombs dropping you back into the Stone Age because I do not know where we are going to go after that.

When we should be husbanding our resources and being very certain that we do not blow what we have, we are setting out to monetize all that we have, burn it up fast and then that monetization that we have succeeded in doing at this moment is in a state of extreme crisis with the global financial meltdown that has suddenly hit the world.

2.15 p.m.

I am amazed that we as a nation are so complacent at our highest levels with regard to the money meltdown that has hit the world. Today, I heard in the news that Iceland which was disparagingly referred to by one of my friends on the other side, as a small nation of 450,000 or 500,000 people—there are nations with less than us in terms of population who do better than we do—one of the advanced First World nations that we are aspiring to become is suddenly bankrupt. It has to go hat in hand to Russia to ask for millions of dollars to bail it out because of the current crisis.

We have been assured that we have been putting our money with triple-A banks, but now triple-A banks are crumbling all over the place. I am coming to something that is very important. Not only are we at risk in our economy and businesses because there is a domino effect in terms of what is happening in the world—It is a tsunami, you do not see it on the surface; the tsunami comes at you under the surface of the water. When it is reaching the shoreline it starts to rise; the waves become about 40 or 50 metres and wash away everything—we are sitting here like sitting ducks and are not paying any regard to what is happening now all over the world.

We have been advised that the small amount we have with Lehman Brothers, I believe 5 per cent of our total holdings is secured because the government of the United States took it over. The reality is that the nature of money is such that money can become valueless. There have been several nations whose currencies have become so devalued that they used to burn it instead of firewood in wintertime. Money is a convention that we agree. It is like you are playing monopoly; you get the money and it becomes real in the game. It is the medium of exchange. *[Interruption]* You better try to listen to what I am saying. You are scoffing at it. It is a whole lesson that I am going to give you here.

Sen. Hon. Browne: You want me clarify it for you?

Sen. M. F. Rahman: No! Let me clarify what I am saying. When I have clarified what I am saying you may address it. When you play your monopoly game, the money, the \$10 or £20 or whatever it is becomes very important. My children used to cry among themselves when they played monopoly and they lost. It was like they lost their life savings. I am talking about when they were young.

World currency is a medium of exchange. It is not tangible. TT dollars are less than monopoly money in America. You cannot put it to use. It is worth what it

says it is worth in Trinidad and Tobago, within the boundaries of this country. We need foreign exchange to trade with the countries with whom we are doing business because that is the money that they will receive. When their currencies become valueless they would be as useless as our currency can become. In the present circumstance of money meltdown and financial crisis, anything can happen. I am saying this because I have a recommendation that is very important to make to the Government. Regardless of whether I am right or wrong about the things that I have said before, you should pay heed to what I am going to tell you. There is one commodity and I mentioned this before.

I wrote a book, *Revised National Economics* in 1994 and this is contained in that book. It is not like yesterday I came to terms with this. There is one commodity that has withstood the test of time through the centuries that regardless of whether currencies rise or fall, this commodity retains its value. It is easily identifiable; it can be weighed and broken down into smaller amounts; it can be put for conversion purposes. It is what people convert their assets to when their countries run into trouble and they want to leave. Interestingly, this Government recognizes that commodity of which we have 1.6 tonnes as part of our sovereign wealth. I hope it is in our vault in Trinidad. The balance is in currencies all over the world in different banks. Every currency is at risk.

The only thing that is not at risk is gold. That is what we have 1.6 tonnes of. Places like the United States of America have 4,000 tonnes and the IMF 2,000 and 3,000 tonnes. They do not hold gold as a standard for issuing currency but as a store of value in these perilous times when the entire holdings of our sovereign wealth in foreign banks and currencies and even American Treasury bills, great America, can evaporate. Rome fell. If the United States of America did not come up with the \$700 billion bail out, do you know what? The prospects are so terrible to contemplate that you do not know what to say.

I am saying that America is holding gold and if we have sense, we will take all our foreign currency holdings now—keep a little liquid for trade purposes—put it into gold and bring it into the vaults of Trinidad and Tobago in the Central Bank. Interestingly, gold as a store of value is unsurpassed. There are other precious metals but you have to test them and put them through chemical analysis to determine genuineness and grade. Gold passes that; there is no problem there. Gold is portable, valuable, identifiable, breakable into units and convertible into any future currency that may enter the world.

This matter that I am telling the nation today is of vital importance. “Iceland gone through.” Grenada did not even need the crisis to go through. Grenada is

Appropriation Bill (Budget)
[SEN. RAHMAN]

Tuesday, October 07, 2008

bankrupt already. They do not have money to pay their staff. All the resources that we have monetized so far and are holding in different currencies can be evaporated overnight in a financial collapse in the world. We will then have to start from scratch to re-extract and remonetize in a new currency, if we do not convert the present holdings into that metal I am recommending. I hope that I am making sense to the Minister. This is very important.

This is not a partisan or opposition or crazy man thinking. Not only is gold a fantastic store of value—I am not recommending diamonds as much as they may glitter or paintings or other things of heritage. Forget all that. One thing that has never lost its lustre is gold. In addition to being the best store of value, it has outperformed everything that has happened in financial markets to date.

The UNC had started the fund now called the Heritage and Stabilisation Fund. It would have established that in the late 1990s. Since 1998 gold has risen from \$300 an ounce to \$880 today. At one time it had reached the \$1,000 an ounce mark. Gold fluctuates but in the currency values, it continues to rise and rise. Some time ago I gave an illustration of what a 1 cent copper piece is worth. It is worth 11 cents in terms of copper value today. Commodities appreciate; they continue to increase in value.

You must have a thousand times more space in copper to store than you will need to have in gold. The gold is already purified, refined and put into 1 kilogramme or 1 ounce or 100 kilo bars as the case might be. We hear about Fort Knox and all the big countries of the world having their gold stocks. For the sake of this nation's wealth preservation, the Government has to move quickly to increase its holding of 1.6 tonnes to as many tonnes as our money supply at present can buy. We cannot buy with TT dollars but we can buy with the pound sterling, US dollars and Deutch Mark and euros that we possess. We could keep a little of our currency for current trade. If we do not secure our wealth—gas and oil are commodities. We have gone the route of extracting and monetizing. Keeping it in money is like ice blocks. We need to return them to a commodity that is as good as gold. Gold is what we have to do.

I have given advice to many people along the way who want to know in what to invest. Do not invest in jewellery because it has margins and markups. Pure gold has an international value that stays there. There is no mark up in that. You have a store of wealth. Nations of the world have recognized the value of gold. As a little example, there is a total of 29,813 tonnes of gold held worldwide. Out of

that the USA holds 8,133 tonnes; Germany 3,400 tonnes; the IMF 3,217 tonnes and France 2,562 tonnes. Who can forget how the franc had become worthless during and after the Second World War.

Today, France is another economic giant to get in as part of the European Union. These people recognized the value of keeping gold. I am asking, advising and exhorting the Government to look at this matter. Sometimes it is right under your nose and you miss it. I am sure because of the breezy answers that we have been getting regarding currencies and how much the triple-A banks are secure and shuffling around our currencies and taking safeguards. A couple days ago we were not getting an admission that we faced any danger in Trinidad and Tobago.

Now we are beginning to understand that we do face a serious danger, but they have not understood the seriousness of the danger. If we get washed away in our currency holdings—you could forget TT dollar because we can print that any time we like. That is not a problem. We only have a certain amount of TT dollars in circulation. The balance of it is in ledgers and accounting systems kept by the various institutions. You do not even have to worry about TT dollars.

2.30 p.m.

But banks are falling. Now the first nation has fallen and we are going to have a domino effect. We will have more nations falling and we will have to come to terms, and I would like to have an assurance from the Minister in the Ministry of Finance that what I have said here today is taken cognizance of. They do not listen to good advice. They recognize that they need help as a community effort in education as Sen. Prof. Deosaran pointed out. Even the byword of the budget is “Doing it together”, but they do not listen to advice because they feel they know what to do about everything.

We have been seeing a fearsome fall from the Third World status to a tenth world status. First World status is where there is less crime, good health services; not only educated people. Do you understand? Now, what is happening is that we have a greater infant mortality rate than we had under the UNC. We have runaway inflation, triple what it was under the UNC; we have a murder rate four times what it was under the UNC and we can go on. The fruit of PNM governance has been poisonous and disastrous to this nation. I am not saying this to criticize you because you are in power, I am saying it to wake you up; to let you understand that you have to start to listen.

It has been said that we criticize and are not offering anything as an alternative. They want to sucker us into a situation where they can pour scorn on

Appropriation Bill (Budget)
[SEN. RAHMAN]

Tuesday, October 07, 2008

everything we say. They do not listen to the Governor of the Central Bank. Sen. Prof. Deosaran is fed up after all these years. They have gone to Mastrofski. They are not listening to their people. They are taking solutions from a different culture.

I had a long discussion with one of my friends long before I had the pleasure of meeting Sen. Prof. Deosaran and he was telling me what a great idea it was to get the former Mayor of New York to come to Trinidad and bring his solutions. I said: How will that work? What does he know about Trinidad? I had the same view as you, Sen. Prof. Deosaran. You need indigenous solutions for these problems.

Coming back to this, the UNC does not have to give you a better budget because it will not be better in your eyes. You will pour scorn upon it. The UNC has had its six years of sterling performance, unparalleled in terms of its accomplishments, and whatever charges you may bring against it about the Airports Authority and these things, that is by the way. That never affected the people of this country. None of that affected the living standards of the people of this country. As a matter of fact, those six years in governance taught the PNM how to get up off its seat and start to do things.

For years we had Project Pride where the Hon. Hazel Manning used to work with distinction, but there was total failure for Project Pride. It never got off the ground and then the UNC came up and in no time at all found money, at \$9 and \$15 per barrel of oil, to build an airport and to facilitate some criminals in a little corruption admittedly. We are saying that openly.

You are recovering money from here and there. Good. But what did it do? It reduced the murder rate; GDP continued to grow; the status of the country rose in the ranks of the world; life expectancy went up. These are the fruits of good governance. We are regaled ad nauseam, to a mantra, about this caring PNM Government. You are caring, but you had better beat me and feed me and care for me and kick me. Do not care for me and give me misery.

The people in this country are resorting to crime. Today is the first day I have heard about the push and pull principle of criminality and that is a revelation to me. I thought about general circumstances. When you align it like that, it is really beautiful. There is a science to things when you bring it to the ordinary layman like me. I have to be impressed. I have my own ideas about social development and handling crime, but when I heard Sen. Prof. Deosaran today, I kept telling my colleagues he made my day. He gave an outstanding dissertation today.

I hope that nobody tries to disparage what he has said. You may say that as a local social scientist he may have an iron in the fire, but that iron belongs here. He

has a right to have his iron in the fire because this is where his navel string is buried; this is the country that he wants to see get out of the quagmire that the PNM Government has been dragging us down into.

We have heard it said again and again that if it were not for the wonderful leadership of the Prime Minister, we would not have accomplished this and that. You never hear them admit that it is because of him we have the crime. We blame the Minister of National Security, but I believe the Prime Minister is at the head of all of them. Who is keeping the Minister of National Security in his job despite his inability to cope?

We have to understand that if we are going to claim fame, we must accept blame. There is a lot of blame that the Government has to shoulder. The Prime Minister has been boasting about the vision he has had to monetize the gas, to liberalize the economy and float the currency. Add that to the floating of the currency and it being tied to the sinking dollar and I am sure everybody remembers some of the remarks I made. If you do not remember, I can tell you again.

Federation Chemicals has been using natural gas to produce fertilizer from the time I was young and in college. From the time I was growing up, I have been hearing about FedChem. Our natural gas is a gift from God and while this Government likes to think it came into power in 2002, let me remind them that with brief interregnums, it came in 1956 and they cannot escape their historical responsibility and their dereliction with regard to the people of this country for the years they have governed.

Dr. Williams, may God bless the man; I loved him and have always admired him—I have said it before and I will not contradict myself—but he did not understand the benefits of tourism. One of his cardinal mistakes was to speak a language which our people did not understand. When he said, “Massa day done”, they misread him. When he said: “Money is no problem”, they misread him and poured scorn on him.

Fundamentally, his economic vision was not versatile; it was not spread in every direction. As a historian, he learnt from the lessons of history, which our present Government is seeking to suppress. He learned from the lessons of history, but he did not know the economics. As a result, tourism was neglected; agriculture was neglected.

We have come to a situation where the Government is always saying that inflation is an imported thing because we import our food. Mr. Vice-President, we import our food because we killed agriculture and chose to import the food. As a

Appropriation Bill (Budget)
[SEN. RAHMAN]

Tuesday, October 07, 2008

result, we are now paying the cake. If inflation is from importing food, it is the Government's policy that has brought that about. We do not have agriculture.

Sen. The Hon. A. Piggott was saying yesterday that the future holds this and that. We have heard so much of that, we are sick of it. You know what is the direction in which we are going? We are going into megafarms and we are using Cuban technology and the poor Cubans have just shut down their own megafarms. Let the nation understand this. So the experts of megafarm failure have been imported to run our megafarms. Does that make sense?

There is a streak of madness that is running through the governance of this country. We do not understand what has happened. We have been given energy as a gift of God, but that was to seed us for our future economic diversification. Downstream industries emanating from energy original products are not diversification; it is additional profit taking, but it is not diversification. Diversification means agriculture, tourism, manufacturing, business and export.

How can we have tourism—I am talking about a vibrant tourism industry? Do not let the present increase in hotel rooms, the next year's double event of summits make you feel that our tourism is developing. We have a single tourism attraction and that is carnival and that is mostly Trinidadians coming back home and some other foreigners to enjoy the mas. We do not have a real tourism industry. What natural wonders and interesting things do we have to show anybody? Maracas Bay is a mess. All the vendors are complaining that water is coming in. It is water logged and the vendors have to be removed.

There are promises that it will be developed but, for God's sake, when will you do it? It is not as if we are taking care of our tourism assets. We are developing tourism and we have a crime situation that is causing people to say not to come to this crazy place. The Bajan reporter says that people should be aware of the global risk of indiscriminate terrorist attacks; that there were five separate bombings in Port of Spain between July and October 2005; that people should be aware that there are high levels of violent crimes especially shootings and kidnappings; that British nationals have been victims of violent attacks, particularly in Tobago where law enforcement is weak. He then refers them to the crime section of the travel advisory for more details. He said that dengue fever is endemic; warns about the hurricane season, and states that the main type of incidence for the British national required consul assistance directed towards victims of crime and those arrested on drugs charges.

Mr. Vice-President, we are trying to dry cocoa in the rain. We are trying to develop a tourism industry in the midst of carnage, the bloodletting that Sen. Prof.

Deosaran spoke about. He spoke about it for the longest while. We have a killing field in this country and they talk about good governance. How can you speak of good governance in a country where crime is exceedingly heavy? How can you talk about a place where you may get shot, if not raped and brutalized?

They want to know how come the Bajans are coming here to buy goods and spend money. It is so simple. Our dollar is half of theirs. They can come here and break style. They are not coming here because they like Trinidad. They bring their Bajan dollar, two to one and they can get twice as much goods. When you say that we are so attractive that Bajans are coming here, they are coming here to take flying fish from our waters and our Prime Minister has made it very clear that he and his authorities intervene against the prosecution of those people.

2.45 p.m.

Here we have a question of law-breaking starting from the very top. Recently, we have had revelations of the Prime Minister saying how he protected certain people from the crimes that he knew they committed. He was the prime actor on the stage in Woodford Square a few Fridays ago, when “all de bacchanal went down”. This is not going unnoticed. Criminality is being condoned and exemplified from the very highest rung in this country. “I eh come to talking about de—we eh start to talk about de areas where this budget is trying to do things.” We have a changing situation. It is almost like a kaleidoscope; you are turning it and everything changing pattern.

Let me stick to the first part. We are trying to develop tourism and we have a crime situation. We are trying to develop tourism and we are denying that we have a dengue outbreak. You have a dengue outbreak, you have it under control and you work towards eradicating it. We have a health system with people speaking Spanish or Filipino and you cannot understand what the nurses are telling you. We have a collapsing situation. We have a situation where we are short of police officers and we have an elite force, SAUTT, which is not even legitimized.

I am getting tired. I am getting frustrated. The situation is—what is it we are really doing? Are we seeking to develop tourism and we have this thing? We are talking about the health sector and we have an outbreak. Good Lord, we are talking about early childhood nurseries and you are promising 300 and making 10 and 15. The Government is always making big grandiose promises.

There is a cartoon with Linus the boy and Lucy the girl. Lucy is always holding up the ball and saying: “Come, come Linus kick it.” When he comes and

Appropriation Bill (Budget)
[SEN. RAHMAN]

Tuesday, October 07, 2008

fires the kick, she pulls the ball away and he falls on his back. Every time, every two or three months, she would do him the same thing. He, like a sucker, would come up and fire kicks at the ball. That is what this Government is doing to this nation: Come, come we have a nice thing for you boy. Come, come, come, “we go fix up” everything. They then come and get excited; “everybody happy, de Government doing wok for we.” Good Lord, “yuh” mamaguying the population, but not everybody. “The poor people who does say PNM till ah dead, dem, they have yuh in power.” You know what?

Thank God for the unedited live transmission of Parliament, despite the reservations that our good Senator and my friend had regarding the live, unedited transmission. Now we can see all the warts and all the ugly scars of the top players in Government coming out. This Upper House does not behave like that, thank God, not yet. We do not scandalize. We do not attack in the way I have seen in the last couple of days happened downstairs. [*Interruption*] He has his evidence and he could take care of himself. “He eh de Prime Minister yuh know.” He could make a monkey of himself and it would not make a difference to the nation. He might lose his seat. As a matter of fact he is up here, so he did not get the seat and I am glad to have him. By God, if Sen. Wade Mark was not here I do know how I would have been functioning in this Senate. I am very grateful that Sen. Wade Mark, who is now my friend, is in this Senate and I can get his advice and direction and help him and support him.

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

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

Question put and agreed to.

Sen. M. F. Rahman: Thank you, Mr. Vice-President. I really am very grateful for the vote of yes I heard coming from the Government side. There is hope yet. I hope you know that I am not saying any of this with malice. We have been attacked by our young friends here, that we do not like to support this or we do not like to support that. We have never objected to good measures. We never wanted to withhold support for the good things that the Government wants to do. It is our duty to speak as we speak and to guide as we guide.

This Government has brought a budget—I should have done like the Prime Minister and asked you to suspend the Standing Orders and give me some unlimited talking time, because I have a lot. “I eh even go down to meh 20 or 30

pages ah notes. I eh even start tuh read meh notes yet. I really sorry, one of these days ah go try that and leh we see how they respond.” It is very nice to have this spirit in the Senate. I appreciate that. We have been given a budget that says very clearly it is not isolated; it is a three-year thing. We have a changing situation.

Apart from the financial problems which the Government, I hope takes heed of my recommendations, we have a situation of change. We have proposed constitutional change. We have a proposed Southern Caribbean Union. We have a possible common currency coming into the picture and nothing in this budget, which still purports to be a national budget; not a mini-international budget that it probably should be. We have had no allocations for pursuing the plans of the Prime Minister in the direction in which he seems to want to take this nation. This is significant. The budget is silent. It is as if he has not shared his vision of integration with his Cabinet. It is unfortunate, because they are going to be the ones who have to come up and defend his sudden policies at the end of the day and sometimes having changed his mind at the last minute and embarrassed them. Anyhow, we have a situation here, where this budget is really quite divorced from anything.

I was going to give some interesting figures, just to show you or to support the idea. Maybe the Government is not gunning for the middle class. Maybe they are not trying to penalize the population. Maybe they do not really want to make life difficult for everybody. Maybe all the measures that they are taking, they really believe, are in the best interest of the people at large, but when you sit and examine the budget as I have done—I would not go to the figures. I would give you some. If you do not believe me, I would give you afterwards.

They have put taxation on vehicles all of a sudden. Do you know the vehicles that they have taxed the most are the lower-end value vehicles? From 1,600 to 1,799 cc, the increase is 100 per cent of the tax. On the 3,500 ccs, the increase is 11 per cent. “Put dat in yuh pipe an smoke it.” They have not been equitable in their application of vehicle tax increases. For the cheap vehicles, as far as the economy vehicles, where you could use regular gas, they have taxed it 100 per cent increase. This thing about \$20,000 and \$30,000 annuity allowance, who is that going to help, the poor or the middle income? This is to help the rich. This thing about building taxes, “yuh scrunting and fighting for years to achieve your dream of a house and now all of a sudden yuh house raise in value. Yuh fight for years to pay yuh mortgage, yuh house raise in value, because of inflation and all of ah sudden yuh have to fine yourself having to pay building taxes of exorbitant rates and yuh want tuh sell yuh house.” The cost is so high.

Appropriation Bill (Budget)
[SEN. RAHMAN]

Tuesday, October 07, 2008

There are several measures in the budget that impact upon single, working women and small income earners who are just beginning to find their feet in the world. At the same time, the Government is talking about inflation being manageable. It is now 13½ per cent. While the inflation is eroding the income benefit and the net income buying power of the people, the Government is doing its own bid to tighten the noose by causing prices to rise in every direction.

Sen. Seetahal SC was open in her scorn for the idea that we have a proper transport system. The Government has brought 300 buses, but they do not have a single bus to go to Cascade, because the road is too small. [*Interruption*]

Sen. Browne: That is not true.

Sen. M. F. Rahman: The residents of Cascade “tell meh” that. They have to get minibuses to go to those places. You are bringing in the wide buses that cannot service those areas. VMCOTT, which the UNC government instituted, better get ready for the repairs that would start to fall on it. The Government is boasting about the 300 buses today. Wait a few months and let us see how many would be on the road. “Yuh go have tuh start tuh cannibalize to keep parts.” Very early o’clock, we had an articulated bus “break away”. We never heard what was the cause of that. What was the forensic discoveries, as to why this thing broke apart? This Government brings in 300 new buses, running on diesel and proclaims an intention to convert all of them to CNG in a little bit. You mean to tell me, the Government did not have any forward thinking to bring them in as CNG to start? I cannot understand! They are now looking to bring in 200 stretch limousines for next year. What they would do with that after the Summit? I do not know if they would re-export them or pass them around. [*Interruption*] It is in the newspapers. Okay, 200 brand new elite vehicles; some of them bulletproof. [*Interruption*]

Sen. Browne: You are wrong!

Sen. M. F. Rahman: “Yuh not bringing any new vehicles for the Summit? Doh gih meh dat. Nah, nah, nah. I eh born yesterday. Yuh bringing in what yuh call it. Yuh building hotels and yuh taking—” Good Lord, this Summit is costing a packet of money. For what reason? Ego and pride “yuh” know boss. Sorry, Mr. Vice-President. When I say boss, I am really not talking to you, Sir. “Yuh” know boss. “Yuh know de story, right?”

Mr. Vice-President, with utmost respect, the Government—Sir, how much more time do I have? [*Interruption*]

Sen. Browne: Too much!

Sen. M. F. Rahman: Seven minutes, thank you. In every direction, we have chaos, a crumbling and a falling apart of all of the institutions and structures in the country. The only thing going up is new buildings, palaces and jets.

Sen. Prof. Deosaran was quick to distance himself from any idea of revolution, as was promulgated by Roget. I think he was the trade union guy. But as a responsible Government, we in these Chambers have to pay regard to that. This Chamber was invaded by rebels, insurgents and insurrectionists in 1990. In 1970, we had something else. That was 20 years apart. The next anniversary, in 20-year terms, is in two years' time.

In those days, before 1990, this “fella” wrote about the gathering storm. I have mentioned a new gathering storm here some months now. People are starting to hear rumblings from the thunder and we are getting flashes of lightening. This Government—I know they bought a lot of riot gear to keep people under control, but it “eh” so easy. If the mess hits the fan “it eh go be” easy at all. What is going to happen would be something with a fury, because now we have guns abounding.

One of the things I am so grateful that Sen. Prof. Deosaran has clarified here today is the matter about the mythological idea that drugs are directly related to crime. It is fighting for turf to share the spoils of a government that has recognized criminals as community leaders and has passed on largess to give them the wherewithal to continue with their activities.

3.00 p.m.

The Minister of National Security mentioned the five or six model police stations where crime has fallen. He is so innocent in his assessment. All the criminals left those districts and went into the countryside and were rampaging for that period. So, when they put on the heat in those areas, the guys went elsewhere to rampage. Crime did not stop in the country. The reality is that we cannot take single little units here and there and hope to make a difference in the national landscape. You must have a coordinated programme in all the stations, precincts and districts in this country.

The Government is trying to revamp the local government structure. Sen. Dr. Carson Charles explained that there is a perfect set of local government laws to accomplish all that you want. “Do not fix it when it eh break yet.” You are going about reshuffling with the structures at every level of the society.

Do you know that one of the fundamental mistakes of the NAR was that when they came into power they brought the vehicle of the State to a grinding halt and

Appropriation Bill (Budget)
[SEN. RAHMAN]

Tuesday, October 07, 2008

then sought to chug it along and start to move again? That was a cardinal mistake. You do not stop things in their track and start to rebuild.

Sen. Manning: You are telling Sen. Dr. Charles that.

Sen. M. F. Rahman: This Government is dismantling on the run and trying to rebuild on the run. It is dismantling only for the sake of its own image. It is a look good Government. It must look good in the eyes of the people; it must look good in the eyes of the world.

I have spoken words that I hope have been heard, not only by the population, but by the Government. I just want to repeat that the imperative is to secure the wealth of this nation in the medium that I have recommended. The Government knows about buying gold, and it knows about gold storage. Do not play stupid and foolhardy because an Opposition Senator recommended it. Please, pay attention. Money is going to get washed away. Money is not worth the paper it is printed on in many crumbling circumstances. What has held its value—I have to repeat this—is gold. If you are holding it you will be able to liquidate it into any currency that the world chooses to use at a later day.

Mr. Vice-President, I thank you and the Senators for the honour and privilege of having the opportunity to address the nation today on this very important debate. Thank you. [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. Corinne Baptiste-Mc Knight: Mr. Vice-President, since I have been in this honourable House, I have always had the greatest pity for whoever of my colleague had to follow the dynamic and theatrical Sen. Rahman. [*Laughter*] Today, the problem is mine. So, I will have to deal with it.

Mr. Vice-President, when I looked at the theme of this debate, “Shaping Our Future Together,” I wondered whether the element of togetherness meant that this was supposed to be an inclusive debate, one in which the Government was inviting us to participate and they would be willing to listen, and if there were any constructive suggestions, perhaps accommodate them.

I have found that there has been a lot of listening from the repartee going on. I suspect that there has been some accommodation, because I noticed that there are changes in the figures presented from these in the recurrent expenditure in the booklet that I have.

The element of future I would like to concentrate on mainly in my contribution is the children and youth. I wish to enter a caveat up front. There may be some flaws in my interpretation of certain areas of the budget, but I ask

this honourable Senate to attribute them to the fact that perusing documents of almost 1,000 pages dense with budgetary matter and trying to compare this with information given in the other place to make sense of it all is definitely not easy for a lazy retiree, especially when information is not easy to come by in this place. Let me explain what I mean by that.

I went through the entire estimates of expenditure, and out of a total budget of billions, I found \$2.5 million allocated for publication, promotion and printing throughout the entire document. That immediately explains to me why there are so many things that are done in this country that people ought to have access to and they know nothing about them. It explains why my colleague, Sen. Rahman, could come here and put a question to find out how to get a free bus pass for persons over 65 years. Now, in his words, this should not be rocket science.

It explains why the Member for Mayaro has to get up in the House and say that students from his constituency cannot get transportation to school when some of us know that principals can request special buses to bring the children from various parts of the country to their schools. This is a problem of not giving information and information is what we need in order to be able to assess what is going on in the country; who is doing what; and who ought to be able to benefit from what is happening. Having said that, I would ask you if I make any terrible blunders, please feel free to correct me.

I want to start by having a look at what the impact of this budget could be on children and youth and surprise, surprise, I would start with the Children's Authority. I know that there are many persons out there who want to know how this recently passed legislation is going to be translated into action. I have been able to find about \$25 million allocated for the establishment of the authority, and I could live with that. Although it would seem that this would be set up at a leisurely pace, but if it has to be done properly, it cannot be rushed. My real concern is the basics, the delivery of the service which must be the staffing. The warm bodies that are essential for this to take off are not easily available.

Yes, I assume when I look at the budget for public administration that some of the scholarships provided for there must necessarily be allocated to this area, but the state-of-the-art in the areas of professional expertise required like guidance, counselling, child psychology, child psychoanalysis, psychotherapy, art therapy and play therapy, all these areas require postgraduate study if these people are to be internationally certified.

Now, if even you are offering scholarships to persons who are about to complete a course of study, in order for them to start the specialty study at masters

Appropriation Bill (Budget)
[SEN. BAPTISTE-MC KNIGHT]

Tuesday, October 07, 2008

or certificate level in 2009, because those areas of study are not available locally, it means they have to get places in the United States of America, Canada and the United Kingdom and that requires time. If those scholarships are not yet advertised, I would be very surprised if anyone could start studying by October 2009.

So, I ask my question: What concrete arrangements are being made to staff the authority? Are you going to raid the existing professionals in the Ministry of Education, the Ministry of Health and the Ministry of Social Development? This does not make sense. You can manage using some of these people for a short while, but you have to think that some of the very people that you would want to raid are the people whom you might need to send to study since it would take them less time to become completely qualified than someone who is now starting to do a three to four-year degree and then a two-year postgraduate. So, I worry about how the Government proposes to staff the authority.

I note that the social service delivery is being decentralized. This gives me hope, because if social service delivery is decentralized then I feel that this is probably the new policy and this is the way the Children's Authority will also operate. That is good.

3.15 p.m.

I come now to an area that is one of my favourite hobbyhorses. I note that two new remand facilities are being operationalized; one for girls and one for boys. In a former existence, I saw a facility that was meant to become a remand home for boys, and all I would like to say at this stage is, I hope that is not the facility, and if it is, I hope that substantial refurbishment has been done to it. I would hope that some arrangement is being made to facilitate children on remand from Tobago, because it is inhumane to remove a child from Tobago to Trinidad to put the child in remand with very little hope of visitation from parents. So, please, if nothing is currently on the books, try to find some arrangement that would solve this problem for Tobago.

Further, I hope that these two facilities are going to be equipped with libraries and tutors, because right now children in remand are doomed to be illiterate; they are not schooled. This is a situation that must not continue. I also note that the habit of providing government facilities as correctional facilities continues unabated. There is nothing in this budget for any kind of new housing for children in need, who are not children in need of correction.

I see that new buildings are going to be given to St. Dominic's, Credo and different things, but that is not enough. You need facilities in the various regions

and municipalities so that children do not have to be uprooted from their normal and familiar surroundings.

Let me go on to education. Within the Ministry of Education, I note particularly that much attention is paid to supporting students to ensure that they can fulfil their potential, so textbooks are provided. Yesterday, Sen. Sharma gave one perspective on the provision of textbooks. Let me give you another. Is anybody on that side aware of the fact that in addition to the textbooks that Government provides, parents have to find in the case of primary school children from \$200 to \$600; in the case of secondary school children, from \$1,000 up per year to provide textbooks?

Now, I do not understand how many textbooks a child in primary school needs per subject. If Government provides you one per core subject, why is it necessary for these long booklists? Every booklist is a foolscap page. And what is the result? In a good year, the children probably finish half the chapters in book 1, and then they are moved to Standard II and they have to buy book 2; something has to be done about that.

I was very pleased to note that instead of giving \$1,000 to the six formers to buy books, Government was providing books. Hello! The book grant came at the end of the Lower Six year; that is after the children were supposed to have studied for a whole year out of books they did not have the money to buy. So, books are being provided now. The term has just started and I can tell you, I do not know one Sixth form child who has received all their books yet.

Now for CAPE, you start in October and basically you have from October to mid-May to complete your syllabus, so that if the books are not there by the beginning of October the child is already at a disadvantage. Can we understand why for the last set of scholarships over 60 per cent of them went to the science students? Work it out.

Now, the textbooks that are being provided, at the end of the school year, the child returns the book and gets a new book at the beginning of the new school year. Would it be all that difficult to signal to the children and parents that these books could be used during the holiday for revision, or to finish reading what they did not cover, or did not learn, and have the books returned and recycled the week before the school term starts? Just a suggestion, it might work, and then again, it might not.

Let me move on to school nutrition, an excellent idea, and something that disturbed me profoundly until the hon. Minister in introducing this yesterday,

Appropriation Bill (Budget)
[SEN. BAPTISTE-MC KNIGHT]

Tuesday, October 07, 2008

mentioned that the new appropriation was \$240 million, because according to the document on recurrent expenditure it is \$215,200,000, an increase of 1 per cent over the \$215 million appropriation. The new increase is 11 per cent, but it comes with the explanation that this is in order to expand the programme to 300,000 children.

Hon. colleagues, if inside here it has been stated that the food prices inflated 27 per cent, we all know that rice went up over 60 per cent and about four days of the week they get rice; flour went up more than double, quite often they get flour, almost every morning it is some kind of flour stuff they get for breakfast; how can you expect an 11 per cent increase to feed more children? I do not know. This old brain cannot figure that out, but young brains on that side might be able to do the deal.

I was very happy to hear the hon. Minister of Local Government tell us about the schools that are being refurbished and new schools that are being built. I wonder whether the refurbishment and the new design takes into account this school nutrition programme. What I am really asking is, are there adequate cafeteria facilities where these children can sit and eat like people? It irritates me profoundly to see my little children eating out of the box with a spork. Hello! Is that what we are developing? Developed people sit at tables and eat with a knife and fork. [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. Manning: You want me to answer you?

Sen. C. Baptiste-Mc Knight: Yes, please.

Sen. Manning: Thank you very much, Madam Senator for giving way. That is exactly what is intended, and if you go to the school in Icacos, the first school with the new design that has been built, what is part of the curriculum is that the kitchen would be built and a particular caterer would be hired to service that kitchen. It means that the caterer will be attached to the school; it means that the service area will be provided and social skills and graces will be taught to the children. Therefore, you will have places, placemats, tables; really a cafeteria approach and funding and support will be provided for the children.

Sen. C. Baptiste-Mc Knight: I thank the hon. Minister, but Mr. Vice-President, do not take that out of my time, "eh". [*Laughter*] I am very glad that the public has heard what this school nutrition is supposed to become.

Let me go on to what the Ministry of Education terms its student support services. The bedrock of that service is the guidance and counselling facility. In

the documentation that I have, in one place it says that 20 per cent of primary schools and 50 per cent of the secondary schools have a guidance person, a special teacher and a social worker. Now, we heard a figure of 700 schools. Is that 700 primary or 700 altogether?

Sen. Manning: It is 488 primary.

Sen. C. Baptiste-Mc Knight: It is 488 primary, okay. So, that means that the 20 per cent of primary will correspond to the 88 primary schools that have these facilities. Another mathematical problem. According to the documentation, the total establishment for that unit is 186 guidance officers, 49 special teachers and 82 social workers, with seven health visitors.

I cannot do the math, especially in the light of the fact that I am positive that there are not 186 guidance officers on staff at the moment. My guesstimate is that there might be about 50 per cent to 60 per cent of those posts filled. I know for a fact, without having asked anyone, that the guidance programme started in the Ministry of Education in the 1960s, because I was a young foreign service officer in charge of students in London, when the first two scholarships were given to the University of Reading to start the guidance unit. Over time, the training did not continue, hence the lack of guidance officers now.

Have we learnt anything from that experience? How are we translating that historical experience to the Children's Authority?

3.30 p.m.

We have to undertake to train people. Having trained the people there will be some problems. You do not get 100 per cent back, but a trained professional is never a waste to your society. People who were trained 40 years ago, some of them have gone to the great beyond and training angels upstairs, some of them are retired, but at least one of them is still doing yeoman service here. Now, it is a funny story. The second person who was given a scholarship from here to train went to the University of Reading. In those days guidance was new so it was a certificate course for trained teachers that was being offered. It was so new in the United Kingdom that the professors were from the United States.

This professor was so impressed by the Trinidad scholar who was there that he asked that she be allowed to go to the United States, pursue the degree, which she could do there and she would then be able to come back and train people in Trinidad. Do you know what the answer was? No. So, he arranged a scholarship, she took it up and got scholarships right up to PhD level; her service was

Appropriation Bill (Budget)
[SEN. BAPTISTE-MC KNIGHT]

Tuesday, October 07, 2008

discontinued according to the regulations here. She worked for years in the United States system, teaching counselling at the university and then retired. Guess what? She is here today giving back—I am talking about Dr. Merle Hoyte who is at COSTAATT. Was that a loss to us?

Hon. Senator: Yes.

Sen. C. Baptiste-Mc Knight: How much more beneficial it may have been if Government had allowed her to complete her studies, so she could have come back home to teach guidance and counselling and we would now have had a facility here training guidance officers. We would certainly have more than 90 officers in the ministry.

Let me digress a bit. I hear shades of this sort of thinking when I hear the reaction to the decision to give scholarships to scholars who get first class honours degrees. I will come back to that at the appropriate point.

Mr. Vice-President, we are talking about these guidance officers and the support services. The guidance officers are essential and we have to find a means of providing them for the system, especially now with the Children's Authority coming on stream we need more guidance officers. We are going to need an establishment overall of, perhaps, 600/700, because there ought to be a guidance officer available to each school. Why? Because there will always be disciplinary problems in the schools and dealing with your disciplinary problems talks directly to your availability of guidance officers—and you want another joke—the availability of psychologists. I defy anybody to guess the correct number of psychologists assigned to the Ministry of Education.

Hon. Senator: Three.

Sen. C. Baptiste-Mc Knight: Two. One, two. [*Counts on fingers*] Once I saw that I never even bothered to ask whether the posts were filled or not. At that point it really does not matter. Two psychologists cannot possibly cope with 400,000 children. The psychologist is not for the child with problems only. We have to find another means of dealing with children who may be disturbed, children who are disruptive, children who are bullies and children who are violent. They exist in the system. How do you cope with them? Suspend them? I am told that suspension is becoming *passé*, but there are occasions on which it is in the child's interest and it is in the interest of the child's peers to remove the child for a period at least.

Now, going through the budget under national security I notice that there is a programme—where is it?—it is School Discipline Initiative. One million dollars

in the budget in 2007, nothing spent. One million dollars in the budget in 2008, reduced to \$500,000. I do not know how much was spent yet, but I suppose that it is the lordly sum of nothing too. It is put back into the budget for 2008/2009. Do I have a problem with that? No. There are three other programmes. There is MILAT, there is MYPART and then there is the Youth Apprenticeship Development Centre. These three I understand are residential courses. Would it make sense to see if there can be a marrying of the education department's problem with problem children by assigning those children to one of these residential courses where they get the discipline that they obviously need and the education?

I recall about 10 years ago when I did the ADP course at Servol, Servol had a particular programme that they used specifically for these disruptive children. From their ADP class, if the children could not adjust, they were put into this special programme which was run by ex-regiment personnel. It involved a lot of physical workout to help them to express their anger, to deal with that, and it did the whole ADP programme as well. It is just another idea, something that can be considered, because these are children who must not be lost. If you lose a school bully you will find him/her in jail years later. We have to start dealing with interventions that obviate these results. Just my suggestion.

I want to come now to the higher end of education, the Ministry of Science, Technology and Tertiary Education. I have no problem with their programmes. My suggestion is though, that HELP programme, it is not as helpful as it could be. Why? Because a large number of people who need the help have difficulty manipulating the loan and many of us are still terrified of borrowing money because we do not know how we are going to pay it back. We do not really have the culture of paying for our education later. What I would like to suggest is, that as a part of HELP you deal with the PTSC—some of my colleagues are not going to be too happy about this, but who cares—give the students free bus passes. Let the PTSC provide one ID that would be given to a student and it would allow them to use the bus free.

Now, I am not proposing any addition to your budget. Do you know why? Because most of the buses are running empty anyhow, so that they will just be filling the buses and be able to get to and from their place of study. In addition, it means that there is going to be the need to do something about the hours at which the buses stop running. When COSTAATT has classes in the night that finish at 10 o'clock, it is not easy for these youngsters to get down to City Gate and from there to get their transport. So, just have discussions with COSTAATT, UTT and whoever runs these courses and arrange night buses so that the students can get their education and get home in safety.

Appropriation Bill (Budget)
[SEN. BAPTISTE-MC KNIGHT]

Tuesday, October 07, 2008

I just want at this point to say a word about these scholarships for PhDs, et cetera. I understand that the best scholars get offers of scholarships, but not all of them do. I hope that this first class honours includes people who graduate in the American system where you do not get first class honours but you could graduate “magna” or “summa cum laude”. If these people are included in it and they can get Government sponsorship, you stand a better chance of getting these qualified people back at the point where you need them most. Note what I am saying, at the point where you need them most. Most often we are not able to give them the type of experience—post PhD—that they need in order to be truly useful to us.

Here again, I can give you the example of a Trinidad scholar who, mercifully, was allowed an extension to do a masters, but straight from the masters was recruited by one of the top firms in the United States. What happens? Before he is finished the guys down here sent to say, “Under your contract you are supposed to return.” Panic! But some misguided soul suggested that they check me out to find out how to deal with this. I said, look, write to the people and tell them that you are willing to come home, just let you know what job you are coming home to, because the arrangement is, that if they do not find a job for you within three months you are free. But within three months the person would have lost the good offer that they had. Say now, you are going home to visit your parents anyhow, dress yourself and turn up and say, look, here I am, I am ready to work, just let me know where. So said so done. They said, “Oh yes, glad to see you, we are going to get in touch with you immediately.” Say right! Get on your plane and go back to your job out there. He worked out there; worked up the ladder and then decided, look, this is no place for my children to grow up. So, children going home; returned home with them.

That scholar is now in private enterprise here making a tremendous contribution—and you could see it on television from time to time—anytime there is a big thing going on in the financial world or in the management world, he is there on the panel discussing. Was that a loss to us?

3.45 p.m.

This is why I really welcome this initiative, once of course, you make it available to our scholars who are not in the first class honours stream, the magna cum laude folks. I want to put a proviso on this. Do you know that we have people who got additional scholarships, who also procured scholarships of their own accord to universities outside? So it means that they never took up the Government's offer of the first scholarship. Make this facility available to them too, because some of them are now ready, having come home, to go back out

there and do qualifications in innovative areas. I had to say to one, "What happen, you are heading for UTT, because that is the only place you could come back to". I want these kinds of people, these committed Trinidadians and Tobagonians to be eligible for this scholarship as well.

Let me just round up this part of my discourse by sharing a more general concern that I have. Now I consider our society to be one in transition, and therefore, I see the need for the variety of training programmes that we have, MuST, HYPE, you name it, all doing something that is necessary. But when one looks at the programmes, you would realize that there is a degree of overlap and at times you wonder whether some of them are not competing for participants. I do not think that it is going to be difficult to rationalize that situation, and it will be to the benefit of the participants, as well as streamlining might save cost. But what I am not seeing clearly and I think the hon. Minister alluded to it this morning, is how the education system itself is being reengineered, to ensure that from the earliest age, right through to say—

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

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

Question put and agreed to.

Sen. C. Baptiste-Mc Knight: Thank you, Mr. Vice-President, this is a red letter day because I do not normally talk this long. I want to know if you subtracted the time that I lent—[*Laughter*] I want to make sure that the students, at least up to the first years of secondary school are exposed to a wide range of science, technology, language and artistic theatre, so that they can then select what they would like to be specialized in when they go in to CXC, CAPE, et cetera. That way we would find that the technical, vocational, scientific and modern would all be offered within the school and programmes like MuST, et cetera, can now all form part of a coherent continuing education system, which would then cater for the dropouts, the people who need to be retrained and for adults who just want to continue to study. Then you will have your full tertiary education. I am hoping that this is eventually where we will be heading.

Mr. Vice-President, I want to quickly now turn to the UNESCO National Office which is a part of the—it comes under the Ministry of Education also and I notice with dismay that their budget has been cut. Now, I have no problem with cutting the budget and I will suggest to you how the budget could be cut, other than the

Appropriation Bill (Budget)
[SEN. BAPTISTE-MC KNIGHT]

Tuesday, October 07, 2008

way in which it was done. The part of that budget that was cut, gut the programme value of the UNESCO office. The one item that was savaged is the item that pays for the activities of the ASPnet programme, the UNESCO Clubs. These are activities that deal with environmental projects. Some of you might know about the Sand Watch project, which is actually being spearheaded by a primary school in Mayaro. This is a programme that brings the slave trade and its history alive in the school curriculum. This is a programme that is supposed to be promoting a project to honour Leroi Clarke, which looking at the new budget, I think would probably have to be aborted. Now, not good enough! That set of programmes, the ASPnet and UNESCO Clubs, participation in them transformed a school that some of you might remember from a warehouse not too far from here. It used to be the Model School which became the Russell Latapy High School. That Russell Latapy High School morphed those children into scholars, artistes, who were always able to perform wonderfully at events. So much so, that a survey of the schools participating in those programmes, showed that there was less disciplinary problem, there was more peace in those schools, to the point where the Ministry of Education was looking at—and I think this is about over the last two years—providing a National Coordinator for the ASPnet programme in order to expand the programme to as many schools as possible.

Now, do we really want to cut that sort of programme out of UNESCO? Okay, so if you put back the money into programmes, you have a board that is now 30 people, many of them cannot come to meetings regularly, cut down the numbers on the board. They are not going to like me for it, but tough, that is a way of life.

There are just a couple other areas that I would like to have a word on. I would like to ask the Minister of Sport and Youth Affairs, I notice that he has a swimming pools programme, but the George Bovell III swimming pool is “missing”. There is a notice board that I have to pass regularly because I live in that area, is this how we reward our young achievers? You said that you were going to put down a swimming pool to honour this first ever Olympic medal in swimming, and then it becomes a board that is becoming weather beaten. Could someone let the Minister of Sport and Youth Affairs know that I would like to find out what the future of that is?

I also wonder whether he is aware that our sports company has given a grant to the Trinidad and Tobago Golf Association. Hello, I like the idea of putting golf in schools because the discipline that that gives to young people is equal to none. But you know what, there is a public golf course at Chaguaramas that is a stone’s throw from the Carenage area and do you know where this golf in schools is

going on? At Millennium Golf Club and at St. Andrews Golf Club. But for good measure, Bishop Anstey East is involved in it, so I do not have much problem with that, and Trinity is involved in the one at Moka. Really, is it that difficult to have the little "fellas" and girls from Carenage go down to Chaguaramas to play golf? No, Mr. Vice-President, that I find very difficult to deal with. That is a public course and this is where our people must learn to play golf.

In addition, whenever corporate citizens donate golf equipment for the youth to play, it is to Chaguaramas they have to go to donate the equipment and then what happens, the equipment is removed from Chaguaramas for safekeeping elsewhere because Chaguaramas youth—no, not good enough!

Two more things—and here I declare an interest because I play golf down at Chaguaramas of course, nowhere else. I notice that the Ministry of Tourism is providing money for refurbishing of the greens and tees. Hey, love it, but it is not only the greens and tees that need looking after. There are sand traps there that are devoid of sand, but very grassy. Not good enough! That place needs serious refurbishment and the Carenage youth who are currently banned from there—let me repeat it, banned from there—they must be encouraged to be part of that club; they must be taught to be caddies and taught the game, so that they can learn and carry the good discipline over into their ordinary life.

Two more things: the GAP programme in the Ministry of Community Development, Culture and Gender Affairs. People in south who are beneficiaries of this programme have a problem. Do you know what it is? They have been told that Government has no more money to run this programme and they will have to pay \$2,500 per month, if they want to continue getting the little help. Please, I want someone on the Government Bench to come into this Senate and announce that there is money in the budget to continue the programme. I have seen it; the money is there for that programme to continue. You have someone who is 102 years old, good God, this is not right.

The last thing. I note that there is a National Social Development Programme that provides water and stuff like that—these goodies—for communities. Then, how come—here again, I have another interest because I was born in Robinson Ville, Belmont and this is the environs of Gonzales—people in Gonzales have to burn tires in order to get water, because they are not getting water for six, eight days, for two weeks on a stretch, and in spite of the intervention of the Member for Laventille West, who is one of two Members of Parliament that they have, the other Member for Parliament has not been sighted up there in connection with this. How come there is a programme that has money, that spends 1.1 million less

Appropriation Bill (Budget)
[SEN. BAPTISTE-MC KNIGHT]

Tuesday, October 07, 2008

dollars than it is allocated and the people of Gonzales cannot get water? When you have to decide from two jalliters of water, whether you are going to give the child a wet sponge to go to school, or cook—not good enough. Need a little action on that.

I thank you very much, Mr. Vice-President.

4.00 p.m.

The Minister of Health (Sen. The Hon. Jerry Narace): Mr. Vice-President, I rise in support of the Appropriation Bill 2008/2009. Permit me to congratulate my colleagues, the Minister in the Ministry of Finance as well as the Minister of Finance for what in my view, was an excellent presentation by the Minister in the Ministry of Finance, and indeed an excellent presentation by the Minister of Finance in the other place.

Mr. Vice-President, permit me to put into the record that while we in Trinidad and Tobago are battling an increasing money supply and an abundance of credit both encouraging excessive consumer spending, I am aware that never before have businesses done so well, never before have we seen so many cars on the road and, of course, traffic. These are indeed fortuitous circumstances for Trinidad and Tobago. I have taken note of the consistent use of appropriate monetary and fiscal policies to address spending, credit and traffic.

Mr. Vice-President, I would like to examine another scenario because as you know, we like to talk about what obtains in the United States of America, Europe and all over the world. We like to compare ourselves and quite rightfully so. I have a note I will like to share with you from CNNmoney.com.

“After a weekend getaway in New York City, Joseph Lanza logged onto his Bank of America Visa account and was shocked to see that his line of available credit had been reduced to \$1,000 from \$3,800. Because of the recent charges from his trip, his balance was \$970, dangerously close to his credit limit. ‘I had been trying to pay my debt down to improve my FICO score and also my debt-to-credit ratio,’ said Lanza...

But despite making timely payments, keeping careful track of each charge, he said, ‘It feels like I’m running up against a bunch of walls.’”

He did nothing wrong, he did all the right things.

“Credit card issuers have been reining in credit limits lately ‘to minimize their risk because the economic climate has changed so dramatically,’...chief executive of the card rating site LowCards.com.

In the midst of a financial crisis, banks have less money to lend. On top of that, the percentage of people who are delinquent on their credit card payments rose to 12% in the second quarter...

So to mitigate rising risk and compensate for less credit overall, issuers are scaling back consumer credit lines...

In fact, 62% of credit card issuers have cut back the lines of credit they make available to consumers..."

Mr. Vice-President, we like to talk about all the bad things in Trinidad and Tobago and indeed, there are many things we can improve and as my friend Sen. Dr. Carson Charles would say, we are not perfect. But if you understood how the FICO score works, you would understand that through no fault of yours and because of the credit crunch and they just cut back your limits, your interest rates would go up and it is a vicious cycle.

Those facing this predicament may not even know it until they apply for a loan or another credit card. In fact, they would not even realize what would have happened. Here is what happens: Let us say a card holder has a credit limit of \$10,000 and a balance on the card of \$4,000. The card companies worry that the large balance may increase the prospect of default, so it lowers the credit line to \$5,000, but in doing that, it completely changes what is known as the credit utilization rate raising it from 40 per cent to 80 per cent, that is then factored into the calculation of one's so-called FICO credit score which measures credit worthiness according to Craig Watts, a spokesman for FICO Credit Score corporation.

Therefore, I can tell you what the implications are. For 62 per cent of card holders the implication is serious, and on top of all of that whilst here in Trinidad and Tobago for super gas we pay \$11.25 per gallon, for regular gas in the States they pay \$21.16. While for "premium" we pay \$16, in the United States of America it is around \$24. I have brought that to your attention to say that sometimes we have to take stock of some of the good fortune we have. A lot of people believe that we are experiencing all these good times just like that, it is not just like that. Mr. Vice-President, I have been around since 1987, I have seen the policies, I have seen them evolve and I will tell you about that.

I thought it was important to start in that context to make my contribution because it is now globally recognized that better health is central to human happiness and well-being. It also makes an important contribution to economic progress as healthy populations live longer, are more productive and save more.

Appropriation Bill (Budget)
[SEN. THE HON. J. NARACE]

Tuesday, October 07, 2008

Many factors influence health status and a country's ability to provide quality health services for its people. Ministries of health are important actors but so are other government departments, donor organizations, civil society groups and communities themselves. For example, investments in road can improve access to health services; civil service reform can create opportunities to hiring more health workers; education initiatives may promote attitude and behaviour change.

Mr. Vice-President, this Government thoroughly understands the importance of health for the country's overall development and the population's well-being, and has thus given it top priority in all its strategies, plans and activities, and has indeed given in terms of roads and education; it is making the appropriate investment so that we can have a healthier, happier nation.

Through the Ministry of Health and other collaborating ministries and government bodies, health is now a national priority both on the individual and collective levels. I will admit that there is a lot of improvement that is required for the health sector and we now have a plan that will transform it.

The Government has a vision for health; a vision it has shared with all the people in Trinidad and Tobago: We envision a nation whose citizens are empowered to live long, healthy, happy and productive lives. We have a collective responsibility as leaders and citizens of this country to realize this vision, for the sake of our country, our children and ourselves. That is why in fiscal year 2007/2008 the Government allocated \$3.6 billion to health and in this budget, it allocated \$4.4 billion. That is a tangible demonstration of a Government that cares and is serious about transforming health care in Trinidad and Tobago and a little later, I will tell you the bigger plan.

The Ministry of Health is naturally the primary actor in making our vision for health a reality. It provides leadership and oversight for the health sector; it formulates policies, develops plans, provides resources, monitors and regulates the delivery of health care services.

Over the last fiscal year, the Ministry of Health has commenced a comprehensive overview of its operations, and a reengineering of its processes. The aim is to improve the operational capability of the ministry, so as to better position it and sustain improvements in the quality of health care.

The ministry has identified and is now focused on three strategic objectives:

1. To foster a healthy and productive population through preventive care;
2. To create and maintain a First World health care delivery system; and

3. To develop and manage a comprehensive customer based public health system.

These strategic objectives will be built on a robust infrastructure development, efficient and effective human resources, an integrated information technology system; continuous improvement measurement system; a client centred environment; dynamic health promotion and active community participation and community health care.

Our commitment to the achievement of these strategic objectives is reflected in the resources that this Government has allocated to the health sector since assuming office in 2002. For the period 2002 to 2008, a total of \$14.8 billion has been expended on the health sector.

As I have already stressed, along with strengthening our health care delivery systems and programmes, we have also developed and intensified health promotion and prevention approaches to build the health skills of people and empower them to achieve and maintain optimal health and well-being, and to create supportive environments that make the healthy choice the easy choice.

We are entering an era in health when health promotion is key to addressing the challenges posed by the new environment. Health promotion entails:

- Building healthy public policy which includes legislation, fiscal measures, taxation and organizational change.
- Creating supportive environments, the protection of the natural and built environments.
- Strengthening community action.
- Developing personal skills through information and education skills; preparing people to learn throughout life to prepare themselves for all its stages to cope with chronic illness and injuries.
- Re-orienting health care services toward prevention of illness and promotion of health.

The role of the health sector must move increasingly in a health promotion direction, beyond its responsibility to provide clinical and curative services. Reorienting health services also requires stronger attention to health research, as well as professional education and training.

Mr. Vice-President, a key prevention strategy is to reduce the modifiable risk factors that are common to several chronic diseases: tobacco use, abuse of

Appropriation Bill (Budget)
[SEN. THE HON. J. NARACE]

Tuesday, October 07, 2008

alcohol, lack of physical activity, inappropriate diet and obesity. Another is the involvement of all sectors in devising and operationalizing actions and interventions relating to chronic disease prevention and control.

The ministry will be utilizing an integrated approach that will include prevention, health promotion, improved management and access to health services, coupled with multi-sectoral collaboration in our efforts to control and reduce chronic diseases within our population. The creation of the CNCD's technical advisory committee is an example of the type of multi-sectoral partnerships and cooperation we are developing for health. This committee is chaired by Prof. Paul Teelucksingh and a very distinguished group of individuals.

Within the Ministry of Health, we have begun our response towards the development of a policy and legislative framework in support of chronic disease control and prevention and healthy living. In other words, we are setting the policy framework so that 20 years down the road we would have made the proper policy and preventive interventions so that people would not require the amount of health care they require now, but through community-led, and their own responsibility for their health we would have a healthier population.

Tobacco is the major preventable cause of death in many parts of the world today. In particular, tobacco related cardiovascular and lung diseases and cancers cause a significant proportion of deaths and chronic disability. It is also now widely acknowledged that second-hand smoke gives rise to fatal diseases such as heart disease and stroke. In order to protect the citizens of this country from the harmful effects of tobacco, Government has introduced the Tobacco Control Bill. The Bill essentially seeks to curb the production, sale and use of tobacco in Trinidad and Tobago. These measures are expected to reduce exposure of the population to tobacco smoke and in turn reduce risks to the development of some chronic diseases.

4.15 p.m.

In real terms, the Ministry of Health is ensuring that there are nutrition and dietary guidelines for the food and meals offered to children. We must reduce the irresponsible use of over sugared beverages that only provide empty calories and the over abundance of fried foods. These nutritional practices combined with inactivity fuel the rise in obesity rates in our region. This Government cares about those children and would take the tough decisions that are required to ensure that they eat healthily from young, so they would get the proper taste from young. In the long run we would benefit as a people, as individuals and indeed, a country.

A survey conducted in 2001, indicated that in our region obesity is assuming epidemic proportions, particularly among women. Approximately 25 per cent of our women are obese and there is a growing trend of obesity among children. The process of the evaluation of school meal options and development of nutrition and dietary guidelines will directly impact this, by creating an environment where the healthy choice is the easy choice, ensuring that children have access to fruits, vegetables, legumes, whole grain cereals and that the meals in cafeterias and tuck shops are prepared, so that they reduce the amount of salt and sugar, as well as trans fats. That is the tuck shops and cafeterias about which the Minister spoke.

We have also taken measures to improve our health services, both at the primary and secondary level. At the primary level, in accordance with the Caricom Declaration of Port of Spain, we have developed a comprehensive plan for the screening and management of chronic diseases.

This plan entails promoting healthy weight through a variety of interventions, including using the wellness centres and our community health centres to implement well weight management programmes, to assist overweight and obese clients and community members to achieve a healthy weight. The Regional Health Authorities have also developed walking clubs with routine access to screening and health education in addition to physical activity.

We will promote physical activity. This requires action in many sectors which have already begun. An example of this is the wellness zones. On Saturday 13, we celebrated Caribbean Wellness Day and we had that well attended walk. We are working in collaboration with PAHO, CAIC and many other organizations. Our new policy is to partner with as many organizations and groups as possible to foster the dialogue; and get out our message and achieve the objectives that we are seeking to achieve. These are some of the innovative ways in which the Ministry of Health and its partners are addressing the chronic disease epidemic.

We are working continuously towards developing strategic lines of actions and interventions in all sectors that will focus on risk reduction and behaviour change for the whole population. At the secondary prevention level, we have established and shared protocols for managing diabetes and hypertension in primary care settings. With regard to research and surveillance, we have begun the process of implementing the surveillance for risk factors of chronic diseases. It is a very comprehensive approach in moving forward to try to reach that goal of 2020.

I will take a step back and reflect on the progress we have made throughout the years. The Senators on the other side like to make you believe sometimes that this Government did nothing. It is important that we revisit some of it. The reform

Appropriation Bill (Budget)
[SEN. THE HON. J. NARACE]

Tuesday, October 07, 2008

of the health care sector has progressed significantly under the leadership of the hon. Prime Minister, as compared to the government of my good friend on the other side, the hon. Senator. Indeed, I must remind this honourable Senate that on December 12, 1987, at the Twenty Seventh Annual Convention of the PNM, the then Leader of the Opposition, now Prime Minister, outlined the vision to transform our country arising from the difficult circumstances of the late 1980s. Difficult times! Very difficult times. [*Interruption*] I know. I empathize fully.

The PNM's vision since then continues to be the creation of a modern society characterized by peace, prosperity, stability, evolutionary and orderly change, economic equality, participatory democracy, high moral standards and social and religious harmony. When the PNM was elected into office during the period 1991—1995, this vision and the need to transform the entire economy was its main priority. The renewal and restructuring of the oil sector and the creation of the gas sector, as well as the strategic planning framework to reform the public sector were some of the main visionary pillars initiated by that administration during 1987—1991; policy developed while we were in Opposition.

I have always reminded those on the other side that instead of using this time to throw mud, they should examine their policies, colleagues and themselves; build their party; build a better alternative and then say to the national community, this is what I offer to you. You never know, they may take a look at you. If you throw mud at every opportunity and continue to throw more mud, you would damage good young people, like one or two Senators on the other side. I know that that is not a right thing to do. Nobody remembers. I will always remind the national community that in 1991, when the PNM was returned to office, Sen. Dr. Carson Charles will remember that the debt service was in excess of US \$600 million for the next three years.

The task looked insurmountable. I remember a comment my very good friend made. He said, "They will eat Manning raw." As a party and government we set about changing the economic architecture of the country. We started to pay the debt. We showed them that we were serious people. We liberalized the trade and foreign exchange regime and we started to do little things here and there. I remembered when they started to talk about natural gas and what will happen. I remember when the then prime minister said that there would be an energy boom and we could reach full employment. Everybody laughed at him. Look at where we are today. Vision. Vision. Without vision a people will perish.

Our whole health approach is a continuum of that vision of changing our economic circumstances. The reform of the health sector was no exception.

According to page 52 of the PNM's Manifesto 1991, entitled, "We Care About You", the main theme for the health sector was the reorganization of the health care system. I will read from each manifesto and tell you what we have achieved.

We said greater community involvement and the allocation of financial and administrative resources. You can find them now in the Regional Health Authority arrangements. We said the creation of mechanisms to allow a cooperative and complementary relationship between the primary and secondary health sectors. Again, that is found in the RHA. We said the expansion of emergency health care facilities in rural areas. This would ease the main pressure in the major hospitals. We started the mobile clinics; district health facilities; outreach centres and the development and implementation of a national health insurance plan. I am only too pleased to announce in this august Chamber that Cabinet has approved the health economics unit that has commenced the costing of services. Only yesterday, we held a conference where we examined the introduction of the national health services. Citizens of Trinidad and Tobago could now look forward to a choice of provider; feel secure and know that if something should happen to their loved one, they would not have to sell their house and car. That is the kind of planning that this caring Government is doing for 20 or 30 years down the road. I have much to tell you. We will have to take a break and come back.

During the period 1991—1995, the PNM government started the process of health sector reform through the health and life sciences partnership and these policies were implemented; decentralization of the health care by developing five Regional Health Authorities in 1994 and the approval of funding for the Health Sector Reform Programme by the Inter American Development Bank (IADB) in 1995;

The Ministry of Health has initiated steps to reflect a more strategic role of policy development; creation of standards; monitoring and evaluation. We engaged Coopers & Liebert Consultancy Services to develop some key elements of the Health Sector Reform Programme, namely the National Health Insurance Scheme and the National Health Management Information System. New arrangements were made to ensure that essential drugs, medicines and other medical supplies are available in a timely manner, through engagement of Nipdec as the procurement agency.

Starting in 1993, the Ministry of Health has spent \$63 million to upgrade the following physical facilities:

- Refurbishment of the Port of Spain General Hospital;
- The addition of a new wing at the San Fernando General Hospital;

Appropriation Bill (Budget)
[SEN. THE HON. J. NARACE]

Tuesday, October 07, 2008

- The completion of the district hospitals in Arima and Mayaro;
- Major refurbishment of the St. Ann's Hospital;
- Construction of a new outpatient department at Sangre Grande; and
- Refurbishment of some of our smaller facilities.

Then came the new government. My very good friend was the Minister of Public Administration and Information. In late 1995, when the government was changed, what happened to the health sector? They had no document, vision or plan. They had nothing! Do you know what happened in that time? I walked with the Prime Minister up and down Trinidad and Tobago. Do you know what they said? They said that he did very well with the economy. He transformed the economy and made them more secure but they wanted some more social consideration. They also said that they wanted him to come to them with a plan. That is how we got the second term of the government.

It is my pleasure to share with this august body, the achievements of the Ministry of Health from 2000—2007.

From 1995—2001 the policies of the UNC resulted in wards being closed or underutilized, inefficiencies and numerous public complaints. I will not go into that. I will just say that.

According to the PNM's action plan 2002—2005, that was "We deliver because we care", you could go to page 7 and you would see what we proposed. We proposed increased investment in wellness which will not only impact on the current lifestyles of our people, but would also influence expenditure, health care and social services and the following:

- Construction and refurbishment of 17 health centres in two years;
- District health facilities in St. James, St. Joseph and Siparia;
- A new intensive care unit and a new public health laboratory;
- Construction of a national oncology centre for the treatment of cancer;
- Strengthening of the National Anti Drug Programme;
- 20 new dialysis machines and 50 new ambulances by 2003;
- Introduction of the BSc Nursing Programme;
- Financial assistance to non-governmental organizations that provide dialysis, cancer and HIV/AIDS treatment; and
- Training and development of health workers.

That was the promise we made in our manifesto. During the period 2002—2007—there is so much I have to say that I want to come back to say it—the Government created a vision for the country. I understand their fear. When we put this case before the people, they would never see office again. Never ever! They can believe nothing that they say. The population knows that. I always say to my friend, Sen. Dr. Carson Charles, you are in the wrong place! You are in the wrong place! I have great respect for you, Sir, but I want to tell you that you are in the wrong place because you are basically an honest person. [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Vice-President: Hon. Senators, it is now 4.30 p.m. We would take the tea break. [*Interruption*] Will I have to repeat that some Senators read Standing Order 42? The sitting is now suspended until 5.00 p.m.

4.30 p.m.: *Sitting suspended.*

5.00 p.m.: *Sitting resumed.*

Sen. The Hon. J. Narace: Thank you, Mr. Vice-President. So, I have outlined what we have promised in that manifesto for 2002. Let me just give you some of the key areas where we have made some strides in the overall transformation programme.

We have made some strides in terms of the country's primary and secondary health care facilities. The following institutions were completed: the Oxford Street Enhanced Health Centre, the San Juan Health Centre, the Petit Valley Health Centre, the Barataria Health Centre, the La Romain Health Centre, the La Brea Health Centre, the Debe Health Centre, the Gasparillo Health Centre and the Gran Couva Outreach Centre.

The following primary health care institutions will be built in the new fiscal year: the St. Madeleine, Morvant, Upper Laventille and Carenage Health Centres, the St. James District Health Facility and the St. Joseph Enhanced Health Facility.

In addition, there have been improvements in our secondary and tertiary health care institutions and these are as follows:

- the new wing at the San Fernando General Hospital;
- the new catheterization laboratory for heart patients;
- the new adult surgical ward and ultrasound unit of the Eric Williams Medical Sciences Complex;
- the establishment of a new chemotherapy infusion suite at the St. James Medical Complex;

Appropriation Bill (Budget)
[SEN. THE HON. J. NARACE]

Tuesday, October 07, 2008

- the refurbishment of four wards at the Port of Spain General Hospital;
- the refurbishment of three wards at the San Fernando General Hospital;
- the reopening of the Outpatients' Pharmacies at the San Fernando General Hospital and the Eric Williams Medical Sciences Complex; and
- the complete refurbishment of the National Intensive Care Unit at the Mount Hope Women's Hospital, which has resulted in a 82.7 per cent decline in the early neonatal death rate for the period 2003—2007, making it a premier service in the Caribbean region.

We have done the refurbishment of the kitchen and the instalment of 1,000 modern beds at St. Ann's Hospital and we plan to build six new hospitals and seven other medical facilities during this term of office. I will address that later.

There are two other major projects identified for construction—the National Oncology Centre and the National Public Health Laboratory. In the case of the National Oncology Centre, the Ministry is in the process of procuring the services of a contractor and work is expected to recommence in the coming fiscal year. The functional programme for the NPHL has been completed, a site identified for the project and construction is expected to commence in fiscal year 2009. In addition, a number of health centres and other facilities have been targeted for construction in fiscal 2009 as part of the Ministry's plan to rationalize and upgrade infrastructure and services in the health sector. These include the construction of the Chaguanas District Health Facility, the Diego Martin District Health Facility, the Sangre Grande Enhanced Health Facility and the Arima Hospital.

These construction projects will be supported by upgrade and refurbishment works at the following health facilities: the Eric Williams Medical Sciences Complex, the Port of Spain General Hospital, the San Fernando General Hospital, the National Radiotherapy Centre, the Chemistry Food and Drug Medical Library and the Ministry of Health administration building.

Mr. Vice-President, clearly the mandate of this Governemnt is to improve the infrastructure and our current health infrastructure plan is unprecedented in the history of Trinidad and Tobago. Indeed, upon completion, the burden of services and admissions at the San Fernando General Hospital will be a thing of the past. In the meantime, in order to ease the overcrowding, we are setting up a temporary decanting centre and this will be used with a makeshift air-conditioned facility in which patients will be housed temporarily until beds are available in the wards.

Furthermore, there are plans to upgrade the bed capacity of the Point Fortin and Couva District Health Facilities in order to ease the existing demand at the San Fernando General Hospital.

We have completed the Pharmacy Board Act, the Medical Board Act and the RHA Regulations. The Ministry is currently preparing a new Mental Health Act, the Nurses and Midwives Registration Acts, the National Health Services Accreditation Bill, Funeral Homes Bill, the National Public Health Bill and the National Blood Transfusion Service Bill. That is our legislative agenda.

Moreover, as most of you are aware, the National Ambulance and Medical Services Bill and the Tobacco Bill are currently before the Senate. My friends on the other side boasted that they passed the most legislation during their term of office. That is not true at all. They failed to provide the basic legal support to improve the operations of the Ministry of Health and the welfare of citizens. Indeed, this Government is reorganizing and creating the foundation to complement a First World health care environment which has always been the vision of our hon. Prime Minister. So it is that several pieces of infrastructural work, the legislative infrastructure, the physical infrastructure, the human resource make this complete system.

Just to say that under the sector, the country has benefited from numerous programmes. Under the Chronic Disease Assistance Programme (CDAP), some 416,000 persons have benefited; the institutional strengthening of the medical professions via the UNV Programme in 2003; the surgical waiting list where some 12,000 surgical procedures were completed; the five-year National Strategic Plan for the prevention and control of HIV/AIDS was created in 2004, the development of the prevention of mother-to-child transmission of HIV/AIDS Programme and the universal access to anti-retroviral care for HIV/AIDS patients. So far 4,498 people have benefited.

The shift of the Eric Williams Medical Sciences Complex from a private health care institution to a public care institution increased facility visits from 23,585 in 2005 to 43,879 in 2006 and continues to grow. This is an increase of more than 86 per cent. We created the National Health Service technical Secretariat. The development of a comprehensive pandemic influenza plan; the creation of a school health programme to address specific health concerns of children in 2006, particularly for the screening for hearing and visual impairment.

From October 2005 to July 2008, a total of 68,619 primary school students received hearing and screening. Also in the case of vision screening, a total of 29,666 cases from October 2006 to November 2007. We increased the dialysis

Appropriation Bill (Budget)
[SEN. THE HON. J. NARACE]

Tuesday, October 07, 2008

machines from 21 to 36. The special renal dialysis programme developed in 2006 to partner with providers to help persons in need of dialysis of which 81 persons have benefited.

The Adult Cardiac Care Programme in 2006 has completed 1,671 procedures. Normally this would not have been available to citizens. There was the Patient Care Assistance Programme in 2006, the recruitment of foreign health care professionals, the National Tissue Transplant Programme—38 transplants were done—the launch of the National Donor Programme and the commencement and the construction of the National Oncology Centre to treat cancer and provide early detection. We are trying to procure new arrangements for that. We hope that will start in this fiscal year.

There is the mobile clinic initiative created to provide accessible and affordable health care of which 10 units provide access to care throughout the country; the development of a poison information centre at the ERHA, which won a prestigious award for innovative excellence in the public service. Trinidad and Tobago was the first country in the Caribbean to ratify the framework Convention on Tobacco Control and the development of the Tobacco Control Bill.

There is the no-smoking policy in public offices and buildings; the transformation of the National Ambulance Emergency Service to First World status by the Ministry of Health through the services of GMRTT. There will be 31 ambulances in Trinidad and Tobago by the middle of this month increasing the fleet to 45—we have promised 50—as well as the enhancement of the emergency 811 hotline number; the National Community Care Programme where the policy was developed in 1998, but a pilot project implemented and rolled out in all of the RHAs under this Government—I give credit where it is due.

From October 2006 to April 2008 a total of 130 patients were moved into community residences. We also refurbished the eye clinic at the Port of Spain General Hospital and established a dedicated eye pharmacy staffed with pharmacists. We have provided 200 persons with prosthetic attachments and we now provide free mammogram examinations at our major health institutions. We have provided over 230,000 free CT/MRI scans, ultrasounds and X-ray procedures at our public health institutions and increased financial assistance to patients via the medical aid committee at a total of \$81 million.

In addition, data from the public hospitals show an increase in the number of surgical procedures at the three major hospitals for the period 2000—2007, which are as follows:

Port of Spain General Hospital went from 4,000 to 6,200;
San Fernando General, 7,000 to 8,300;
Eric Williams Medical Sciences Complex, 3,400 to 4,700;
Mount Hope Maternity Clinic, 2,200 to 3,200;
Sangre Grande, 1,300 to 1 500;
Point Fortin, 296 to 459; and
Tobago from 984 to 1,676.

It is important to note that whilst there is room for a lot of improvement in terms of administration, actual delivery, transformation and development, the system did deliver. That is why it is important to put it on record.

These achievements have set a positive tone for the deepening of the Health Sector Transformation Plan. Clearly, this plan represents the Ministry's commitment to promoting continuous improvement in the nation's health care system. This Government during the period 2002—2007 has created the programmes and policies to improve the welfare and health care standards of all citizens. Indeed, we are all better off under the Government as opposed to my friends on the other side.

We must continue to restructure and re-align our health care environment and to build the capacity to create a modern care environment. This is the only way we can achieve a vision to ensure that our people live healthier, happier, longer lives.

According to page 30 of the PNM manifesto in 2007 entitled, "We continue to deliver because we continue to care", the following were proposed for improvements in the health sector. I charted from 1987 coming right down to show what we planned, what we did and how we are going to continue to improve in the delivery of health care at all levels and to promote healthy lifestyles. I have clearly outlined that we are doing a lot of that. We will also use the findings of the commission of enquiry to further develop the health sector and I will talk about that just now.

We continue to improve in human resource development by the continued partnership with universities and technical institutions locally and abroad, bilateral and multilateral institutions and to develop and implement a policy environment with incentives to attract and retain talent in the health sector and reverse the brain drain with tax incentives.

Appropriation Bill (Budget)
[SEN. THE HON. J. NARACE]

Tuesday, October 07, 2008

Mr. Vice-President, we continue to improve the health sector through healthy lifestyles—I have touched on some of them; and to use the findings of the commission of enquiry—we did more than that. We had a consultative process using all the documents—Vision 2020, HSRP; all those documents.

5.15 p.m.

In terms of human resources, I have elaborated on that several times and, of course, in developing a policy environment with incentives to attract and retain talents in the health sector and reverse the brain drain. We have explained how we are going to do that, through a number of programmes.

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

Motion made, That the hon. Senator's speaking time be extended by 15 minutes. [*Hon. Dr. L. Saith*]

Question put and agreed to

Sen. The Hon. J. Narace: Mr. Vice-President, we spoke about continuing to reform the health sector and the emphasis of accountability, increased performance by the RHAs and health centres and the strengthening of our health infrastructure.

There was a question on the Scarborough Hospital, which is now being built. Under the Scarborough Hospital, under the previous contractor, according to the information from the Ministry, it would have cost us \$447 million. Under the new arrangements, it will now cost us \$344 million; a design/build approach which would guarantee us that it will come in at a price of \$100 million less and a guarantee that it will come in on time.

We plan to build the following facilities: the Point Fortin Hospital; Arima Hospital; Sangre Grande Enhanced Health Facility; the Replacement Hospital at Port of Spain; the Central Hospital to include a burns unit, the recommencement of the National Oncology Centre; and two renal dialysis centres. I am pleased to announce that they have notified the successful bidder. That has been completed—the National Public Health Laboratory. This network of hospitals will reduce the problem of overcrowding and overutilization of resources in our major public institutions and will provide easy access to health care for our citizens. To Sen. Drayton who asked what we are doing, once those institutions are strengthened, in terms of our infrastructural programmes, that will speak to that.

This Government's vision is to empower its citizens to live long, healthy, happy and productive lives. When we measure this vision, based on PAHO and world rankings, we currently rank 57. I am proud to inform this Senate that the Ministry of Health has developed a transformational plan for the health sector, which is projected to eventually rank our country among the top 10 in the WHO's list. That is our objective. More particularly, the Ministry of Health has received approval from Cabinet for the implementation of its five-year health sector transformational plan, at a cost of TT \$30.07 billion, for the period 2009—2013. This includes funding of the MOH's operations as well as funding for the Regional Health Authorities. Through the transformation of the health sector, Trinidad and Tobago is projected to rank at number 30 in the WHO's global rankings and reach the top 10 list by 2013.

I would give some information on the infant mortality rate as well as life expectancy. Between the years 2004 and—I cannot seem to find it. The life expectancy in 2000 was 68 and in 2005, it moved to 69 for males. For females, it was 73 and it moved to 74. The average for the country moved from 70 to 71. In terms of the infant mortality rates, that had improved significantly from 2000 to 2004, which were the latest figures available. I cannot seem to find those figures.

In the first quarter of fiscal 2007/2008, the Ministry of Health formulated a three-tiered approach towards addressing the challenges of the health system over this fiscal year. The first year involved the development and implementation of a 100-day interim intervention, which comprised short-term initiatives to effect immediate improvements. This was the “crook winds” found in the Gladys Gafoor Report. Of course Sen. Drayton spoke about low hanging fruits.

I would give you those figures on the infant mortality rate. In 2000, it was 21.1; 2004, it dropped to 16.5. Four years after your government it was 21.1. Four years after this Government it was 16.5. In terms of the maternal mortality rate, it dropped in 2000 to 54 and 2004, 52.2. Sen. Mark, again, misleading figures.

In our 100-day plan, we sought to introduce systems to benchmark performance; to make primary care facilities more accessible; to educate the population about appropriate health facility choices; improve bed management at the public health institutions; improve—*[Interruption]*

Sen. Dr. Charles: I wonder if you might wish to quote the source of these figures, in terms of the infant mortality and life expectancy?

Sen. The Hon. J. Narace: I would always give way to you, Sir. It is from the CSO and I can make them available to you. For the life expectancy, it is Health in

Appropriation Bill (Budget)
[SEN. THE HON. J. NARACE]

Tuesday, October 07, 2008

the Americas, Volume II, a PAHO document. I can make them available to you. That is no problem at all.

In the 100-day intervention, we tried to do the creation of a client-centered culture; the development of a culture; accountability and responsibility. Of course, we said that in order to achieve these objectives, we wanted to introduce systems to benchmark performance; make primary care facilities more accessible; educate the population; improve bed management; improve human resource management; improve the physical environment; and improve our customer service. The results will show that we have established:

- filter clinics;
- shuttle services;
- and waiting times in several service areas in RHAs have been reduced.

In one instance an average of 1 hour 23 minutes waiting time was reduced to 15—24 minutes.

- the extension of operating hours for support services;
- health in the market place;
- a general thrust towards improving the physical environment of the institutions of the RHAs; and
- close circuit surveillance televisions.

There are a number of things that we did.

I know my time is getting short, so I have to be a little quicker. It would really take four hours to say what is going on here, but we would have to do it another time. In our transformational strategy, which is where we are really moving now, we had a three-tiered approach. One was a short-term intervention, one was strengthening the capability of the Ministry and the other one was the big transformational plan. That is the five-year plan; actually more than five years.

What were the strategies? Nine strategies were identified. We spoke about the strategic objectives, now we speak about the strategies:

- to reform the Ministry of Health;
- to reorganize and strengthen the MOH;
- to assume a leadership role;

- to define, agree and continuously update the vertical services, national programmes and targeted national interventions by establishing effective institutional arrangements for service delivery;
- to rationalize and upgrade infrastructure and services;
- to perform institutional strengthening;
- to harness the health sector, leading knowledge, research, science, technology and innovation;
- to continuously improve the standards of the health sector management and services;
- to survey and assess health sector professionals and technical skills needed and develop and implement strategies and plans for the sustainable maintenance of an adequate pool of such resources;
- to conceptualize, design, develop and implement a health sector information system, communication and technology strategy; and
- to incorporate quality management systems in health care management and delivery in all support business areas and develop and implement a comprehensive strategy for financing the health sector.

Mr. Vice-President, a comprehensive plan with comprehensive strategies to transform the health sector. Through this transformation plan, the Ministry will strengthen the core public health institutions to provide the capability to introduce and manage the services and infrastructure to meet the health needs of Trinidad and Tobago; develop the pool of health care professionals, implement quality standards; implement the information systems to support health care delivery and develop an appropriate health financing strategy, the NHS.

The strengthening of the MOH's operational capability—the main objective of the PWC consultancy is to enable the MOH to effectively manage and oversee the delivery of health care services in Trinidad and Tobago. This includes assisting the MOH in change management from its role as a purchaser and provider of health services, to its focus role as a purchaser through policy-making, monitoring, evaluating and regulating the country's health services.

We see the country's health services as public and private and we see, under the NHS, that people would be able to exercise choice of provider, et cetera. We would define the leadership role. We would position the Ministry; develop an

Appropriation Bill (Budget)
[SEN. THE HON. J. NARACE]

Tuesday, October 07, 2008

organizational structure; develop an integrated approach; define the role of vertical services; develop and enact a framework for decision-making in health care; and develop a funding formula, and so forth.

I would speak to unspent balances again raised by Sen. Drayton. In the recurrent expenditure, we spent 96 per cent. The other 4 per cent was as a result of Nipdec not submitting invoices. The VSEP process is ongoing and payments could only be made when people accept an offer. Of course, that is why we did 96 per cent, which is a fine performance at any rate. In terms of the capital budget, if we took into account that there was a \$26 million related to the HSFP/IDB loans that was previously not brought into the Government's financial records but needs to be reflected in our books, if that is done, we would show a 94 per cent achievement, in terms of the capital budget. The other 6 per cent is from equipment purchases that did not come in; some contracts that were not finalized and a dispute with one contractor; 96 and 94 per cent. That is performance, not "ol' talk."

The TTHSI, I do not think I have time to speak about that. Of course, that is a major initiative, where we are working through John Hopkins. The National Health System, I think we have spoken about that. Health is going to be a big thing for us. Somebody in Mayaro, using ICT technology, could listen and would be able to access Mount Hope without living in the community. We would go into that on another occasion in this Senate.

Auditing and control mechanisms—of course I am pleased to announce that with respect to the Caribbean Public Health Agency, the Cabinet has agreed to offer Trinidad and Tobago to be the headquarters for CARPHA, which would see us utilizing all those resources and synergizing with the world leaders. With respect to CARPHA, Caricom wrote to us and they have agreed. I need to inform the Cabinet about that. That is also on the books.

Therefore, this present Government is a visionary Government. It is also a results-oriented Government; determined to realize its vision. This Government is in the process of creating a modern health sector that can be globally top-ranked. This entails both the delivery of health care in the most timely and efficient manner and also health promotion and lifestyle changes for our citizens towards population wellness.

A preventive health care system and a proper health care system, all supported by a sustaining continuous improvement mechanism, is being implemented as we speak. I am confident that as many developed and developing countries around

the world grapple with health care delivery and universal access issues, the biggest issue in every election, Trinidad and Tobago is well on its way towards effectively addressing those issues and creating a system that will accommodate the needs of every single citizen when this transformation is completed.

I thank you, Mr. Vice-President.

5.30 p.m.

Sen. Dr. Carson Charles: Mr. Vice-President, thank you very much. I think we can give many points to the Minister of Health for talk. That is why he is the public relations officer, and nothing is wrong with being able to talk. That is important in politics, but there is one little thing that we should focus on. This is a budget debate and budget debates go all over the place, and you can basically get up and speak on anything. You can go back to 1987 and so forth. Why not go back to 1983 or 1984? You can go back as far as you want. [*Interruption*] I cannot do like your Prime Minister and ask for an extra hour.

Sen. Narace: That is a very important point. Thank you very distinguished Senator. I did that because the country is being misled, and not realizing that we have been working with a plan, I thought it was important to show how the policy was developed from its earlier stages and how it evolved over time, and there can be believability in what we are going to do.

Sen. Dr. C. Charles: You see, I tell you that the Minister can talk. My point really is what we really ought to have is—you can go back as many years as you want—an accounting of expenditure for the last year followed by an indication of what you are going to do in the following year, and you would then be able to explain to us—this is not only for the Minister of Health, but for the entire Government—the reason for the dismal performance of the Government in terms of projects that were not completed. So, if there is some magic that the Minister of Health has, he can certainly share that magic with the rest of his Cabinet colleagues, because the Government's performance in terms of projects being executed and even projects getting started is really not good at all. I am just saying this is what we really ought to have; an accounting for the past year. What are the projects you were supposed to do last year; what you have done; and then you can probably tell us what you are going to do in the following year. Having said that, at this late stage in the debate, there is not much I imagine that Ministers can do about that.

I want to deal with some of the fundamental issues that confront us today. It is like a man who lives in Port of Spain and wants to go to San Fernando, because

Appropriation Bill (Budget)
[SEN. DR. CHARLES]

Tuesday, October 07, 2008

he understands that things are really good in San Fernando, and he would like to go there. So, he gets his experts together to tell him that in order to reach to San Fernando he needs to have fuel, a good vehicle and he needs to know how to drive on the highway, et cetera and then sets off on the journey. He pays attention to everything like the lights and so on. He is driving really well, and there are no accidents on the way. His windscreen wiper is working very well. Everything is wonderful with the vehicle, because he has enough fuel, but he finds himself passing coconut trees along the way, and people tell him that he should not be passing coconut trees. He then finds himself on various stretches and so on—passing bridges of various kinds—and then the gas runs out on him somewhere between Mayaro and Guayaguayare. At that point, he abandons the vehicle. Now, we do not want that to happen to us. When you abandon the vehicle, as you did the last time, we do not want to have to take that vehicle back from Guayaguayare to San Fernando.

I start with that example because the Government is really good at talk. I surrender that it is really good at talk. The Government is even good at pretty pictures. Congratulations! That falls in the public relations department as well. The Government is good at PR and it is good at spin. These are important things. Do not get me wrong. I think the Government is going to San Fernando by way of Guayaguayare and it is not going to get to San Fernando, because it is going to run out of fuel on the way to Guayaguayare.

I looked at the Vision 2020 document and one mistake was made. You see this thing about becoming a developed country; a developed country did not start off saying that it wants to become a developed country. Every country today which is developed started off saying that it would like to do something for its people; it would like to serve its people; and build things for its people. They focused on their people. That is how they went about their business. The great distinction between a developed country and an undeveloped country is the focus they have with their people. Everything is toward their people. I am not talking about poor countries as opposed to rich countries; I am talking about developed countries as opposed to undeveloped countries.

The development of a country is the development of its people, especially the development of relationships among the people and between the people and their government. That is what development is about. When you have that you can meet any challenge because your strength lies among your people. There is where your strength is.

We have no idea what is going to happen to the international economy. The experts have no idea. Presently, the experts are scrambling to find explanations.

They are panicking. Not only investors are panicking, but experts are panicking. They did not expect it and they do not know what is actually going on, and they do not know where it would lead and how to stop it.

What do developed countries have? They have this tremendous resource in their population; the confidence in relationship between the population and the government and those in authority. Their focus is about their country and, therefore, they are going to meet those challenges by using the strength of their people. That is what makes the difference. So, regardless of what happens to the world markets all over the world, they are able to be resilient and react to what is taking place. That is the difference. We are not in that fortunate position. I am not blaming the Government. I am not saying that the Government ought to have brought us to that position today. I am saying to stop heading to Guayaguayare when you are supposed to be going to San Fernando.

As I said, you should not have titled this document “trying to be a developed country”. That was not the idea at all. Nonetheless, you did some useful things. You got together many distinguished persons. This was chaired by Mr. Arthur Lok Jack and there were permanent secretaries and distinguished names like Ronald Ramkisson, David O'Brien, Trevor Alleyne, Pat Bishop, and Terrence Farrell and so on. There were committees chaired by all kinds of people and they could not have produced rubbish. I do not think so. They must have produced a good document—

Sen. Dick-Forde: In consultation with the people.

Sen. Dr. C. Charles: Yes, I know that it was a big exercise and so on. I am saying that you did very well in that regard, but you are not following this document. The Vision 2020 document has turned out to be a really wonderful smokescreen. Every time you would get up and say Vision 2020 and this is all in keeping with Vision 2020, and yet when we examine what Vision 2020 means and where we are supposed to be—instead of seeing a highway which tells us that we are on our way to San Fernando, we are seeing coconut trees and this means that you are out on the beach somewhere on the east coast.

Nothing that you are doing seems to be consistent with getting to that particular destiny except for the talk. The talk is good; the talk is fine. I do not think that these worthy contributors, distinguished men and women, were allowed to go far enough to give specific targets along the way and benchmarks so that when you speak of Vision 2020 in the year 2008, we could say that in order to get to that particular destination, you were supposed to pass Chaguanas by now so

Appropriation Bill (Budget)
[SEN. DR. CHARLES]

Tuesday, October 07, 2008

that we can judge and see whether you are, in fact, in the vicinity of Chaguanas. I do not know whether they were allowed to complete the task or they were not aware that they had to take it that far.

Vision 2020 did not specify in clear terms the benchmarks that would allow us to judge whether you are on the way. So, what do we use to judge? We judge by comparing what we see in the country and what you are saying that you would like to achieve. That is how we judge you. I would suggest that not only we judge you that way, but I think all of Trinidad and Tobago judge you that way. I do not think the man in the street has any other way of judging you. He certainly is not going to read all this paper. So, the only way he can judge you is by comparing the objective situation in the country with the goals and so forth that you have set for yourselves and the fine words that are uttered. He would compare the fine words like what the Minister of Health just uttered and what many Ministers uttered—I mean, these things sound very wonderful when you listen to them—all the things that you would like to do for the country, all the love, the care and so forth—and he has to compare all these fine words with his objective situation and his actual circumstances, and there is where the problem arises. I do not think that there is any way he could see it in his everyday life.

All these wonderful things about a woman delivering a budget and so on are fine. I have to be very careful commenting on a woman delivering a budget, because I think we have women in the Senate who are going to deal with that aspect of it. All I would say is that all of that is nice talk, and I do not know if the women who go to the supermarket or to the mini-mart or the marketplace on a Saturday or Sunday morning really share this feeling that you are focusing on women and you are doing all kinds of wonderful things for them. I do not think they feel that way at all. On the contrary, I think people are just under so much pressure right now, they are suffering so much that they would like some relief or some sign of this actual care.

When Sen. Prof. Deosaran spoke about doing something that would reduce this antagonism building up in the population, for example concerning gas prices, I think that is something that you would certainly want to think about. I do not think that the explanation about super and premium gas and so on is going down well, and then we have the traffic situation and so on. I am going to deal with that in a little while. I am just saying that this is a general approach of dealing with my contribution. Something is fundamentally wrong. There is a misfit between the fine words of what you say are your goals and lofty ideals to which you adhere and the wonderful record of the PNM going back to donkey's years ago, which

you also told us about—the plans you had in place so many years ago—there is a disconnect between that and the actual objective, everyday reality. So, we do not see any evidence that you are going to San Fernando.

Now, what are some of those lofty ideals? Well, I was looking at this document and reading these wonderful things and it says that by the year 2020 Trinidad and Tobago would be a united, resilient, productive, innovative and a prosperous nation with a disciplined, caring and fun-loving society, comprising healthy, happy, well-educated people built on the enduring attributes of self-reliance, respect, tolerance and integrity and it goes on and on. There are many wonderful words there.

Well, with respect to “united”, that could be placed on your doorsteps, but I am not going to comment on that. That might not be your call. I do not think, by definition, the PNM can unite anybody. You are a war machine and you are built that way. You have been like that for all the years. It is basically PNM versus the rest. It has been a general philosophy. So, I am not going to put that one on your doorsteps. I am not going to ask you to try to unite the country anymore. We are going to do that. Do not judge us by the few of us who are sitting here.

Now, the Minister of Energy and Energy Industries said some things and I paid attention to them yesterday. He spoke about the energy sector and the fact that the Government recognizes that the energy sector was going really well. They seem to have things organized very well and so on. That is what he was basically saying and, therefore, they are now thinking how to make the other institutions in the country function like the ones that are functioning in the energy sector. I think that was basically his approach to it.

5.45 p.m.

There, I think is a very fundamental flaw. It perhaps comes about because we have an energy Prime Minister, like President Bush in the United States, he is an oil man, and oil men have a way in which they see the world; it is always a solution having to do with oil; energy is the source of everything and everything will be solved by energy and more energy. So, even our diversification would come by having—

Sen. Browne: You sound like an engineer.

Sen. Dr. C. Charles: I will come to engineering in a while, you know, because I missed the Minister of Works and Transport. I sent out an SOS for him, I wanted him here but he did not come, but we will get to engineering in a while.

Appropriation Bill (Budget)
[SEN. DR. CHARLES]

Tuesday, October 07, 2008

I am saying that this is not engineering, this is the way in which some people in the oil environment see the world, that everything is solved really through big projects, through capital-intensive methods, through high-tech expertise; everything is solved that way. It is a way of seeing the world. You cannot see that the strength lies in the individual person, in the communities and the people. They can only see the strength lying in the capital that you need to use to apply to explore or to drill and the kind of resources that you get when you have a successful find.

It is a way of seeing everything, and in fact this optimism that there is always more and more oil—and in our case gas—available, it is just a mindset. And I understand now when I listened to the Minister of Energy and Energy Industries, in the way in which he presented Government's perspective, in an operational sense, because unlike the other Ministers, he spoke in more practical terms about Government's philosophy in trying to sort of copy what is happening in the energy sector, into the rest of the society, and therefore, taking the experts from there and sending them to head various things and get various things on the same footing as the energy sector, but the rest of society is not that way at all.

Nothing else works like it does in the energy sector, and for as long as we have known ourselves here, the energy sector has been efficient, because it has basically been foreign driven; the environment is totally different; it is not really a local environment; it is like a foreign environment on our own soil. That is basically how it functions, and you cannot assume that the way things happen there you can simply transpose that elsewhere, because you cannot transpose that foreign environment anywhere else.

It is a completely foreign environment in the energy sector; it is driven by foreign capital, by foreign expertise, by foreign management and so on, to a large extent, and our local people have become caught up in that, almost as locals go to the United States, the United Kingdom and so on, and some of our locals are really magnificent managers, professionals of all kinds when they go in that environment. They go in a different environment, and then you really see their capabilities, because once put in a different environment our locals are really quite good. The problem has to do with environment.

Sen. Browne: That does not explain Clico's energy.

Sen. Dr. C. Charles: No, there are some local companies that are really quite good. I am talking about the environment in general, there are some local companies that have done very well for themselves. I am not saying that there is

nothing in the country that is running efficiently at all; I am speaking in general terms here. I am saying that you cannot simply try to transpose that into the rest of the country and expect it will work that way. The Government in fact displays more than anything else, a tendency to find the solutions to its problems in big capital, in big foreign companies; it thinks big, it does not think in terms of the ordinary citizen, and what that ordinary citizen must do, the role that person must play in terms of developing our country.

I am saying that is completely the opposite of what you see in any developed country, in which they rely on the average citizen. Take China as an example; it is the most recent example of a country that despite the fact that it had to open its doors for people to enter and do business, the strength of the Chinese economy comes largely from the tremendous burst of entrepreneurship from the Chinese people themselves, in manufacturing almost every single thing now, under the sun.

The strength of all the countries of the Far East, that is where their strength has come from, from the burst of energy of their people. They brought in foreigners in order to educate, to share knowledge and so on, but it is their people who have this tremendous talent that is now coming to the fore after many years of investments. In the development thrust, in terms of the modern India, about 40 years ago in a deliberate strategy to develop itself, it went about certain things, and it all had to do with what was indigenous. So, what you have now emerging after 40-odd years is something that is unstoppable.

I am just pointing out that this is the direction in which the Government is going and you are going to get into trouble, because you will never be able to make the whole country a foreign country. You cannot impose their solutions to the problems we have by bringing in big companies from abroad or bringing in foreigners to solve them, whether it is in the security area you are trying that or you are trying it in terms of changing the industrial mix in the country; you are even trying it in agriculture. You are not going to succeed in agriculture by depending on big farms or big anything; you will only succeed by building what you actually have, which is many farmers who are all disorganized, who are all individualistic, and who do not know how to cooperate with each other, and therefore cannot solve any of their problems, but you have to find a way to establish commonality so that they can actually get common services, and out of 1,000 small farmers you can get economies of scale.

If you cannot deal with that problem of actually mobilizing people, uniting them in a common cause, and thereby getting economies of scale from many small people, you will never succeed. This is a small country, which is highly

Appropriation Bill (Budget)
[SEN. DR. CHARLES]

Tuesday, October 07, 2008

disaggregated in small units all over the place. This country has so much diversity; it matches any of the big countries in the world for diversity in terms of what happens in every little village. Every block is different from the one down the road, so it is hard to manage. If you do not try to do that and instead you feel you can solve the problem by imposing these big solutions, by having big projects, by bringing companies in, having big farms and all these things, you are never going to get anywhere. I have nothing against your big farms, but I do not see any evidence that you are actually tackling the problem from the right side; you are tackling it from the wrong side, and that is my point. These are wonderful words here, as I said, resilient, productive, innovative, prosperous, disciplined, all nice words, we will come to them in a while.

I want to say one more general thing before getting to the specifics of the Minister of Finance's presentation. Government has drifted off—because of this big company approach perhaps, I do not know if that is the reason or maybe it is because the Prime Minister has selected a particular team of professional people and so on—so far to the right, it seems to me, it is now 'purist'; you do not want any subsidies; you do not want any distortions; you think that we should get rid of them all at once; you find that we have a subsidy on gas and it is distorting the market place, so you get rid of it all in one shot. There is a lack of feeling now because of this drift that you have had in your government; off to the right. It is a lack of feeling and sensitivity to the issues of the ordinary everyday man. Nothing else will explain you all deciding to increase fuel from \$3 to \$4 in one shot.

Sen. Browne: Super is subsidized, diesel is subsidized.

Sen. Dr. C. Charles: I will get to that specific too; I will get to all the specifics. I am making the general point about my perception, that you seem to be lacking sensitivity to what is happening to the average man or woman, when I compare—not your wonderful words—the actions, especially in the economic sphere, and I look at the impact. So, in the economic sphere, all of these things are having a tremendous impact on the average man, and you want to load him up with more and more at the same time. He has mortgage interest rates now rising, and you want to revise the taxes on property because you are a purist; you do not think we should have 1920 taxes. So, you think right away, like next year you should dump on him the increased taxes.

Sen. Browne: No, we did not say that either.

Sen. Dr. C. Charles: That is the approach of Government. In January next, you want to revise all of it. [*Interruption*] Well, of course you will increase it. If you say it is 1920s, you are telling me in 2008 you are going to reduce it? Of

course you are going to increase it. I am saying your whole approach to it is to try to remove all these subsidies to correct all these distortions as you call them, and so on, all in one shot; so you have gone off in one direction, and you are losing the connection with the rest.

All the words sound fine, maybe even some ministries and some Ministers might be thinking, “well, in my ministry I am seeing about people; in my ministry I am concerned about what happened to the ordinary persons”, but they themselves are losing the bigger picture, which is the impact of the overall economic strategy of the Government, the philosophy you are pursuing. They themselves are missing the bigger picture.

I am sure each Minister thinks he is working really, really hard and doing so well in his particular ministry. After all if you have money to spend, I am sure you will do wonderful projects with it, but that is not my point. You can build many buildings, introduce many programmes and have all kinds of things done around the place. My point is look at the overall direction of your Government and ask yourself why with all of these resources, people are so miserable. If you are telling me the people out there are really happy, I will say something is wrong with you, because you really cannot even listen, you cannot even hear.

So, you cannot tell me you really believe that people out there are really happy; you can say you think that they will be happy next year, or they will be happy some time in the future. In fact, what you are saying suggests to me that you think they would be really happy in 2020. I am saying okay, wonderful, in 2020 we will all be happy, resilient, productive, prosperous and all kinds of nice things would happen to us in the year 2020. Look outside the window, people are not happy; they are stressed; they are anxious, and therefore there is a disconnection, and that has to do with the direction the Government is taking in economic matters, that is where the directional problem is.

Mr. Vice-President, let us look at the Minister’s presentation of the Appropriation Bill. I suppose everyone can congratulate the Minister here and the Minister in the other place for their presentations, but I do not think we are talking about presentations, we are talking about content. So, on the matter of content you will excuse me if I do not join in congratulations to the Ministers concerned. I am sure their presentations were just good, but to look at the actual content of the document, the Minister has certain headings under which he presented his budget, from page 8:

“Budget objectives and operational strategies for fiscal year 2009, developing innovative people.”

Appropriation Bill (Budget)
[SEN. DR. CHARLES]

Tuesday, October 07, 2008

I see here he has education and he speaks about a sound educational system, and so on. Then he speaks about all the buildings that they are building, et cetera. I want to suggest to the Minister that developing innovative people is not really a matter of building all these childhood centres and all these schools; that is about educating people and I have no quarrel with that. Education is extremely important; it is a way of freeing people, especially people who are disadvantaged. Many of us have benefited from educational opportunities in terms of rising throughout our professional lives and so on, or even entering the professions. So, I have no argument about that, and I have no argument about the school feeding programme, all these loans programmes and so on. The University of Trinidad and Tobago; I do not think we really ought to be repeating over and over the need for accreditation. We have said that before and there was no response, so I do not think we have to go back into that.

I am making the point that you do not really develop innovative people; you promote innovative people. You cannot send people to school and teach them physics, chemistry, economics or history and make them innovative by teaching them these things. You cannot even say you got all these nice first class degrees and how many A levels and that makes you innovative. My point is this, you promote innovative people not by the fact that you are educating them, some people are naturally innovative and therefore, when they are exposed to education you have to have a means by which you promote people who are innovative.

6.00 p.m.

In other words—[*Interruption*—we have to separate the issues. I am making the point that in your presentation under “Developing Innovative People” all you have here is education of the citizens from childhood, and that is fine but that is not sufficient. That is not the point at all of developing innovative people. That is the point I am making. Do you have any programme for spotting talent and giving people from very early in life—

Hon. Senator: Yes.

Sen. Dr. C. Charles: You say yes, yes, but you do not. Not on the scale if you understand what has happened in some of the countries that have already become powerful and great in the world today, you would not be just saying yes, yes. Because the countries that have done that, they spot talent from the time you are small and they have got people from the age of 12 and 13 in university.

Hon. Senator: We are now putting it into place.

Sen. Dr. C. Charles: Because they take them out from a very young age and they promote them. You do not have it here, so do not say yes, yes.

Sen. Browne: We put them in the army.

Sen. Dr. C. Charles: Well, put them wherever. I am just saying do not bawl yes, yes until you understand my point, which is, that you do not have that. [Interruption] I am not blaming you for that. I am saying that that is something that you need to do. If you want to develop innovative people it is not enough to talk about just the education system. It is important to target people in that way, which we do not do in this country. We are still “chinksin”.

You want to become a developed country as you say—you use the word “developed”—then you have to do these things on the scale in which countries have done it. The ones that have become really big players in the world, that is the scale on which they have done it. They spot talent at an early age and that talent is promoted in a very serious way. That is what I am saying, from very young talent is promoted because there are people now in the world who are in their teenage years and they have PhDs. There are people who are inventors and you spot inventors from the time they are five years or six years old. Do not say you have it. It is something that you should pay attention to, and that is my point, Mr. Vice-President.

You want to get into the big leagues; you have to think like you are in the big leagues, instead of just being defensive. What do we have for people who are inventors? There are many people around in the society right now and it is unfortunate. I do not know where you can go if you have an invention. I know some years ago, Robert Amar is a “fella” who used to do that. You had an invention and you went by Robert Amar and you were pretty sure that is one man who would put some money behind your idea. There were many guys who were trying to invent stuff who used to go by him and he would promote them. It is very hard right now to get anybody who is going to put their money—in the private sector or anywhere—behind you and promote you because you have an invention. This is something that you have to do. If you want to develop innovative people—

Hon. Senator: You got some bad innovations.

Sen. Dr. C. Charles: Well, I am not saying this to give any kudos to Robert Amar, I am just saying something I know. I know this is something the man used to do, I have no idea what he does these days. It is something of importance and I know that at one time he did this and I cannot think of anybody else who used to

Appropriation Bill (Budget)
[SEN. DR. CHARLES]

Tuesday, October 07, 2008

do it and who does it now, whom you could go to, knock on their door and as an inventor you will get some financing to carry your invention forward just because you seem to have an invention.

If you want to develop innovative people these are some of the things that you have to do. That is all I am saying. The burden on the Government is much because we are also trying to develop our own private sector. This is not to knock anybody, but we are all underdeveloped in the country including the private sector. In a developed society there is much more innovation that goes with entrepreneurship, so you have a private sector which is a different mix to what we have, and of course, the people are all legitimate in terms of what they do. I have no arguments about what they do, but we do not have the full mix of people, we do not have the full mix of entrepreneurs in the country who will take new ideas and promote them or go into new ideas where you are taking a chance and you might not make any money and you could get into trouble. There are very few.

Hon. Senator: They are rare.

Sen. Dr. C. Charles: They are rare and that is the stuff of which this whole march towards developed country status is made, and I am saying the Government does have a responsibility in this area. So if you want to know some of the things that actually fall under this category—developing innovative people—I am sharing something with you. [*Interruption*] The individuals as well as the business people, well in this case the Government, because the Government says it is also a business organization. [*Interruption*]

The Minister goes on from developing innovative people—and I have to move quickly because time of course is limited. I am not as fortunate as the hon. Prime Minister who got his extra time and engaged us—I am so happy nobody has really engaged us in bacchanal here today.

Sen. Dr. Saith: Except Sen. Mark.

Sen. Dr. C. Charles: No one has taken us down—[*Interruption*] I cannot be on my feet and not make this comment. The Prime Minister gets extra time and he engages us down into bacchanal. That is just by the way. [*Interruption*] If I was so fortunate to get some time, Mr. Vice-President, I can assure you I would not take you into bacchanal.

Sen. Narace: Listen, I think Sen. Mark is going to spoil you, you know. [*Laughter*]

Sen. Dr. C. Charles: I will spend my time sharing some of my thoughts. *[Interruption]* Under innovative people you have community development and culture. That is interesting, sport and youth under innovative people, well I do not know, you do not really want to talk about sport innovation, because your record for promoting sport and promoting sportsmen is not so good, so you have to improve that record, sad to tell you, but there are others who can speak better on that topic of youth and sports than I can. I can just tell you that in community development and culture that the whole village or community councils are half dead and the Best Village Trophy Programme is three-quarter dead—

Sen. Dr. Saith: Start to pray.

Sen. Dr. C. Charles: No, it is three-quarter dead. Nobody needed to kill it. *[Interruption]* It is three-quarter dead. Let us be honest here. There was a time, I went and performed in the Best Village Programme some many, many years ago, coming from one of the villages. It was an exciting thing to do. As villagers, we learned to do various things and so on. I went on the stage and performed, et cetera, with our group from Cumuto, we came second in the Best Village Competition.

Sen. Narace: You come second?

Sen. Dr. C. Charles: Yes, yes, in Cumuto way back in those days.

Sen. Narace: What did you do, sing?

Sen. Dr. C. Charles: I was a drummer. *[Interruption]* I am still quite capable of doing it. The point I am making is, there was a time in which the villages came to life with that Best Village Programme and many young people who had nothing to do—because there are many idle hands when the day comes, you know, many “fellas” around the place who have nothing to do—and in the evening time or the night-time, apart from sports and so on, people looked forward to getting into the community centre to practise. Who was doing dancing, singing, drumming, who is just looking on or who is just checking out the girls or whatever, people had things to do in the evening. It is a focus for the community.

So there was a time in which that played a really important role in creating life in the communities. Some communities have their own lives. They have a different cultural set up and so on, and they have had life of their own before the Best Village Programme for how many years. Not everybody needed that, but many communities did not have that and the Best Village Programme brought that to them. So, there was a time in which it was relevant, in which it was useful and

Appropriation Bill (Budget)
[SEN. DR. CHARLES]

Tuesday, October 07, 2008

productive and I am telling you that time has long past, it is not relevant. People who are doing it I am happy for them, not criticizing them. I am just saying that if you want something that will make an impact on the nation you need a revival, a new effort, a new programme there that is going to mean something to the young people of today in these villages to give them life again, otherwise people just look for the wrong things to do.

It is not only employment and so on that occupies a young man or a young woman's time. It is all the cultural activities, all the village life that goes on that also occupy their time, so you need to have a revitalization in the communities if you really want to attract the young people to something productive and you want to talk about innovation so you want to get them into being into drama, music, et cetera, you want to get them involved in that, you need a revitalization of that. What a sad thing in the days when we have so much money, so little is done to revitalize these things.

The next topic he has here is, "Nurturing a Caring Society". It is interesting that under that heading he has chosen to put national security. Well, I do not think in any area we could be further from nurturing a caring society than in the field of national security and in crime in general, we cannot be further from it than in that. I do not know how many times we have to plead with the Government to pay some attention to Remand Yard, pay some attention to the prison service. If after people go into the prison system and you are sure you are keeping them there for life or you are sending them off to some island somewhere and they do not have to live in your country anymore, it is one thing, but these people have to live in the society. And if you cannot pay attention to the terrible conditions it is a shame.

Trinidad and Tobago having such a bad report by international bodies like Amnesty International and so on, it is really a shame. We do not belong there in that category. We never saw ourselves that way as having a bad report from Amnesty International in terms of the conditions of our prisons or in terms of police killings and so on. We have got to fix that and I do not think there is any Minister paying attention to that. I do not think so. I have said before in this Parliament that once upon a time there was another Minister from Laventille East/Morvant, I do not think he did anything, but he at least was given that portfolio—I think it was Mr. Hinds at the time—to look at the prison system.

At the end of that administration—I notice how at one time we could talk about the administration as though it started last year and then another time we could talk about it and it is long range plans going back to the year 1987.

[*Laughter*] We can talk about it that way sometimes. But when we tell you that you are responsible for what happened over the past six years, sometimes there is this comment, it is just last year and whatever. For all these years now you were supposed to be attending to these problems and if you are taking responsibility—

Sen. Narace: [*Inaudible*] continue.

Sen. Dr. C. Charles: Yes, it is to continue them. I know you think that the whole world is a PNM world with interruptions of different parties. I cannot help that mindset that you have. [*Interruption*] That is your mindset. I cannot help that. [*Laughter*] The whole world is a PNM world and you have these interruptions like other parties and so on in the way.

Sen. Narace: Which you cannot understand at all.

Sen. Dr. C. Charles: Yes, that is the way you see it. I think the whole country knows that now. That is the way you see it. I do not think we can change that, that is how you see it. The rest of the country is actually more than you, so I do think we have to change it. Your success at the polls has so little to do with this continuum and these achievements that you talk about and so much more to do with our own failings in Opposition from time to time in uniting the rest of the population. That is the reality.

Sen. Narace: You see it—[*Inaudible*]

Sen. Dr. C. Charles: It is the reality, hon. Minister of Health, it is along that road, you know. That is the reality. It has to do with our failings from time to time as Opposition in uniting the country. The moment we unite the country you are a minority. That is the reality. But while we are divided and so on, you talk about all your great achievements keeping you in office. Nothing could be further from the truth.

Sen. Browne: Opposition does not win election, they lose them.

Sen. Dr. C. Charles: Sorry?

Sen. Browne: Opposition does not win election, Government loses them. [*Laughter*]

Sen. Dr. C. Charles: That is what you think, “eh”? In Trinidad and Tobago you think that is the case? [*Interruption*] Mr. Vice-President, the point I am making is that over this period of six years nothing—it is a serious matter—in terms of improving the prison system. Nothing! How can you be so callous? How can you be so uncaring about that? It is a serious matter; it is not a joking matter.

Appropriation Bill (Budget)
[SEN. DR. CHARLES]

Tuesday, October 07, 2008

You are breeding people with hate and anger out there. Young men and young women—especially young men—are coming out with hate on their minds and hate in their hearts. I do not want to have to keep on repeating it every time I get up. You have got to attend to it.

Prison is not meant to be a place where you make a person into a beast because that person has to come back and live in the society among us afterwards. It is a place in which people are punished and they are held away from society and so on. You make an attempt to reform them, you may or may not succeed, but it is not a place in which you are supposed to treat people as lower than animals, just forget about them, make no effort to improve the prison system and then expect them to come back among us and live like human beings among us. You cannot expect that. You cannot expect if they feel hate in their hearts and then are to treat with us like human beings. There are too many young people feeling that way. Not only those who are in prison but even those who have not been in prison; by the reaction or the engagement with the police and so on, you see the reaction of communities. It is all fine to say that the police are not wrong. I do not know who is right or wrong, but look at the reaction of communities and you can tell something is wrong. Something is wrong that there is this festering antagonism and so on to authority.

The Government is part of it. The Government is seen as authority. We may all be seen as authority and therefore this antagonism towards authority may extend towards all of us. You have got to attend to that otherwise why are you talking about nurturing a caring society and having national security under that heading.

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

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

Question put and agreed to.

6.15 p.m.

Sen. Dr. C. Charles: Thank you, Mr. Vice-President, I know you too feel the need for giving me much more than 15 minutes. I am so happy that you share this sentiment that I should be given much more time than 15 minutes. Fifteen minutes will do and I thank my colleagues of the Senate.

Mr. Vice-President, I am not going to get into crime very much, but only to say now that it has been fairly very well established, that crime in the

communities exhibit some relationship with government programmes and so on. There is a relationship and I assume now that the Government will no longer turn a blind eye to this issue and will seek to address it. I do not know how you would address it since—I never blamed the Minister of National Security, poor soul, for causing crime. He is totally unable to do anything about crime. He is hopeless, but I never blame him for causing it because I know that it is the Prime Minister who played a major role into launching us down this dangerous path. That is the reality and I say it without fear of contradiction because the programme with respect to—[*Crosstalk*] “Bash”, are you serious?

Hon. Senator: Yes.

Sen. Dr. C. Charles: No one but the Prime Minister could have launched us down such a path, when the statistics are clear to be seen. You are living in denial.

Sen. Mark: That is exactly it, they are living in denial.

Sen. Dr. C. Charles: You are living in denial. The statistics which you read all the time are there to be read. The connection with your term; the connection with your NHA painting contracts, it is there and is well-known by everybody—the crime madness started afterwards. Anyway, I was only given 15 minutes unless you want to find a way to give me more time, Minister?

Sen. Browne: Well, do not waste it then.

Sen. Dr. C. Charles: Do not live in denial, please. Talking about crime and your denial of what caused it and what continues to feed it, is not wasting time. Not at all, because it continues to be fed, and first of all the interaction with drugs is the result of people getting big enough, to get into the drug business. Once they get into it, it then feeds on each other. They get Government contracts; money comes in from one side; they go into drugs; more money comes in and small marijuana dealers can go into cocaine and so it goes—guys can buy guns. It builds on each other and after a while you would say that you did not start it, but it is bigger than all of us. That is what happens. It started somewhere; it grew and it is really big now and after a while they can continue operating through the drug culture even if you withdraw Government projects from them. But I will talk about that another time.

I want to go on to a couple other things that you have here in this presentation, in particular item four, “Investing in Sound Infrastructure and Environment”. Well housing, Government is building many houses, no question about that. Houses everywhere whether it is on agricultural land, wherever, houses everywhere.

Hon. Senator: Performance beats “ol’ talk”.

Sen. Dr. C. Charles: You are building many houses and no one can deny that. We can discuss these issues where you are building these houses and how many votes you have been counting in the various marginal seats by building these houses, but that is not my point. My point is that you think that the solution to housing is building houses; and you think the solution is to saddle literally everyone with a mortgage.

Sen. Dr. Saith: No.

Sen. Dr. C. Charles: Because that is what you are doing.

Sen. Dr. Saith: You could rent.

Sen. Dr. C. Charles: No, but the ones who could afford—[*Interruption*]

Sen. Dr. Saith: Rent to own.

Sen. Dr. C. Charles: Well, they rent to own—get mortgages. So your middle class and your would-be middle class members are all scrambling for mortgages. These mortgages would be tied around their necks for the rest of their natural lives and in some cases, the mortgages will be passed on to their children and you think it is a wonderful programme.

I want to tell you that a mortgage is a nice thing to have in order to get your house, but a mortgage is a terrible thing to have for the average salaried person for the rest of their natural life. It is a terrible thing to have.

Sen. Browne: What is the option?

Sen. Dr. C. Charles: You can expand and have some housing, but the option would have been to use the enormous resources at your disposal, to expand the programme of providing cheap land and assist the people in building. [*Desk thumping*] It is a time established system. Long established and it is a way that so many of us grew up; it is a way that so many Trinidadians and Tobagonians built their houses over the years. They save a little money and build once they could get access to land. That is the solution that you had—

PROCEDURAL MOTION

The Minister of Trade and Industry and Minister in the Office of the Prime Minister (Sen. The Hon. Dr. Lenny Saith): Mr. Vice-President, I beg to move that the sitting of the Senate continue until 8.00 p.m. for today.

Question put and agreed to.

**APPROPRIATION BILL
(BUDGET)**

Sen. Dr. C. Charles: Thank you very much. I am sure Mr. Vice-President is counting all of these bits of time that he has given to me. Injury time. I am making the point and I am trying to get Government to think. I know it is easier to react and to be self-righteous, but I am trying to get the Government to think and to recognize—you mean I am wasting my time trying to get the Government to think?

Sen. Dr. Saith: We tried it and it did not work.

Sen. Dr. C. Charles: No, we tried it on a small scale. The resources are what mattered. No one doubts that you have more resources than anybody else in this country ever had, this Government, and therefore, I am saying that there are endless people who have built their houses this way and who are prepared to do it, but they had to have access to land and some assistance to start. They would save and build and in five or 10 years time, they would have a house, but they would not have any mortgage. Therefore, you did not have to saddle everyone with a mortgage.

I am not saying nobody should have a mortgage; I am saying you did not have to saddle everyone with a mortgage. You think that your programme is wonderful because you are saddling the whole of the middle class with mortgages, but I am saying that is not so wonderful. Perhaps you should think of not only building houses, but you should try to facilitate those who actually want to build themselves, and therefore would have disposable cash in their hands. Because if you want to build an indigenous business class, people have to have money in their hands so they can actually get into some kind of business with it.

If the middle class is totally consumed with paying mortgages especially when things get bad in this country, when the economy begins to slow down, you are going to see what will happen. Everyone will be tightly constrained and they cannot move a muscle. That is my point. I am trying to get the Government to think and as hard as that may be, I am prepared to try. Under infrastructure, there is more to say than housing, but I do not want to be on the housing issue too much, just a little advice there.

Under transportation, I really honestly wish I had the Minister of Works and Transport here in this Parliament to speak because he is the worst in terms of performance in this Government. How can we be speaking in the year 2008 about the same thing we spoke about so many years ago? We are still talking about the

Appropriation Bill (Budget)
[SEN. DR. CHARLES]

Tuesday, October 07, 2008

highway to go to Point Fortin; to Princes Town; off to the East—do not talk about the one on the Churchill Roosevelt Highway, where all the materials are standing on the highway going east. That is just standing there year after year and we are still talking about this. How can a Minister perform so poorly? Is it because he gets up and makes some noise in Parliament that he continues in his office? How is that possible? Was he not in health? Did you not get rid of him in health?

Sen. Narace: Who is that?

Sen. Dr. C. Charles: The Minister of Works and Transport. [*Laughter*] He performs very poorly. There is no initiative to deal with traffic in this country. There is none. When we ask about transportation, we hear about the rapid rail. In no study on transportation in this country have we had a recommendation of a rapid rail. None!

Sen. Cummings: Mass transportation system.

Sen. Dr. C. Charles: Mass transportation system, they told you light rail. Read the studies, they told you light rail, not rapid rail. Light rail system they told you. They told you about introducing things even before that, to encourage park and ride, for people to develop the culture of stopping and getting transportation into the city. They told you about inner city transportation. Do not mention water taxi. That has been on the cards to start for donkey's years and every year we have a new date to start. In any case, water taxi is hopeless; it will make no impact whatsoever on the transportation demand in the north/south route given the numbers. It is minuscule in terms of impact on demand, at high price which you have to subsidize forever, so do not mention water taxi.

I am saying that I am not worried about water taxi because that is a little fanciful dream somebody saw somewhere in the world and they thought that it would be nice here for us to look like a developed country. Almost like how you have tall buildings and so on. Forget water taxi, I am talking about the particular kind of mass transit that you want to introduce in the country with no feasible study to justify it. None! There is none. The latest, the transportation plan which you paid how many millions for, has not yet been produced and delivered anywhere, and all previous transportation plans have recommended other than that system, a light rail system if you have to go to mass transit.

Sen. Dr. Saith: [*Inaudible*]

Sen. Dr. C. Charles: Because you are talking about heavy rail, heavy expenditure. It is a different technology. A light rail system is not a rapid transit system.

Sen. Browne: What is it?

Sen. Dr. C. Charles: It is called a light rail system. Do you want me to give you a lecture on transportation? [*Laughter*] I do not have the time. Mr. Vice-President only gave me 15 minutes so I cannot give you a lecture on it, but I can tell you that we need a system which can penetrate the urban core. In any event, I am making the point that in the field of transportation, it is really terrible in terms of the performance of the Minister of Works and Transport and I am saying nothing is being done to even tackle traffic. All the bypass routes required around the cities, everyone requires bypass routes. All of the intersections along the Solomon Hochoy Highway are now becoming congested. Not only Couva, but now go to every single one and you would see it is becoming congested.

The Minister is still talking about things that are supposed to have been built already, the widening of the Beetham Highway. If you go to the transport study you would see it. I have them here. I walked with the documents, but I have no time to present to the Senate today, but I am saying even in terms of cost, the Prime Minister put his tall building down on the port, blocking off what was supposed to be the reserve on the dock road. Do you know there is supposed to be a reserve going through there for bypassing Port of Spain? You now have wonderful tall buildings there and that reserve is gone. So, I am not sure how we are bypassing it, if we have to bypass the city of Port of Spain. How are we bypassing on the port side anymore? I have no idea, but maybe he knew when he was putting the buildings there.

We do not even want to talk about the fact having put all these tall buildings in Port of Spain, that you have now created a transportation planners nightmare in centralization. Decentralization would be a whole topic requiring much time because the Minister of local government said some wonderful words. I think the Minister means well, but quite frankly, this is in context of the Government's centralist policy in which all that is happening, is that the Ministry of Local Government itself is becoming another Ministry like every other with the power centred in the Ministry and the local government bodies having none. And everything that is published about the new plans, says that you are going to take away whatever little power that they have, including the power to tax.

After all these years, such a retrograde step, you are going to take away the power that local government bodies have to tax. So from a little bit of revenue that they can collect on their own, they would now be able to collect none and would come and beg cap in hand, the Government for revenue. That is where you are going. Your decentralization programme is non-existent. You have a centralist

Appropriation Bill (Budget)
[SEN. DR. CHARLES]

Tuesday, October 07, 2008

programme; you are reforming local government and you are taking away all the powers from the councillors. You would only have power in the centre now and the councillors would become implementers of government policy. That is what you stated in your document, implementers of government policy so that they would not be able to make independent decisions in councils anymore. Because if you are implementers of government policy, your job is to carry out what the Minister tells you to or what the Cabinet decides.

I am saying you are going in the opposite direction. So hence my point, Mr. Vice-President, that is why I started on the theme and I return there to say that the Government said it is going to San Fernando, but is heading off somewhere past Mayaro now. It is not going to end up in San Fernando at all; it is going to break down somewhere off in the bushes and after the resources are not what they are now, we will have to come and rescue once again. Once again, you have taken us back to all those years, so many years ago, when we had to rescue the country from your hands and it is so sad. We can see it coming; we speak about it; we warn you about it, but you go merrily along your way taking us right back to that location.

Yesterday, I asked the Minister of Energy and Energy Industries why it is that you have a 13-year proven reserves? It is fine to tell us about 64 years, but that is possible reserves and we do not want to hear about that. The proven reserves according to Ryder Scott are 13 years. For that to happen, it meant that you took too long to begin to explore or to intensify exploration. You intensify exploration now and you may not want to admit it, but that is the reality. When you were planning to have three smelters and so on, you must have known that you have to explore a whole lot earlier. You could not deliberately bring us to a stage where we have 13 years of proven reserves. That could not be deliberate, that has to be the result of something going wrong in terms of your advance planning.

6.30 p.m.

There is so much to say on this budget, because there is so much to say about what this Government is not doing right and time is not available for it, but please you already passed Tunapuna going somewhere and you are headed the wrong way. Could you kindly look at San Fernando again and recognize it is not good enough to see how beautiful it is, but you must actually chart the course to San Fernando, and along the way, we should be able to say that it appears as though you are going there. Right now we cannot say it appears that you are going to Vision 2020 because nothing is consistent with Vision 2020.

Thank you very much.

Sen. Annette Nicholson-Alfred: Thank you very much, Mr. Vice-President, for the opportunity to join in this debate on the 2008/2009 Appropriation Bill. Permit me to join in sending congratulations to the Minister of Finance, Minister Nunez-Tesheira, for creating history by being the first female Finance Minister to deliver a national budget in Trinidad and Tobago. Most women, if not all, I am sure, will join me in saluting the Minister on this special occasion.

I also offer congratulations to the Minister in the Ministry of Finance, Sen. The Hon. Mariano Browne, for having piloted his first Appropriation Bill. I myself am experiencing my first occasion to participate in a national budget debate and I am grateful for this.

Mr. Vice-President, as I studied the budget, I became concerned about the rising inflationary tendency in the country. I cannot say that I am satisfied with the explanation offered by the Minister of Finance when she promised to reduce the rate of inflation to a sustainable level of 6 per cent in the medium term; probably I do not know enough of economics. Statements attributed to the Governor of the Central Bank and other financial analysts and economists insist that inflation should be lowered at a much faster rate.

The *Trinidad Guardian* of Monday, October 06 quotes Jwala Rambarran as stressing that:

“Government’s pace of expenditure should be slowed down without delay, as the key source of inflationary pressure was being fuelled by injections from Government's spending.”

The attitude of the Government towards inflation leaves the middle class almost helpless as it appears as though soon they will not be able to provide themselves with life necessities such as a home, a car or maybe even food. The small businessman will find borrowing rather risky as labour is scarce and materials and goods become too expensive. I urge the Government to give heed to the calls of people like the Governor of the Central Bank, Mr. Ewart Williams, and BPTT’s CEO Robert Riley and many others, as they are supposed to be independent and have no reason to misguide the Government.

Mr. Vice-President, this country has felt the wrath of inflation before, the time when our monetary system collapsed in the 1980s. I am old enough to remember the then Jamaican Prime Minister remarking that our money was “running through us as salts”, that was due to our wild spending. I want to caution the Government that once bitten twice shy. We need to enhance our Heritage and Stabilisation Fund and we need to save more for that rainy day.

Mr. Vice-President, the budget has increased the Senior Citizens Grant by \$300. I wonder how much can that do to stem the high cost of living when every day the price of sugar, rice, flour and everything in the supermarket is skyrocketing. I express concern, even more so for Tobago, because when inflation in Trinidad is about 13.5 per cent, in Tobago it could be as much as 15 per cent; you would agree, because I know many times you come there and you walk with everything that you should use, because you cannot cope with the prices that we offer in Tobago. So much for high cost of living, inflation and the negative effects in our country.

Mr. Vice-President, forgive me if I sound personal, for as much as the entire budget is of great importance to all of us, I am prepared to spend my time on topics closer to my heart and I want to begin with the environment to which the tourism industry is closely linked. It is advantageous for me to deal with both environment and tourism together especially as I see the environment as the engine which fuels Tobago's tourism industry. Most tourists come to Tobago because of nature's gift to us. Was it the present Prime Minister who said that: "Tourism is to Tobago what oil and gas are to Trinidad"? Somewhere along the lines I remember hearing those words. Tobago's environmental gifts comprise the unique coral reef systems, some of the richest and most colourful in the western hemisphere, over 40 species of coral, 600 species of fish and over 200 species of birds only on 116 square miles of land.

Tobago's Main Ridge Forest Reserve is the oldest protected forest reserve in the western hemisphere. Our wetlands and mangroves provide homes for many species of fish and birds. All the above and more contribute to Tobago being titled the best ecotourism destination for over four years in succession.

Mr. Vice-President, tourists may go to many other islands for sea, sun and sand, but they come to Tobago because of the above mentioned and for a clean, green and serene environment. With regard to the environment, I do not think enough has been said, so I want to ask the Government: What have we on our books in our budget to safeguard the conservation, preservation and protection of these unique environmental features? How are we assured that Tobago's natural environment will be preserved for future generations?

The deposit of silt caused by unplanned development, gas oils from garages, agricultural pesticides, sewer pollution and wastewater pollution are allowed to destroy the environment which is of such importance to the tourism thrust. Mr. Vice-President, how much has been allocated—may I ask through you, to whoever can answer—for the sensitization of the population on the fragility of the

environment? A gift that must be treasured and not destroyed, a money-earner that must be cared for. The World Resource Institute puts a value of \$3 billion on Tobago's reefs. These reefs provide enormous economic opportunities in diving and snorkelling, they provide a sea defense mechanism protecting coastlines against rough seas, they furnish spawning grounds for fish and also protect smaller fishes from large ones. The coral reefs have contributed to making Tobago the premier dive destination in the world, yet the 2008/2009 budget speaks very little of the security of our environment.

Over 30 years, Tobago's Southwest Waste Water System has been on the books for construction, to date, with all the tourism activities and hotel development on the southwest of the island, this wastewater system geared to collecting the sewage and water waste from Plymouth to Crown Point is still a dream. Sewage waste now leaks into the drains and rivers and into the sea sending a great number of persons to the doctor for itching picked up while bathing in the sea. They are sent to the doctor, I do not want to say hospital because—

Mr. Vice-President, you will not like to know the results of the water quality testing of some of our beaches: Back Bay, Plymouth, Store Bay and Buccoo Bay, the home of our famous Buccoo Reef and Nylon Pool. I would really like to see the commencement of the south-western wastewater project.

Allow me to raise a further concern with regard to the environment and tourism. An item geared towards the destruction of one of the most scenic tourist destinations in the country is in the fore—as a matter of fact, when I saw hardly any funding pertaining to Tobago re the environment, I saw in our books where there will be the construction of a new jetty—money has been allocated for a new jetty in Charlotteville, the most beautiful part of paradise. I observe funds in the budget for a new jetty in Charlotteville, something that is geared to destroying all the treasures spoken about earlier.

How can we bring a new jetty to Charlotteville where we have our best reefs, even though our fishing grounds are almost gone because of the oil and gas rigs on the other side? The Government needs to understand what is good for Charlotteville and the island of Tobago, and not what it wants to do regardless of the consequence. God made Man of War Bay with his own two hands, it is one of the safest and most beautiful harbours in the Caribbean and surrounded by the picturesque village of Charlotteville, it is set to be axed; it is set to be cut down. How can tourism be developed and the beauty of the island preserved when the budget has an allocation of funds for a jetty which includes water and fuel lines

Appropriation Bill (Budget)
[SEN. NICHOLSON-ALFRED]

Tuesday, October 07, 2008

for bunkering? When you bring that to my homeland, when you bring that to Man of War Bay and Charlotteville, that is the end of the beauty which everybody comes to that end of the island to enjoy.

I do not understand how we are going to match tourism and environment with a jetty for bunkering. Ecological surveys have identified Man of War Bay as the location of one of the main coral reef systems of northeast Tobago with the highest diverse species of corals and fishes. It was recommended that the area be designated as restricted under the Marine Areas Preservation and Enhancement Act of 1970.

6.45 p.m.

The beaches which comprise Man of War Bay are classified as sensitive habitat. The leather back, hawksbill and green turtles nest and lay their eggs there. Are we going to destroy this with a jetty for bunkering? Who knows what kind of boats will be cleaned and refuelled there? Maybe, those pertaining to the oil and gas in Castara. In the interest of the environment and tourism in Tobago, I believe that a large pier and large ships will alter the hydrology and wave patterns and lead to coastal erosion and death of the coral reefs. I humbly suggest that the funding for a new jetty in Charlotteville or Man of War Bay, if you prefer to say that, be redirected to the preservation of the environment and construction of the South West Wastewater systems.

I am Tobagonian. Most of you are Trinidadians. I am sure that you will remember the story of Clifton Hill Bay in Point Fortin. Are we going to allow that to happen to Charlotteville? God help us. I trust that the EMA will never let God leave their thoughts and allow such things to happen. We are not going to be a second Clifton Hill Bay. Those who have ears to hear, let them hear.

Charlotteville is geared for and already active in community tourism. So many of its villagers have built and renovated structures or converted their homes to bread and breakfast plants, and now a jetty which will change everything that is being promoted? I do not know how many of you know Charlotteville, especially when you come down the hill. You will not let them spoil it.

Hon. Senators: No.

Sen. A. Nicholson-Alfred: At all. I take your word.

In a few years time, even though we have all the other beautiful sites like Fort Campbleton and Flagstaff wherever you want to go, there will not be that beach with all those nice boats laid out there and the quiet waters where you bathe

morning, noon or night. We cannot afford to spoil it. Charlotteville is a beauty to behold. Do not change it.

Just a little more on tourism. The Crown Point Airport buildings need to be brought up to real international standards. Accommodation, seats and ticketing space need to be upgraded. Last week I was at the airport and I tried to get some “Benay balls” and then the rain came. I cannot walk too good or too fast, so there I was on this side and I had to get on the other side to get the ‘plane, trouble. It needs to be totally covered and modernized. If we are calling it international, let us do something to improve the airport. As it is now, when it rains it blows into the ticketing area and it becomes wet and slippery. It could cost people their lives and the Government a lot of money.

It is time we go to the airport or sea port to obtain transportation without so much of a hassle. Whether the country needs more aeroplanes and boats, I do not know. There is never a holiday season when we do not have problems to get a flight. Even me! I am supposed to get a little special treatment, and when I get there “the ‘plane is full. So you have to wait,” that is what I am told. Something needs to be standardized. There is something missing somewhere. I see everybody is shaking their heads. Imagine you have that, maybe, once in the year; I have to deal with it nearly every week. We need to spend some money to make Tobago or Paradise how it should be.

The Scarborough Hospital. Where is the hospital man? [*Laughter*] The budget speaks of resumption of work on the new Scarborough Hospital. It fails to address the completion date of that long overdue item. We are not talking resumption now. We are talking about completion. We are not talking about resumption of work on that structure. We are talking about building or constructing a new hospital with a solid foundation because we know the problems of what was started there and what is left. I am sorry that the Minister is not here so he would understand the passion we have for our hospital. Tobagonians are demanding a new hospital built on solid foundation and not the resumption of work on such a faulty structure.

Since I knew myself which is not now, since 1956, we in Tobago have been waiting for a hospital. Everyone knows the expenses incurred by Tobagonians whether you are Tobagonian or otherwise re healthcare. If you live in Tobago there is so much expense to get to Trinidad to the doctor. You are talking about \$300 by air then another \$200 to get a taxi to go to your doctor. Do you understand what happens to us? No wonder we are so poor over there. We cannot get anything. I ask the question Shadow asked when he sang: “What wrong wid

Appropriation Bill (Budget)
[SEN. NICHOLSON-ALFRED]

Tuesday, October 07, 2008

we? What wrong wid we?" Can anybody over there tell me? No, no, no. Let us talk seriously about the hospital and not continue to fool Tobago.

Much has been said about agriculture. I want to remind the Government that since I was small I was told this: A man who cannot feed himself is no man. I go further, a country that cannot feed itself, is no country. [*Desk thumping*] Therefore, we must appreciate that. I like the plan that the Minister of Agriculture, Land and Marine Resources outlined. But many times as Sen. Dr. Charles said, we talk, just talk. No. We need to walk the walk.

I remember how agriculture played such an important role in my development. I am from a cocoa growing area. I remember how much money my daddy made through cocoa propagation, especially when we have always been told that Trinidad and Tobago's cocoa is the best. It is said that today cocoa is fetching its highest price ever. The world still remembers the high grade of cocoa which came from these parts. Now that we must lay emphasis on feeding ourselves through agriculture, farming and fishing, I hope that all those abandoned cocoa estates will be revitalized. If you come to Charlotteville during the Heritage Festival, you would become aware that we still try to preserve the cocoa activity.

Another thing within agriculture is this. I visited my friend maybe two weeks ago. She gave me a drink. It tasted nice. I asked, "Where did you get guava this hour?" She said, "From South Africa." I was very concerned and I said, "South Africa"? When I looked at the box I saw "made in South Africa". Here we have so many guavas and all sorts of fruits as soursop and golden apple which you call pommecythere; what are we doing with them? They are left to rot on the streets because we have not even—the health man gone again—taught our children that they must eat the fruits we grow. They do not want that. They want apples and pears.

We have guava which is so rich in nutrients, yellow plum and red plum. What have we been doing to ensure that our young people appreciate and eat the fruits from here? Sen. George, what have we been doing? You walk along the street and see all these fruits on the ground and nobody is paying attention to their uses. It is time we get our ladies busy doing preserves, jellies, jams, wine and other drinks; let us see made in Trinidad and Tobago and let me stop drinking made in South Africa and Turkey drinks. "Nah, nah, nah." Now is the time to get our people busy. I remember as a child that mother and they made all these things. They had no technological anything. It was from scratch. Now we have everything to grind, we could afford to get involved. We have many people at home who need something to do that they would be proud of. We should get into that type of activity.

We have more than enough land to plant. Let us look seriously at food security; eating what we grow and growing what we eat. I remember that there was a man, a prime minister of this country who was concerned with that type of life, but we had too much money, so we did not want to do these things. They got rid of him very early. Sen. Dr. Carson Charles, they got rid of you all very early. I remember that Sen. Dr. Charles had some ideas about planting and making use of all these things and letting the people, especially the women become self-sufficient. We threw that aside. I heard somebody talk about cottage industry today. We threw away things like that for the big bucks. We need to get back real fast.

As I said before, I like the detailed plan for agriculture. I hope that it is not a paper project. I might sound crazy. Sometimes I do. How about a national agricultural insurance policy, catering for droughts, disasters and emergencies? It is not easy to plant. You know in Trinidad you like floods— before you turn around there is a flood and everything goes. As a planter, how will I feel? Of course, after a while I will decide that I am not going to plant anymore. We must try to devise some means of helping these people who plant and give them the encouragement to go on with planting, so that we can take care of ourselves and get out of the food dilemma.

Back home. The Minister of Finance declared that the Government will facilitate transfer of property. Madam Attorney General, just shed some light. I do not know if I understand it well and I want to be clear on it. This threshold that has been raised for the transfer of property from \$450,000 to \$850,000, for my people, is that for land and house or land alone? Say yes, to land alone. Then, I will appreciate that you tried to help the Tobagonian. The argument was just raised. We in Tobago do not buy house and land. We buy land or daddy or “meh aunty or nenen” gives me a piece of land. I want to know if that ruling entails land alone. If it does not, I will like you to go back to the drawing board with that.

Sen. Annisette-George: Senator, it relates to the transfer of residential properties, house and land. There is a different regime that governs the transfer of land alone. That has not changed. It has remained as it was. I do not have the Schedule here. The Minister in the Ministry of Finance will deal with that in his wrapping up.

7.00 p.m.

Sen. A. Nicholson-Alfred: Mr. Vice-President, I am making an open request right now. We have too many people in Tobago in a state where all the lands have been given to them—you put your house in that corner and you put yours there.

Appropriation Bill (Budget)
[SEN. NICHOLSON-ALFRED]

Tuesday, October 07, 2008

How do we deal with that? Something has to be done to resolve that situation. So I cry here on behalf of the Tobagonians who would like to have that regularized so that we could feel comfortable with the whole matter.

Is anybody taking notes from me to ask the necessary question?

Sen. Browne: Yes.

Sen. A. Nicholson-Alfred: Mr. Vice-President, it was not clear and in talking with one of our lawyers, she tried to explain that she did not think it meant land alone. I am begging you to come up with the agreement for the land because we are a land-alone people. We like to build our own houses.

There is something with the RPO. There is an acute situation in Tobago and I hope that something can be done for the intergenerational transfer of land. We cannot ignore the fact that over 75 per cent of Tobagonians are without land titles—they are bad or they have none at all.

The Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Marine Resources—I think I read it or someone told me—is supposed to implement a project whereby all lands will be registered and adjudicated upon so that title could be regularized. Last year, an initiative was taken to implement this with Tobago being targetted for the first pilot project. Since then nothing has been heard and I am calling on the Minister with responsibility for that project to make a clear pronouncement on the status of the land adjudication/registration project that would help to address this acute problem in Tobago. Tell us about the pilot project. Who is the assistant to the Minister of Agriculture, Land and Marine Resources? When will it commence?

Mr. Vice-President, I will not be fair to myself if I did not say something about crime as it affects Tobago. Serious crime is creeping into the once peaceful and safe environment of Tobago. We would love to know when the police stations at Roxborough, in the heart of Tobago East, and Old Grange, which is within the tourist area in the west, will be built. They have been promised or have been on the drawing board for over eight years. There is also a shortage of police on the island. This leaves room for a lot of criminal activity. If care is not taken, tourists will be turned off and turned away and you know the ripple effect if we have no tourists; a lot of people will be without jobs, et cetera.

Allow me to enquire when Tobagonians will be sharing equally with our Trinidadian brothers and sisters in certain areas. As you are aware, we come to Trinidad to do almost everything; to transact important business, and this is not new. We have to come to Trinidad to take care of almost everything. This is an

extra cost incurred by the Tobago resident and I am asking the Government to have a heart and let us walk this walk together as promised.

Missing are:

- A forensic science centre, even a branch somewhere to do something in Tobago. It is Trinidad and Tobago, not Trinidad and Chaguanas or Trinidad and Point Fortin because they are all here on this island. We are on a separate island, which brings a different picture totally;
- Office of the DPP;
- Ministry of Trade: We must come to Trinidad for import licences if you bring in a fridge or anything;
- Industrial Court;
- Environmental Commission;
- Service Commission; and the latest,
- Trinidad and Tobago Revenue Authority. That is the new one in this budget.

We are asking for a branch in Tobago of all these. Let us see that we are walking together.

I almost forgot, so let me come back. Before I end, permit me to ask when will the Government be building a five-star hotel in paradise? Your big shot friends I am sure or your big-shot guests will surely enjoy the serenity and relaxation they will get when they come to Tobago. Tobago is the tourism capital of Trinidad and Tobago. Where is our five-star hotel? Do not do that to us.

As I end, I remind the Government, and I am quoting from the *Newsday* of Monday, October 06, 2008 in which Economist Patrick Watson, director of the Sir Arthur Lok Jack Institute of Social and Economic Studies, UWI, St. Augustine has said that “Poor days may return—Trinidad and Tobago could find itself back to the poor days of the 1980s recession if the Government continues to ignore calls to strengthen the economy and reduce dependence on the energy sector.”

Mr. Vice-President, hon. Senators, Members of Government, be warned. I thank you.

Sen. Laurel Lezama: Thank you very much, Mr. Vice-President. I must say it is an absolute pleasure, as a young woman, to address this Senate and the country in this year’s deliberation of the National Budget 2008/2009. I speak here

Appropriation Bill (Budget)
[SEN. LEZAMA]

Tuesday, October 07, 2008

in my capacity as a young citizen of Trinidad and Tobago and I am certain that I speak on behalf of the young citizens of this country upon whom there has been a great impact with the presentation of this budget.

Let me begin, first of all, by congratulating my colleague, the hon. Minister in the Ministry of Finance Mariano Browne, for his crisp and clear presentation of the budget yesterday morning for us to debate. Persons have been stating that many Members of this Government are neophytes. I want to say that it is a pleasure to be working among these neophytes because they continue to outclass and outshine some of the experienced people who have been in this Chamber for a very long time.

Whilst I congratulate Minister Browne, I also must, as a young female, pay my respect to the hon. Minister of Finance, Karen Nunez-Tesheira for her historic presentation in the other place on Monday, September 22. Together they make a formidable team and this is espoused in the presentation of the 2009 budget memorandum by PricewaterhouseCoopers in its Executive Overview, which says:

“The 2009 Budget will not only be recognized as the largest in Trinidad & Tobago's relatively brief history but also for the extensive focus on educational, social and developmental initiatives that Government considers imperative if we are to attain developed country status on or before 2020.”

It goes on to say:

“The Government's extensive social and educational programmes are most commendable and we can surely boast of being one of the few countries in the world that enjoy such benefits.”

So, Mr. Vice-President, I get into my debate. When I was preparing for this debate, I told myself that I do not have a great understanding of economics or finance, but I have common sense and there are many people who can guide me accordingly.

Like Sen. Nicholson-Alfred, I thought I would speak on something dear to my heart, so I have decided to premise my contribution around the impact of this budget on the young people of our nation. What effects do certain aspects of this budget have on young people? Further, I asked myself: How does Vision 2020 impact upon the young people of Trinidad and Tobago? The five pillars as we all know of Vision 2020 speak to developing innovative people, nurturing a caring society, promoting effective governance, enabling competitive business and investing in sound infrastructure.

I will speak to the first two pillars as I see these two as the two which impact on young people. I asked myself: what are the goals set aside in this budget and in Vision 2020 for the young people of Trinidad and Tobago? What do they have to look forward to in this budget and on or before the year 2020 as we seek developed nation status?

I turn my attention to the Ministry of Science, Technology and Tertiary Education. The mandate for that Ministry reads as follows:

“The Government of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago has committed itself to the achievement of developed country status by the year 2020. In view of our strategic thrust, Government believes that tertiary education and training are central to the 2020 development processes and outcomes. We believe that we must generate a cadre of qualified, skilled, capable, marketable and civic-minded citizens who can preserve our democracy, transform our socio-economic environment and modernize our society.”

Mr. Vice-President, this mandate speaks clearly to education and training. Let us treat with the training aspect of our young people first. I do so specifically because yesterday Sen. Sharma shocked my senses when she said that the focus was too narrow on the academic system. It was not this administration which stopped several youth training programmes such as the youth camps and the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC). That was during the period 1995—2001.

Did you know, Mr. Vice-President, that in 1995 there were 2,000 persons enrolled in the John S. Donaldson Technical Institute? During that period, 1995—2000, only 300 persons enrolled at John D. Thank God enrolment is back up to 4,000 persons. And they have the audacity to ask why there are so many delinquent people. That is because they abandoned the young people during their term of office. The answer is very simple. A certain regime denied Trinidad and Tobago's young citizens opportunities within the vocational realm.

John D. and the San Fernando Technical Institutes became malnourished. It took this Government to seek to rejuvenate these technical schools and further supplement them with the reintroduction of the CCC, the rejuvenation of YTEPP and OJT and the creation of other skills programmes such as MuST, HYPE and YAPA.

I also need to place on record the retraining programme geared towards reintegrating and rehabilitating prison inmates into our system.

7.15 p.m.

Did you know that 107 inmates have already been trained, thus being effectively equipped with both practical and life skills? Since this Government was returned

Appropriation Bill (Budget)
[SEN. LEZAMA]

Tuesday, October 07, 2008

to provide caring and effective governance in 2002, allow me to show you some figures of enrolment in these skills programmes between the period 2002—2008: HYPE, 7,371 young people; MuST, 6,400; YTEPP, 38,267; and On-the-Job Training, 48,000. This year alone, the training figures for HYPE are 1,040; MuST, 6,400; YTEPP 4,411 and OJT, 7,955 persons. I have several friends who have been employed through the On-the-Job Training programme and they have been retained by their employers by virtue of their association with and introduction to the workplace, via the OJT. What would have happened to these roughly 100,000 persons, had this administration not sought to implement these programmes? That would have been a drain on the society; perhaps an abundance of more rampant illegal activities. That is a cause for concern. I have to say thank God for this caring Government.

When this Government allocates relevant funding towards the implementation and execution of these projects, as evidenced in fiscal 2009, any person who dares to say this budget is only for the upper echelons of the society, obviously lives in his or her own banana republic and not in this sweet Trinidad and Tobago.

Mr. Vice-President, the caring does not stop there. Fiscal 2008/2009 saw the allocation of considerable amounts to education and training. This Government believes that we must always seek to develop our greatest asset, our human resources especially, but limited to the young people.

For those who are academically inclined, this Government introduced the Government Assistance for Tuition Expenses (GATE). When the Government introduced GATE, which speaks to tuition expenses for all undergraduate students to be paid for by this Government, I remember how suddenly many of my friends who were denied the opportunity to embark upon pursuing higher education were now afforded this opportunity, making themselves the innovative people whom we speak to in the pillars of Vision 2020; making themselves innovators, scholars, leaders and a responsible workforce and caring citizens Trinidad and Tobago needs them to be.

For GATE, as I refer to the Social Sector Investment Programme, the allocation for 2009 was \$633,500,000 invested in the young scholars of Trinidad and Tobago. For the Higher Education Loan Programme (HELP), \$25 million was invested in the young people. You cannot tell me that \$633 million was a waste of money; that was unacceptable to persons in the different strata of society, rich, poor, orange, green, Hindu, Catholic. Whether you are in an SUV or “yuh taking ah taxi”, there is no room in this Government for discrimination, as far as education and our system is concerned as certain obscurantists would have you believe.

This Government noticed that with the removal of certain vocational programmes and with the introduction of the Dollar-for-Dollar, there was the creation and creeping in of a classist society, but we will have none of that on this side. We subscribe to the principle: Here every creed and race find an equal place. So, for the academically inclined, we widened the capacity of COSTAATT whose enrolment figures are 500 per cent more now, than in 2000, with a whopping 5,000 students. It was this Government which established the University of Trinidad and Tobago, at which 5,242 students are now enrolled; offer a plethora of courses relevant to and catering to the needs of Trinidad and Tobago's society, ranging from sporting to food technology, from biosciences to agriculture; a cross section of appropriate courses catering to the tertiary needs of our nation's scholars.

What of the University of the West Indies? There are 16,000 students enrolled there, undergraduates, attending at the expense of the State. Masters and doctoral candidates benefit from an increase of \$10,000 in their tuition subsidy. When I say that this Government invests in its young people, I mean that. We do not pay lip service to the young people of our nation. We believe in our young people. We set goals. We plan strategically. We consult with the relevant stakeholders and we implement.

With regard to youth of the nation, there is no exception. We on this side care. If our party youth league was hosting an event, our visionary and caring leader would not have to "Slam the party's MPs and councillors for their lack of interest in the youth arm" as per an Adrian Boodhan article in the *Guardian* of Monday, October 06, 2008—[*Interruption*] "Doh worry" you were there. Nobody else was there. [*Interruption*]

Sen. Mark: What business is that of yours?

Sen. L. Lezama: It is my business. [*Interruption*]

Sen. Mark: File your integrity form.

Sen. L. Lezama: They are filed. It is my business. As evidenced in this Adrian Boodhan article in the *Guardian* of Monday, October 06, 2008. [*Interruption*]

Sen. Mark: [*By order of the Chair, remarks struck off the record*]

Sen. Annisette-George: On a point of order. He is imputing improper motives to the Member.

Mr. Vice-President: Yes, Senator.

Hon. Senators: Apologize!

Sen. Mark: No. May I, Sir?

Hon. Senators: Apologize! Sit down.

Mr. Vice-President: Senator, I would like you to withdraw that statement.

Sen. Mark: “Why I must withdraw”? No, before I withdraw—I cannot withdraw just because you say so. No, I have to defend my position. No, no.

Mr. Vice-President: But you are imputing improper motives against the Senator.

Sen. Mark: No, no, no.

Mr. Vice-President: Senator, you are imputing improper motives, so would you withdraw that statement? Would you withdraw that statement?

Sen. Mark: Listen to what I have to say first. I have to say something, naturally. Mr. Vice-President, I have in my possession a statement from the Integrity Commission, published Legal Notice, where Senator Laurel Lezama did not file 2003/2004 her declaration of assets, liabilities and income. Therefore, what I am simply saying, for her to point at us, she must first file her declaration of assets, liabilities and income. That is the context in which I have made the statement. That is the context.

Sen. L. Lezama: Mr. Vice-President, I will ignore the comments of the Member on the other side. I will place on the record that my assets, liabilities and everything else, all relevant documentation, have been filed with the Integrity Commission. [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. Senators: Apologize!

Sen. Mark: Apologize for what? Okay, she just filed.

Sen. L. Lezama: May I please continue? I have the authority to stand here and speak with integrity, that if my party’s youth league were to have an event, our leader would not have to “slam” the MPs and councillors for their lack of interest in the party’s youth arm.

Through you, Mr. Vice-President, because the Senator was there it does not negate the fact that the rest of his party does not care about the young people of Trinidad and Tobago. Do you know what his leader said at that event? His leader said: “People do not care how much you know until you show how much you care.” That is a direct quote of your leader. You show by your actions that you

care. Those MPs and councillors do not care, but on this side, all of us care. Imagine, if they do not care about their own, imagine, as my mother would say: “Crapaud smoke yuh pipe” for the rest of this country.

Meanwhile, back at the complex, unbeknownst to the Trinidadians and Tobagonians, another statement was said, something along the lines of: “The function of a charismatic leader is to commit suicide.” I have no idea what that statement means. I do not know the context in which it was said, but I must say it sends a very chilling message to the people of Trinidad and Tobago and I reject such statements and that behaviour.

As their other supplementary temporary leader said, I quote from the Member’s budget contribution—*[Interruption]*

Mr. Vice-President: Senator Mark, you are disturbing the Senator, please refrain from—*[Interruption]*

Sen. Mark: Sorry, Sir. “Ah coming jus now.”

Sen. L. Lezama: “Show me a leader and I will know his men.” That is a direct quotation, absolute disappointment; only paying lip service to the young people. If you need help with young people, you have Joel Primus, Former National Youth League Chairman; Foster C. Cummings, former Youth Officer, male; Wesley George, former Education Officer; and Laurel Lezama, former Chairman of the National Youth League. If you need any help, the whole back bench is here to help you.

Sen. Mark: “Yuh eh win election. Yuh loss...”

Sen. L. Lezama: That is what the purpose of intention—*[Interruption]* I would not allow you to draw me into your—*[Interruption]*

Hon. Senators: —Pointe-a-Pierre!

Sen. L. Lezama: Further, if there is any need for planning, we guarantee that we will not only bring out a turnout of 20 people and two politicians at the event held on the weekend. You are guaranteed to get a strong showing of support.

At this point, I want to interject and congratulate the nation’s students who continue to excel in their studies at the SEA, CXC and particularly at CAPE, with special regards to the 257 recipients of national scholarships. I also congratulate Miss Jordanna Deane, a past pupil of my Alma Mater, St. Joseph’s Convent, Port of Spain and Miss Jenissa Nandoo, a past pupil of Naparima Girls’ College, San Fernando from the Rio Claro district and resident of Mayaro.

Appropriation Bill (Budget)
[SEN. LEZAMA]

Tuesday, October 07, 2008

As I was browsing through the *Hansard*, I was appalled to read the contribution of the one Member. I quote:

“Mr. Speaker, as I stand I want to take...”—[*Interruption*]

Sen. Mark: Mr. Speaker?

Sen. L. Lezama: I am quoting. If you would listen—[*Interruption*]

Hon. Senators: Pay attention.

Sen. L. Lezama: “Mr. Speaker...” [Interruption]

Sen. Mark: How dare you address my Vice-President as Mr. Speaker?

Sen. L. Lezama: “Mr. Speaker, as I stand, I want to take some time to congratulate one of my constituents, Miss Jordanna Deane...”

Mr. Vice-President, I am quoting from the Member for Mayaro.

“Mr. Speaker, as I stand, I want to take some time to congratulate one of my constituents, Miss Jordanna Deane. I want to congratulate her mother and father because like myself, they are from the country, Navet. Jordanna and persons like herself do not have it easy...”

He goes on to speak about his children. I was appalled, because these people are glory hogs. Jordanna Deane is not from Mayaro. She attended St. Joseph’s Convent, Pembroke Street, Port of Spain.

I went to mass on Sunday, because I am a very good Catholic girl and I am proud of faith, and I purchased my *Catholic News*. In the *Catholic News* of Sunday, October 05, on page 7, it states:

“Jenissa makes Rio Claro proud”

When you are trying to be a glory hog and impose upon the children’s achievements, “oh God, get yuh facts right, nah, please.”

7.30 p.m

Mr. Vice-President, please allow me to touch briefly on social development with regard to some policies that are in fiscal 2008/2009. Look at these things! Free ferry passes for our citizens over 65 years; \$200 increase in the disability grant; increase for each recipient in the public assistance grant; a wider bracket of beneficiaries in the Senior Citizens Grant; an increase in pension for retired public servants; and over 27,000 citizens holding a Smart Card ensuring that 100,000

persons have a measure of food security. What do we have now? We have a subscription to the tenets which guide the Ministry of Social Development helping, empowering and transforming lives.

So, we have the carrying out of the mandate; the allocation of appropriate funding; and the end result is the improvement of the lives of the vulnerable citizens of Trinidad and Tobago. As I speak about the vulnerable citizens of Trinidad and Tobago, what of our children; our precious little children in Tobago and our precious children in Trinidad?

Members of the national community and my colleagues, Sen. Baptiste-Mc Knight and Sen. Sharma, have been asking what about the children. Mr. Vice-President, let me assure you, Senators and the nation at large that the children are at the highest level of priority as far as this Government is concerned. We aim to safeguard, nurture and educate our children.

We all know of the children package of legislation, and let me speak specifically to the Children's Authority. The Act to establish the Children's Authority was passed in both Houses of Parliament. There is in place an advisory team at the Ministry of Social Development with respect to the implementation of the authority. As announced by the hon. Minister of Social Development in the other place, Cabinet has authorized the acquisition of a specific property on Pembroke Street, Port of Spain, for the operation of the Children's Authority. The key requirements for the type of room, space and facility for this central administration building are being identified. The Act speaks to the functions of the authority as being responsible for the licensing of foster homes and regulations which will govern procedures regarding the referral of children and, as such, priority is given to it.

What is significant is that requirements such as staffing, job descriptions and remuneration packages are being actively pursued at this time. It is instructive that in recognition of the need for social workers in Trinidad and Tobago, discussions between the Ministry of Social Development, the University of the West Indies and the University of Trinidad and Tobago regarding intensifying the training of a cadre of social workers to complement and work in tandem with the policies are now under way. We are hopeful that within the financial year, the Children's Authority will become operational as allocations have been provided for it in this budget. This brings me to the decentralization of services that Sen. Baptiste-Mc Knight was asking about.

Appropriation Bill (Budget)
[SEN. LEZAMA]

Tuesday, October 07, 2008

Please permit me to quote a paragraph from the front page of the Social Sector Investment Programme. It speaks to the fact that ministries within the sector are attempting to align and rationalize programmes with objectives set out in Vision 2020, and it establishes certain things. It goes on to say that social service delivery will be decentralized in the Ministry of Local Government, the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Social Development. The reengineering delivery processes are to ensure greater efficiencies within the system leading to greater accessibility, fewer delays and improved resource allocation.

Sen. Sharma wanted to know why no new children's homes were being constructed by the Government, and the answer is very simple. What this Government, through the Ministry of Social Development, has done is contracted private institutions to provide care and shelter for the children for whom such is necessary. What we have also done is taken advantage of the available resources and drawn upon the experience of those in this child care business.

Further, a non-governmental unit has been established at the Ministry of Social Development which will seek to strengthen partnerships with NGOs throughout Trinidad and Tobago. NGOs, through this unit, will provide contracted and decentralized services to the ministry and to the Government regarding transition homes, reception and assessment centres and children's homes. This unit, in collaboration with the Children's Authority, will provide the necessary oversight, monitoring and evaluation of the operations of the homes.

The children's homes that are run by the State have not been neglected. There have been significant allocations to the St. Dominic's Children Home of \$9,500,000; St. Jude's Home for Girls, \$5,500,000; St. Mary's Children Home, \$10 million and St. Michael School for Boys, \$8 million. Also, a new and modern piece of legislation which treats with a host of offences against children has been laid in the other place.

Yesterday we celebrated Universal Children's Day. This Government respects the rights of children and recognizes its role in protecting and safeguarding the rights of children. May I take this opportunity, on behalf of this caring Government, to extend greetings to the children of our nation, all of whom we love and cherish dearly. [*Desk thumping*]

The Children's Authority and other relevant legislation, action and implementation and the Family Court speak volumes to the commitment of this Government to the children of our nation, that is setting goals with measurable

targets, rolling plans, effective implementation—[*Interruption*] Sen. Mark, would you like to take the floor? I do not interrupt the goodly Senator.

Sen. Mark: Sorry my dear.

Sen. L. Lezama: Thank you very much—excellent governance and a happy community shaping our future together. This is courtesy the People’s National Movement.

Mr. Vice-President, I just want to give two testimonials. There is a senior citizen by the name of Teresa Toussaint who comes to my home—[*Interruption*]

Mr. Vice-President: Sen. Mark, we have been having lovely debates for the past two days, please do not spoil it.

Sen. L. Lezama: Mr. Vice-President, thank you very much. As I was saying, there is a senior citizen by the name of Teresa Toussaint who comes to my home to give my mother communion every Sunday. Last Sunday, when I was dropping her home she said to me: “Thank God for the increase in the Senior Citizens Grant and please tell Mr. Manning I said thank you for always looking after us.” [Desk thumping]

On the day the budget was read, I, along with other Senators on this side, was present for the presentation on Monday, September 22, 2008. I went to meet with some of my friends afterwards, and they all pounced on me: What were the new things in the budget? I have one friend and I would just call him Mr. Small for now. He said to me: “Is that stamp duty thing true?” He and his wife were just about to purchase a home. They were looking at the home and the value was under the \$850,000 bracket, and for that he was extremely grateful, because the stamp duty has been removed. [Desk thumping]

Mr. Vice-President, I read my news all the time and Letters to the Editor. I am sorry I do not have the article, but one resident in Cascade wrote an article stating that there was need for some form of public transportation in Cascade. I must say that I am pleased with the efforts of the Ministry of Works and Transport and I must place on the record compliments to them because out of Cascade there is a bus service throughout the day, and that is repeated throughout the country in different areas. [Desk thumping] So, all the children who have been standing and waiting on transport and could potentially be late are now able to take this public bus. I also want to commend the ministry for the rapid rail advertisement I saw in the newspaper recently.

Appropriation Bill (Budget)
[SEN. LEZAMA]

Tuesday, October 07, 2008

Mr. Vice-President, as I conclude, I just have a few points that I would like to make. I just want to respond to Sen. Rahman and to let him know—and I speak on behalf of all the young people in Trinidad and Tobago and this majority Government and the majority of supporters—that there will be no revolution in this country ever again. [*Desk thumping*] The fallacy of a 20-year cycle has been broken. I would like that to be established. [*Interruption*]

Further, I want to make a plea for a stop by certain Senators in this Senate on the attack of the nation's psyche. [*Desk thumping*] It is detrimental to our society and it is only going to cause instability in our country. [*Desk thumping*]

I would like to commend this budget. I support it 150 per cent. Sen. Dr. Carson Charles said to leave it up to them to unite the country. I look at the Parliament Channel—he said that he would not ask us. I have a confusion in my mind, because in the Senate they are called the UNC-A, but in the other place, there is no mention of any alliance. In the other place they are merely the United National Congress, so you are the chief standing alone, and I am so sorry for you. You are speaking on behalf of yourself, my dear Senator. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Vice-President, I am reading a book which is titled *Understanding Media* and it says that the medium is the message. So, if the medium is a bully, a terrorist, an intimidator, is threatening, ill-disciplined, obnoxious, cold, unkind, selfish, scandalous, incompetent, objectionable, vindictive, oppressive and repressive, what is the message? [*Interruption*] I cast no aspersions.

As I close, in a previous life, I was a flight attendant with BWIA and I had a marvellous time there. As we welcomed passengers on board we would say: "Good morning, ladies and gentlemen, welcome aboard BWIA flight and so forth". I would like to close by saying, ladies and gentlemen, I would like to welcome you on board voyage vision, destined to the year 2020 in a developed nation with all the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago captained by the hon. Prime Minister Patrick Manning and crewed by his Members of Government in this People's National Movement administration.

I commend this budget, every Member of this Government and all the ministries for the work that they are doing, and I look forward to wonderful things during this fiscal year.

I thank you. [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. Mark: That is my girl. [*Interruption*]

Adjournment

Tuesday, October 07, 2008

ADJOURNMENT

The Minister Energy and Energy Industries (Sen. The Hon. Conrad Enill): Mr. Vice-President, I beg to move that this Senate do now adjourn to Wednesday, October 08, 2008 at 10.00 a.m. Given the last half an hour, I hope those persons whose medication ran out would walk with their medication.

Question put and agreed to.

Senate adjourned accordingly.

Adjourned at 7.45 p.m.